Contemporary African Art Scholar Okwui Enwezor Named 2012 Kirk Varnedoe Visiting Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU

Okwui Enwezor, curator, author and critic specializing in contemporary art, has been named the 2012 Kirk Varnedoe Visiting Professor. His lecture series and course offerings will focus on contemporary African art, its development and narrative since the late 1970s, as well as exploring its presentation in both domestic and global contexts. He will be in residence at the IFA from January to May 2012.

Mr. Enwezor was born in Nigeria and educated in the United States. As a student he studied political science but his interest in art led him into a career in the art world. He soon distinguished himself by bringing attention to contemporary African art history and advocating African artists under-represented in exhibitions, museum collections and in the global art market.

His curatorial experience is extensive and noteworthy. Currently he is adjunct curator at the International Center for Photography in New York City. He has been named Director, Haus der Kunst in Munich, Germany and will assume that post in October 2011. Previously, he was Artistic Director of Documenta 11, Kassel, Germany (1998–2002) and the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale (1996–1997), which famously issued an end to Apartheid from a cultural perspective. In addition, he has curated numerous exhibitions in some of the most distinguished museums around the world, including The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994, which traveled to Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, Gropius Bau, Berlin, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and P.S.1 and Museum of Modern Art, New York.


The Kirk Varnedoe Visiting Professorship brings a distinguished scholar to the Institute each year to teach a course and give a series of public lectures in the area of contemporary art. The Professorship was endowed in 2006 by the late Professor Varnedoe’s friends and colleagues to honor and perpetuate his legacy of innovative teaching and to enhance the study and presentation of contemporary art at the Institute.

The Institute of Fine Arts has played a defining role in the disciplines of art history, archaeology, and conservation since its founding in 1932. It is unique in its integration of those fields and in its focus on research-led graduate teaching. Its range of interests and sphere of influence are international and interdisciplinary. With its close ties to the major museums and collections of New York City, its participation in NYU’s global network, and its excavations in Sicily, Egypt, Turkey, and Greece, the Institute offers a distinctive program of object-based study.