

Ceremony and Society

Theme 4: Ceremony and Society

Introduction

People across the world engage in a wide range of ceremonial rites and spectacles. Some of these are religious, others political or social. Through these practices and the arts that accompany them—costumes, masks, vessels, ancestor figurines, altarpieces, staffs, and other objects and images—people across cultures define identity, build community, express belief, negotiate power, and attend to the physical and spiritual well-being of both individuals and societies.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for History and Memory.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the Ceremony and Society video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. In examples featured in the program, how has the transformative power of masks been used?
2. How have cultures used ceremonial objects to promote the well-being or betterment of the community?
3. Compare the political undertones of the Carnival celebration in Haiti with Mardi Gras in New Orleans.
4. In the examples featured in the program, how has ceremonial dress conveyed position or status?
5. What makes a trip to an art museum a kind of ritual?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Ceremony and Society in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.