

Tulane awarded \$1 million to create innovative graduate study program in Africana Studies and Art

March 20, 2024 9:00 AM Matt Roberts
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Stephanie Porras (left), professor of art history and chair of the Newcomb Art Department, and Mia L. Bagneris (right), associate professor of art history and Africana studies and director of the Africana Studies Program, developed an initiative that will allow students to pursue an interdisciplinary course of study culminating in either an MA in Africana studies and art history or a studio art MFA with an MA or certificate in Africana studies. (Photo by Juliana Argentino)

Tulane University's School of Liberal Arts has received a four-year \$1 million dollar grant from the Mellon Foundation to develop the [*Crossroads Cohort: Africana Studies at the Intersection of Art History and Practice*](#), a collaboration between the Africana Studies Program and the Newcomb Art Department.

Crossroads Cohort was developed by Stephanie Porras, professor of art history and chair of the Newcomb Art Department, and Mia L. Bagneris, associate professor of art history and Africana studies and director of the Africana Studies Program. The new initiative will allow students to pursue an interdisciplinary course of study culminating in either an MA in Africana studies and art history or a studio art MFA with an MA or certificate in Africana studies.

Paid summer internships at local arts and heritage organizations and collaborating in a capstone project provide professional skills and experience in community-engaged art history or practice.

The cohort provides students the opportunity to expand their professional networks through activities such as traveling to see relevant exhibitions and meet museum professionals, visiting other institutions to engage with faculty, and participating in conferences.

Enriched by the city's history as a center of African diasporic culture and creativity, the initiative will offer the nation's first master's-level interdisciplinary degree in Africana studies and art. The *Crossroads Cohort* aims to serve as a model for other universities, fostering increased representation in an area that has not traditionally included a diversity of voices.

"In contrast to traditional pipeline programs that often encourage these students to conform to the conventional models that have worked to exclude them in the first place, the *Crossroads Cohort* initiative will empower them to work to upend these models by emphasizing the importance of their presence and scholarship in the necessary work of re-centering the discipline of art history and the systems and structures of museums and galleries," Bagneris and Porras said. "That re-centering begins with hiring the university's first tenure-track faculty member specializing in the study of African art, and we are excited to welcome Tony Yeboah — an exceptional and influential emerging scholar of the Ghanaian visual culture, architecture, and built environment — to Tulane next fall."

“By pairing graduate work in Africana studies with advanced training in art history and practice, Tulane is positioned to make a meaningful intervention in the art world,” said School of Liberal Arts Dean Brian Edwards. “At a moment when many in museums, galleries, and auction houses have been looking for ways to be more diverse and inclusive, this innovative program demonstrates how universities can provide leadership and help make positive change. Further, the successful recruitment of Tony Yeboah to our faculty through this initiative expands our commitment to a global approach to liberal arts research and teaching.”

Bagneris and Porras hope that building a critical mass of students and faculty invested in the study of African and African diasporic art and enhancing Tulane’s connections to arts and heritage organizations in New Orleans will lay the groundwork for a PhD program in Africana studies and art history.

“We are tremendously grateful for this generous support from the Mellon Foundation, which demonstrates not only their support for our exciting proposal but also their ongoing confidence in our ability to take full advantage of these opportunities to create excellent programs that benefit both Tulane and the many communities with which we engage,” said Tulane Provost Robin Forman. “Under the leadership of Professors Bagneris and Porras and Dean Edwards, we are going to enrich our campus and our curriculum by building a new focus on African Art. This aligns perfectly with some of the most important conversations taking place across our campus, around our city, and throughout the arts community and will further distinguish Tulane as a leading contributor to those conversations.”