CESTA research anthology 2022

African Archive Beyond Colonization

The landing page for the "African Archive Beyond Colonization" virtual exhibition for the 2021-2022 academic year. This page was designed and implemented on the archiving platform by Brittany Linus.

Project Description

Denise Lim, Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellow at The New School's Parsons School of Design (at Stanford 2021-22)

This project was part of a new initiative that aimed to rehabilitate and recenter the African collections held in the Stanford University Archaeology Collections. Alongside BIPOC Curatorial Postdoc Dr. Denise Lim, students were invited to conduct in-depth research on 15 African objects from Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, the Sudan, South Sudan, and South Africa. In a course co-taught by Dr. Lim and Prof. Sarah Derbew, "The African Archive Beyond Colonization" (Fall 2021), students prototyped a virtual exhibition that archived their research contributions and served as a digital complement to the on-site exhibition, *Reimagining African Borders Through Cultural Objects*, which is currently on view at the Stanford Archaeology Center until May 2023.
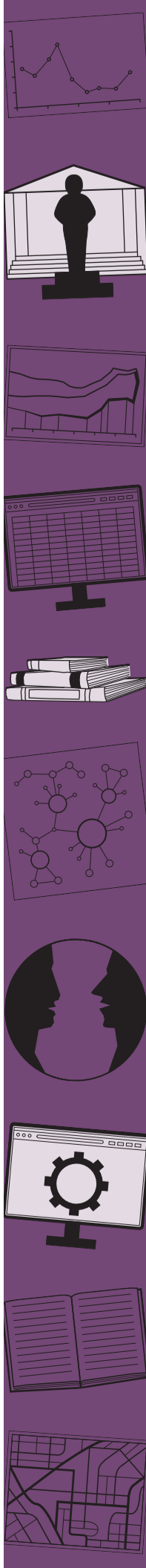
Decolonizing Visual Storytelling

by Brittany Linus

As a diasporic African woman with a keen interest in visual storytelling, I leveraged my technical design experience, creative problem-solving skills, and academic interest in cultural rhetoric to contribute to this project in both its form and its function.

I participated in Prof. Derbew and Dr. Lim's class, "African Archive Beyond Colonization," where I was introduced to the complex social constructs underpinning the tensions between European, American, and African views of archaeological and ethnographic practice. Uncovering these tensions involved more than simply reading research papers: Dr. Lim and Prof. Derbew showed us how these tensions also manifest in journals and museums.

Being the lead user-interface designer for the "African Archive Beyond Colonization" virtual archive allowed me to merge my interest in visual storytelling with my appreciation for African craftsmanship as I helped provide an effective digital context for the objects researched by the students. This virtual archive is a part of a larger decolonial movement occurring within the digital humanities

An official acknowledgment from Stanford's Archaeology Center recognizing that Stanford's digital ecosystems depend on indigenous American and African communities. This acknowledgment fosters accountability within the Stanford community. It reminds all visitors to the virtual exhibition to actively challenge their colonial knowledge structures when viewing exhibited artifacts.

and involving the narratives of marginalized or underrepresented communities within academia.

With Dr. Lim's guidance, I began constructing the virtual archive to house the complete collection of the course's student-curated virtual exhibitions. First, I compiled a research document containing detailed descriptions of the African artifacts and corresponding student
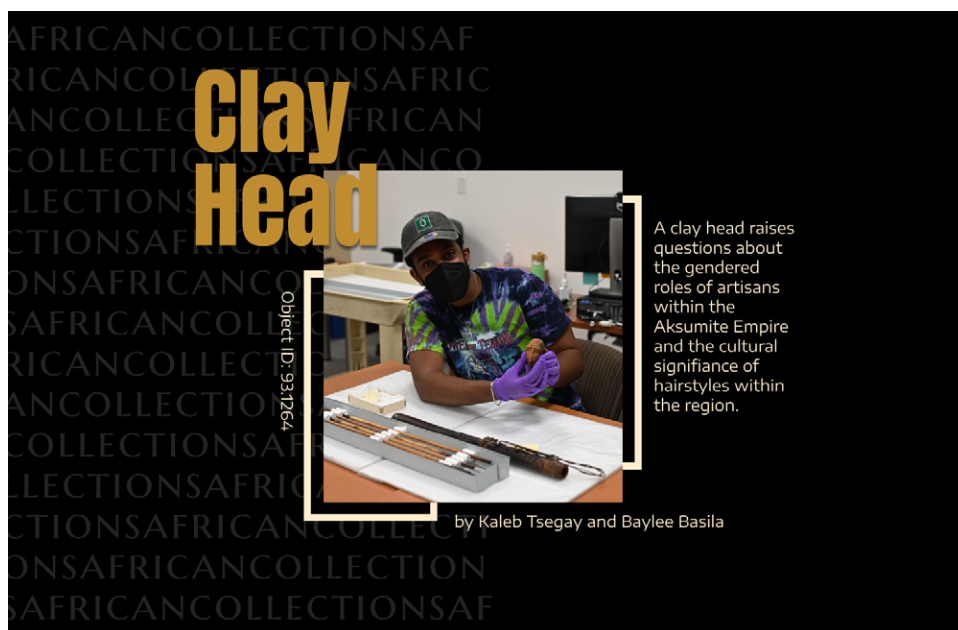

The landing page for the "Clay Head" virtual exhibition curated by Kaleb Tsegay and featured on the archive website. All exhibitions featured in the virtual archive have landing pages designed by Brittany Linus, which introduce visitors to the artifacts and student curators.

curators. Since the curators did not all create their virtual exhibitions using the same platform, I decided to screen record and screenshot the virtual exhibitions to maintain the creators' intellectual integrity. This tactic ensured seamless continuity between all the exhibitions on the platform. Engagement is critical with digital platforms intended to educate users, so I balanced text with interactive visuals. Assembling the virtual archive was a rigorous exercise. I exercised radical hesitation, juxtaposition, and critical citation to produce a paradigm-unsettling experience of engagement with African history through the artifacts featured in the archive.

Student Researcher Brittany Linus
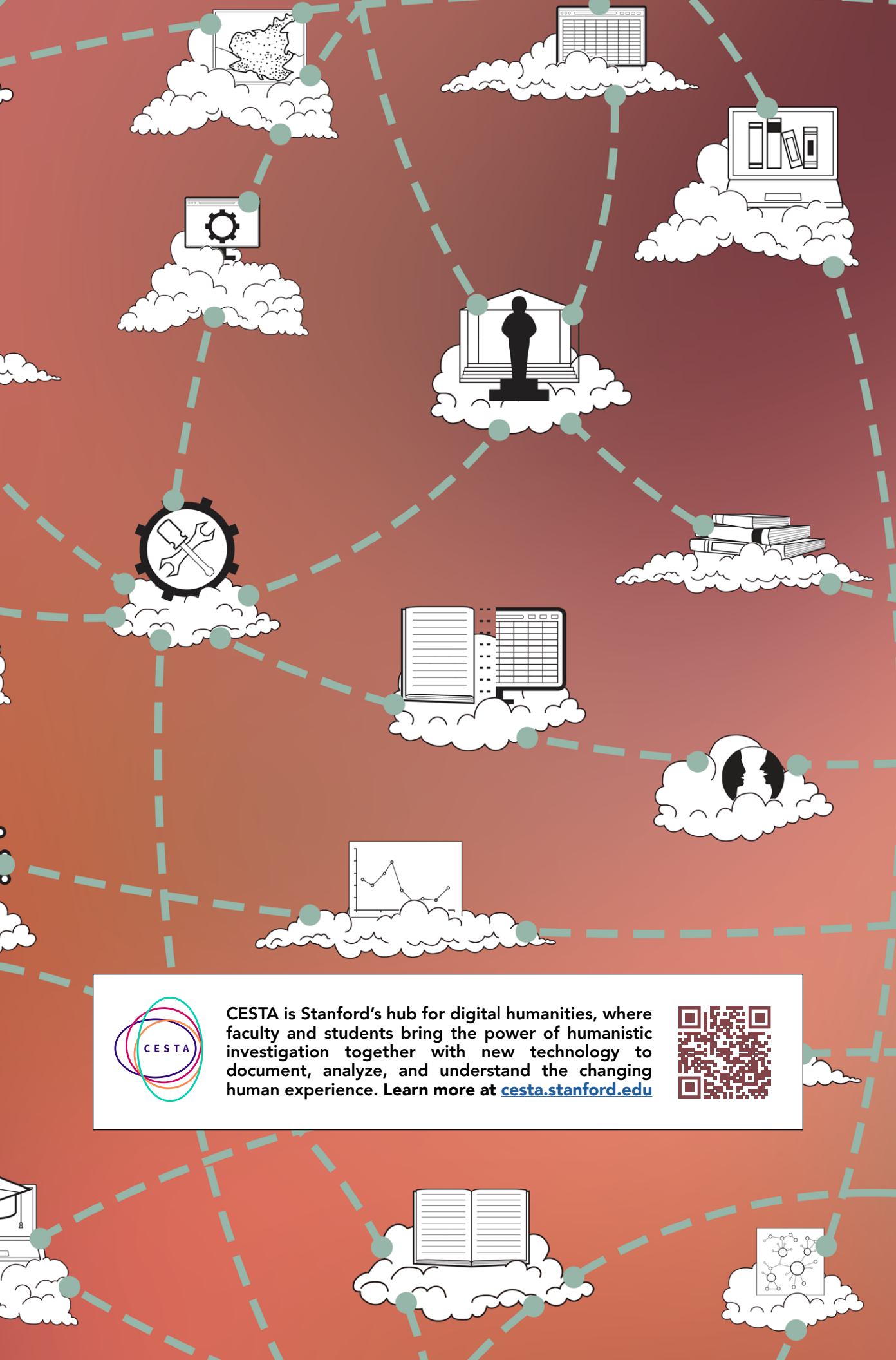
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