

ART491-01/601-02: Cabinets of Curiosity: The History, Criticism and Aesthetics of Museums

Spring 2010; T 5-7:30 pm, 211 Young

Instructor: Prof. Roann Barris
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HRS: M W 11-3; other times by appt

This class is required for art history majors. Other students may use it to fill an art history/museum studies elective requirement.

Course description:

an introduction to museology or the study of museums: their history, their narratives, and their role in the communication (or suppression) of cultural values.

To paraphrase Mary Anne Staniszewski, in the introduction to her book on *The Power of Display*, art history traditionally studies the work of art as a discrete fact, but the reality is that we (and the public) never see art works as isolated units. Whether part of a permanent collection or a temporary special exhibition, each work is an actor in a staged context that influences not merely our response but even what we see. This class will explore the changing paradigms of exhibition display and museums.

Course format:

seminar: This is a small class and everyone will be expected to participate equally, rigorously, and regularly. We will read common material for discussion and everyone will also engage in research on an individual project for presentation at the end of the semester. Ongoing reports of work accomplished and questions raised will be part of class meetings.

Readings:

required text: David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

A folder of online readings will be accessible from the class web site. In addition, some books and articles will be placed on reserve in McConnell library.

Requirements

- You must attend every class. Each class missed will lower your grade by half a letter grade; seven classes result in an F.
- Do all readings and participate in discussions.
- Prepare weekly topic papers for class discussion.
- Develop, report on, and implement term project.

Topics

The conventional course outline:

- I. The Academy and the Salon in the 19th century
- II. Art markets and museums: the commodification of art; the museum as a department store
- III. Censorship and exhibition practices
- IV. Challenging and reframing the museum and the gallery: the “anti” exhibition
- V. The museum as installation art
- VI. Exhibitions that made and “unmade” history
- VII. Displaying the marvelous or marvelous displays: the architecture of museums

The less conventional course outline:

- traditional histories of museums
- influential museums: *case study presentations* [MoMA; NMWA; Guggenheim, Whitney, National Gallery of Art, etc.]
- women as patrons of the arts and founders of museums (*case studies*) [Isabelle Gardner, Katherine Dreier, Peggy Guggenheim, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, and others]
- the museum’s public: who goes to the museum (any museum), who doesn’t, and why or why not
- exhibitions: staging art and the public’s encounter (*case studies: these should include a trip to a museum of your choice*)
- ethical questions: who “owns” the art in the museum? Do museums have the right to de-accession their holdings? Who “owns” national treasures?
- building museums: museum architecture and its influence on museum narratives
- changing museums and changing exhibitions: unconventional narratives (*case studies*)

Course project:

The project will involve ongoing research and presentation on a regular basis of new findings and new questions for your study. The final project will include a class presentation with the use of visual aids (a web site) and a product which can be turned in. Your assessment and class feedback will determine your grade.

Project topics may be derived from the case study short papers listed in the unconventional syllabus or they may take the form of one of the following:

- a historical study of the evolution of how one theme has been treated in museum exhibitions (for example, women’s art, the art of native Americans, a particular artist, etc.)
- a proposal for an exhibition in which you identify and justify the subject, the location, the sources for your art works, possible patrons, the organization of the show, and prepare a mock catalogue

Bibliography

Books on reserve in the library:

Cuno, James, ed. *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*. (A collection of essays, most of them written by museum directors and curators)

Hoving, Thomas. *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art*.

Lynes, Russell. *Good Old Modern*. (About MoMA, before the current expansion and rebuilding)

Halladay, Wilhelmina. *A Museum of Their Own: National Museum of Women in the Arts*.

[others may be added during the semester]

e-resource in McConnell:

Sherman, Daniel J. And Irit Rogoff, ed. *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*. (This is an electronic book, accessible through McConnell.)

Articles in class Web folder:

Barris, Roann, "Empowerment and Manipulation: The Seductive Betrayal of Art." In Mirela Duculescu and Alina Auerban, *The Seductiveness of the Interval* (Stockholm: Romanian Cultural Institute, 2009), 127-132.

Duncan, Carol and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum." *Art History* 3, No. 4 (Dec. 1980), 448-469.

Hauptman, William, "Juries, Protests, and Counter-Exhibitions before 1850." *Art Bulletin* 67, No. 1 (Mar 1985), 95-109.

Ward, Martha, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions." *Art Bulletin* 73, No. 4 (Dec 1991), 599-622.

Levi, Neil, "'Judge for Yourself!' – The 'Degenerate Art' Exhibition as Political Spectacle." *October* 85, Summer 1998, 41-64.

Winton, Alexandra Griffith, "'A Man's House is his Art,': the Walker Art Center's 'Idea House' Project and the Marketing of Domestic Design 1941-1947." *Journal of Design History* 17, No. 4, 2004: 377 - 396.

Articles on electronic reserve in the library:

Akinsha, Konstantin, "The Faking of the Russian Avant-Garde," *ARTnews*, summer 2009, 94-105.

Chung, James, Susie Wilkening, and Sally Johnstone, "Coming Soon: The Future. The Shape of Museums to Come." *Museum*, May-June 2009, 38 - 43.

Cembalest, Robin, "Reshaping the Art Museum." *ARTnews*, June 2009, 76 - 81.