FAH 160: Museum History & Theory

Fall 2016: Andrew McClellan
Tuesday 6:00-9:00pm, 11 Talbot, Seminar Room
office hours by appointment: andrew.mcclellan@tufts.edu (office located on second floor of Art History Dept., 11 Talbot Ave.)

Learning Objectives: This course will make you an analytic consumer of the most powerful and pervasive of art institutions: the art museum. Alternating segments on museum history, theory and contemporary practice provide a critical framework to understand how and why art museums have evolved over time and function today, why they are so prominent the world over and why they provoke controversy. Unlike a straightforward art history course, we will not study works of art but rather how art objects are displayed and interpreted within an institutional matrix. This course contributes to our knowledge of art history by analyzing a crucial context in which we encounter works of art – a context that shapes the reception and definition of art. My hope is that after taking this course no museum visit will ever be the same! Weekly class discussion and response pieces will sharpen critical thinking with respect to fundamental issues and current literature. Guest lectures bring fresh perspectives from professionals in the field. Assignments include a comparative analysis of Boston area museums and a term paper on a relevant subject of your choice.

Syllabus

Sept 6: Introduction: Why Museums? Class discussion

Part 1: You and museums

Part 2: Do museums still matter in our virtual age?
http://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_518882&feature=iv&src_vid=zuYzOn0U2PY&v=zw9NXY3xOOI

Museums are Freakin Awesome!:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VWPHKABRQA

For further stimulation, check out:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-91GqSBnUUs

and a longer, updated presentation of the Google Art project:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjB6DQGalU0
Sept 13: Collecting and Curiosity

Part 1: Collecting and Curiosity in Early Modern Europe
Reading: Kenseth, Kaufman, Schepelern

Part 2: Guest lecture by artist, collector and writer Rosamond Purcell

Sept 20: The Art Museum in Europe
Reading: Abt; Duncan; McClellan, “Art for All, Palace of the People”

Paragraph: what does Greenblatt mean by “resonance” and “wonder”? 
Reading: Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder”

Sept 27: The Art Museum in the United States
Reading: Duncan; Dana; McClellan, The Art Museum, Chapter 1

Paragraph: what were Dana’s objections to art museums and do you agree with them?

Oct 4: Museum Architecture

Part 1: A History of Museum Architecture
Reading: McClellan, Art Museum, chap 2; Rybszynski; Goldberger,

Paragraph: Is dramatic architecture good or bad for museums?

Part 2: Gulf Futurism & Museums in the Middle East
Reading: McClellan, “Museum Expansion in the Twenty-First Century: Abu Dhabi”; “The Desert of the Unreal”
Oct 11: Display Strategies

Part 1: How and why museums classify things
Reading: Fisher; Corrin; McClellan, Art Museum, Chapter 3

Paragraph: what does Fisher mean when he says that objects have many lives?

Part 2: A game with postcards

Oct 18: NO CLASS: Museum Analysis

As your mid-term assignment, and in lieu of class, visit the Museum of Fine Arts and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on your own time and find one room or space in each to analyze in terms of issues raised so far in class. The rooms might be similar in some respects or they might offer a strong museological contrast. The choice is yours but feel free to discuss with me beforehand. Include a photo (or two) of each space, if possible and relevant to your analysis.

6-7 pages to be submitted via email as a Word doc by 5pm Monday, October 24. Be prepared to discuss your spaces in class on Oct 25.

Oct 25: The Museum Public

Part 1: A history of the art museum public
Reading: McClellan, Art Museum, Chapter 4; Coles, Cuno, Knight

Paragraph: Can, and should, art museums be for everyone?

Part 2: class discussion of mid-term assignment

Nov 1: Museums and Community

Guest lecture by Barry Gaither, Director of the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston
Reading: Gaither; Davila
Nov 15: Money: Funding & Commercialism

Part 1: A history of museum funding
Reading: McClellan, Art Museum, Chap 5; Prior; de Montebello; “The Price of Admission”

Part 2: Discussion of “Occupy Museums”
Reading: http://occupymuseums.org/index.php/about (and feel free to explore further on the web)

Paragraph:
Either: What do you think of the Occupy Museums movement?
Or: Should art museums be free? If so, how would you pay for them?

Nov 22: no class (substitute MFA visit on Dec 1), but do reading and paragraph on Cultural Heritage: Where Does it Belong?
Reading: Macgregor; AAMD Documents; Opoku; McClellan, Art Museum, Chap 6 and Conclusion; Jenkins, “Obsessing about past ‘wrongs’”

Paragraph: Should significant cultural objects be sent back to their place or origin or are they more useful serving as “cultural ambassadors” in other countries?

Nov 29: Displaying the “Other”
Reading: Karp, Vogel, Clarke

Paragraph: Should non-Western art be displayed like Western art or does it require more explanation (labels, atmospheric context, audio-visual material, etc.)?

Part 2: Film, “In and Out of Africa”

Dec 1: Class visit to the MFA—Provenance Research

Guest lecture by Victoria Reed, Curator of Provenance, Boston MFA
Reading about Reed: (1) http://www.brownpoliticalreview.org/2015/03/bpr-interviews-victoria-reed/; (2)
Meet at the Sharf Information Center inside the museum promptly at 6pm. Give yourselves time beforehand to get tickets and check backpacks. (http://mfas3.s3.amazonaws.com/MFA_Map_Mar2016_Level1.pdf)

Dec 6: Contemporary Art in Museums

Guest lecture by Eva Respini, Barbara Lee Chief Curator, ICA Boston
Reading: Altschuler, Belting, Dobrzynski

***Final Projects due Monday, December 19 by 5pm. (Submit as a Word doc via email or via Box)

Reading:

Required texts:
Andrew McClellan, The Art Museum From Boullée to Bilbao (University of California Press, 2008)

Other Readings - in order of use. Required readings are on Trunk or accessible through links embedded above. Strongly recommended readings are also on Trunk.

Sept 13: Collecting & Curiosity


recommended further reading:
K. Pomian, “The Age of Curiosity,” in Collectors and Curiosities, Paris-Venice, 1500-1800,
1990,45-64
Jill Lepore, “Robert Ripley and his World,” New Yorker (June 3, 2013)
Snodin & Llewellyn, “Marvellous Materials,” Baroque: Style in the Age of Magnificence, 126-41

Sept 20: The Art Museum in Europe


Sept 27: The Art Museum in the United States

Carol Duncan, Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums (1995), 48-71

Further reading:

Oct 4: Museum Architecture

Paul Goldberger, “Art Houses,” The New Yorker (Nov 5, 2001)

The Desert of the Unreal,” Dazed (November 9, 2012): http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/15040/1/the-desert-of-the-unreal (Fatima Al Qadiri and Sophia Al-Maria on “Gulf Futurism”)

Oct 11: Display Strategies

*Strongly recommended:*

**Oct 18: Museum Analysis**

*Helpful reading on the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum:*

**Oct 25: The Museum Public**

Christopher Knight, “Elitist and Proud of It,” *LA Times* (Sept. 2, 2001)

**Nov 1: Museums and Community**


**Nov 15: Money: Funding & Commercialism**

Nick Prior, “Having One’s Tate and Eating It: Transformations of the Museum in a Hypermodern Era,” in McClellan *Art and its Publics*, 51-68
**further reading on commercialism:**
Hans Haacke, “In the Vice,” *Art Journal* (Fall, 1991), 51-5
H. Schiller, “Corporate Sponsorship,” *Art Journal* (Fall 1991), 56-9

**Nov 22: Cultural Heritage: Where Does it Belong?**

**suggested further reading:**

**Nov 29: Displaying “the Other”**
Christa Clarke, “From Theory to Practice: Exhibiting African Art in the Twenty-First Century,” in McClellan, *Art and Its Publics* (2003), 165-84

**Further reading:**
Dec 6: Contemporary Art in Museums

Bruce Altschuler, “Collecting the New: A Historical Introduction,” in Collecting the New (2005), 1-10

Course requirements

- Reading, class participation, paragraphs (30%)
- Museum Analysis (30%)
- Final Project (40%)

Paragraphs

Paragraphs should be between a good size paragraph and a page long, no longer. They are intended as response pieces to the readings to help you articulate your thoughts. Submit your paragraphs each week via email before class and prepare to discuss your observations in class. Submit all them together as a continuous word doc at the end of the semester; feel free to make edits and improvements to any or all to reflect second thoughts you may have as a result of my comments and class discussion.

Museum Analysis

See assignment above.

Final Paper

Write a final paper 10-15 pages long on a museum-related subject of your choice. You might choose to elaborate on, or build off, one of the paragraph themes or a particular reading. I will offer a list of topics that come to my mind, one of which might intrigue you or spark another idea. Or you might want to pursue an interest of your own. I am available to discuss any ideas you have. You must get my approval in advance for the topic you choose to write about.