ARTh401/ARTh601: Cabinets of Curiosity: The History of Museums
Fall 2013; T R 5 - 6:15, YG 321

Instructor: Prof. Roann Barris
email: rbarris@radford.edu

Office: 202 PF; Phone: 831-6001
HRS: mornings daily and T afternoons, but best to check first or make an appointment

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

Course description:
The first course in the museum studies sequence, this class focuses on the history of museums. 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 how and what we see. This is true for any museum, whether an art museum, science, anthropology, or some other kind; consequently, we will not limit our focus to art museums. Inevitably, we will touch on the role of exhibitions but exhibition histories are the focus of the second course in this sequence.

Course format:
Seminar: This is a small class and everyone will be expected to participate equally, rigorously, and regularly. Some of our readings will be shared; other readings will be individually selected and the reader will be expected to provide an overview to the entire group. 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: Bettina Messias Caronell, Museum Studies, 2nd edition. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). Additional readings will either be on reserve in McConnell or available as e-files in D2L.

Requirements
- You must attend every class. Being present means being awake, being interested, and being prepared, and turning off your cell/IPAD, etc.
- Each class missed will lower your grade by half a letter grade; five absences will be an automatic F.
- Do all readings and participate in discussions. Prepare summaries, outlines, etc., for all reading assignments, and be prepared to turn them in on request.
Topics and Schedule

(approximately one topic each week but flexibility prevails! Required readings are included but you are encouraged to do additional readings from the textbooks and bibliography)

Introduction. Why museums? Are museums important? If so, why (or why not)?
Reading: hand-out in class (opinion piece from the New York Times), ch. 6 in the text.

I. History and typologies of museums:
Reading: Duncan and Wallach, “The Universal Survey Museum” – ch. 3 in text. Also read ch. 2.
When you read Duncan and Wallach, identify at least 3 basic assumptions guiding the authors. How do they support their assumptions? How might they be supported by arguments not made by the authors? What arguments could be made against these assumptions?

II. The public survey museum (continued)
S. Alpers, “The Museum as a way of seeing.” (D2L)
Focus in particular on alternatives to Duncan’s theory of ritual and the origins of the public museum.

III. Museums which are not museums, pt 1: the fair/expo museum
examples: Crystal Palace, the Chicago Exposition of 1892, the NY World’s Fair of 1939, etc.
Museum Culture (e-book in McConnell), ch. 13 (Selling Nations)
Rydell, “World Fairs and Museums” (D2L)
text, ch. 25
How do these “non-museums” relate to the traditional idea of a museum? What do they offer the spectator/public? Apart from impermanence, what problems do they raise?

IV. Museums of modern art: public and private
Museum Culture, chapter 9 (raises two issues, one concerning the “abuse” of art by a political exhibition, and the other concerning an exhibition which is not in a museum); and chapter 8
Although the degenerate art show is a very specific example of the misuse of modern art, what issues are raised in less political situations about modern art and museums? How have some museums attempted to resolve these issues? You may need to do extra reading to answer this question!
Also read chapters 42 and 50 in the text.

V. Non-museum museums, part 2: the house museum and the donor museum
Museum Culture, ch. 4 and chapter 12
Text, ch. 49, 34, 36
choose for additional reading: Domesticating History (on house museums) or one of the books about a specific donor museum – these are on reserve in McConnell
How do these museums differ from public and municipal museums? Why are women
disproportionately represented in the area of donor museums?

VI. Eco-museums and memorial museums
Museum Culture, chapter 4
Akcan, “Apology and Triumph” (D2L)
Text, ch. 8 and 9
What is an eco-museum and what is the guiding strategy for creating one? When is a museum a memorial? Are all museums memorials?

Presentations and Feedback: short presentations based on project proposals will be done in weeks 7 and 8. You should be prepared for these “draft” presentations – winging it is not a good idea (we’ll be bored and critical and you won’t do well). Final presentations will be done during the final exam time slot (Dec. 10, 5 pm).

VII - VIII. Other Cultures, film and science
Choose readings parts II and III in the text and from the special issue of Daedalus devoted to museums.
How do cultural variables influence exhibition practices? Does the idea of museum vary from one culture to another? How will new technology continue to influence museums? What are some examples of the impact of technology on museums?

IX. Museum ethics
chapters 1 and 2 in Ethics and the Visual Arts (D2L); chapter 26 in Companion to Museum Studies (e-book)
What ethical issues face museums and curators? Are the ethical responsibilities of a museum different from those of a curator? What is meant by the public trust when it comes to museums? (What are the obligations of a museum to the public?) How have these obligations been violated in recent years?

X. Museum architecture
chapters 14 and 15 in Companion to Museum Studies (e-book) and independent reading on a museum of your choice

Grading
Class participation (100 points), the project proposal (100), and the major project (300) are the sources of your grade. I will ask you to assess your own participation, using a rubric that I give you. Smaller projects may be introduced on an ad hoc basis – these will contribute to your participation grade. Sometimes these unplanned projects provide inspiration for the longer, big project, so you should always take them seriously. This class will use the plus and minus system of grading.

ARTSTOR: after you register to use Artstor (or log in, if already registered), don’t forget to unlock the folder for this class. Folder name: ARTH401 Museums
password: arth401fall2013
Term project: the biography of a museum
You will analyze and study the history of a museum’s coming into existence, its changes over time, the responses of visitors and staff to the museum, and anticipated problems or new directions for the future. The project will involve the use of books, the museum website (if it has one), and interviews (either in person, by email or by phone) with people who work at the museum and visit it. The best papers will use as many of these sources as possible.

Determination of directions for the future will probably involve your ability to compare the museum you choose to other museums of a similar type. Depending on the museum you choose, it may be possible to access archival documents. Many of the readings on your bibliography will provide you with ideas for the best way to approach this. You may find that Duncan’s ritual analysis of museums is an appropriate model to use or you may find that it does not suit the particular museum you have selected. The Stuth article in the class bibliography exemplifies an approach taken by an architectural class – it obviously will not be entirely replicable for your project but it may provide you with ideas. The Akcan article is another approach. In other words, there will be more than one way to do this; use your assigned readings and your own exploration of additional readings and real museums to determine your approach.

Once you have decided on your museum, you should consider the museum to be a client that has engaged you to provide this biography and analysis of future directions. Write a letter to the museum director with your project proposal. Justify your decision to choose this museum and indicate your desire to provide the museum with a proposal for directions in the next decade. Although you do not have to spell out these suggestions at this point, you might find it helpful to provide either a skeleton of what you envision or a reason for believing that some changes will be necessary. Include a list of references you plan to use and ideas you have for additional data gathering. This letter will constitute your project proposal and will be shared with the class. The proposal letter will be graded separately from the total project.

The final project should be prepared in written form with graphics and visual aids. It should look like something you would be willing to share with a museum administrator in real life. You should also prepare a power point version of your written presentation. You will present the power point to the class and turn in the written version for grading. The length of the paper should be approximately 2500 words (about 10 pages); the presentation should be 12 - 15 minutes, it should be formal, but you should not read directly from your paper.
Rubric for term project

(superlative) project meets requirements for length and content, and demonstrates high level of quality in concern for writing, organization and overall project; presentation version shows serious (professional level) concern and commitment to project

270 - 300

(good; better than average) project meets requirements at an acceptable level but overall project lacks evidence (frisson) of having gone beyond the readily available material and/or conclusions; the written version may be excellent but the presentation did not appear to polished or practiced (this is not the same thing as being nervous!)

240 - 270

(Acceptably decent) Project is missing historically relevant material or fails to demonstrate personal initiative in going beyond the provision of a summary of historical materials; all components are otherwise included and competent

210 - 240

(unacceptable college work) project is turned in but is incomplete in terms of content, approach to theme, and submitted components

200

Bibliography


