*Museums: Past, Present, Future*

UCLA HIST XXX

Tuesday evenings, 6 p.m. – 9 p.m., Room 318

The many millions of museum-goers that descend on Washington each year —this is the nation’s museum capital, after all – understand that museums are repositories for history. But do they know the history of museums, or how these institutions struggle to remain relevant?

The idea that a collection should merit study emerged during the Renaissance and just after, when the very wealthy assembled curiosity cabinets showing petrified arachnids alongside amethysts and Altdorfers. Later, political upheaval, Enlightenment ideals of education, and the rise of leisure time and the middle class shaped museums into destinations for everyday citizens. Today, museum professionals must constantly refine their strategies to keep up with a rapidly evolving culture.

This course will examine museums from a multiplicity of perspectives, exploring the important trends emerging in the field and delving into the unique challenges these institutions face in the 21st century. Topics include globalization, restitution claims, private-collector museums, access issues, ethical issues surrounding de-accessioning, the use of digital technology, and more. We’ll read what critics and scholars have to say, see how artists have responded to and critiqued these institutions, and then meet an array of Washington museum professionals who will share their insights into the stewardship of national collections and the future of cultural leadership.

Our classroom activity will center on the active presentation, discussion, and debate of assigned readings. Guest speakers will be invited to class. Please arrive in class eager to talk to classmates and visitors.

Instructor:

Jessica Dawson

[jessica.barrow.dawson@gmail.com](mailto:jessica.barrow.dawson@gmail.com)

Please include “UCDC” in email subject line

Office Hours: TBA, Room 353

Attendance and Participation: 30%

Paper 1: 30%

Project Presentation/Paper 2: 40%

\*NB: Please respect your classmates and your professor: Cell phone use and texting are prohibited. Laptops must remain closed (and notes taken longhand) when guest speakers visit. All other times, laptop use should be kept to a minimum.

Reader: Available from Bookstore

**Papers and Presentation:**

You will be assigned two papers and one short presentation.

*Paper 1* will be a 1,000 word analysis of an exhibition currently on view in Washington; assignment will be distributed in class.

*Paper 2* dovetails with a 10-minute presentation, which will be delivered during our final two class meetings. This 5- to 7-page paper fuses reporting on a current issue in museums or is your exhibition proposal (see potential topics list at end of this syllabus). Students will conduct interviews and do original research.

**Week 1: Course Introduction and the Origins of the Museum**

* Class overview
* Introduction to major milestones in museum history – from *kunstkammer* to Louvre; political and social underpinnings of early collections

**Week 2: Who Owns Culture?**

* Nazis, looting, repatriation disputes. What happens when you remove an object from its original site and into a museum?
* Museums as agents for the State

In class we’ll watch the documentary: “The Rape of Europa” about Third Reich attitudes toward art and Nazi looting during World War 2

*Readings:*

*From Schubert, Karsten, “The Curator’s Egg,” One-Off Press/Christie’s Books, 2000.*

*From Cuno, James, “Whose Culture? The Promise of Museums and the Debate over Antiquities,” Princeton University Press, 2012.*

*International Council of Museums Code of Ethics PDF*

*Selected newspaper articles*

**Week 3: The Exhibition and its Author(s)**

* Should museums teach, react, gratify?
* Curatorial Practice, then and now
* The hang: from Salon to White Cube

Guest Speaker: Adam Budak, International Curator of Contemporary Art, Hirshhorn Museum

*Readings:*

*From Noordegraaf, Julia, “Strategies of Display,” Nai Publishers, 2004.*

*From Altschuler, Bruce, et al., “A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution,” Whitechapel Ventures Limited and Koenig Books, 2004.*

**Week 4: Artists React to the Museum**

* A look at artists who question the museum’s power: from Duchamp to Donald Judd to Thomas Struth
* Creative rebellion: ephemeral works, earthworks, performance, video

Guest speaker: Jose Ruiz, artist and arts entrepreneur, Brooklyn and Washington, DC; member of artist collective Present Company; owner of Furthermore print studio

*Readings:*

*Buren, Daniel, “The Function of the Studio” excerpted in Doherty, Claire, ed., “Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation,” Black Dog Publishing, 2004.*

**Week 5: Museum Education: Good Intentions, Mixed results**

* The education function of a museum
* Audiences: understanding a public and serving it
* Case study: The Barnes Foundation and the question of access. Whom are museums for?

In class, watch the film “The Art of the Steal”

*Readings:*

*TBA: newspaper articles on Barnes*

**Week 6: The Day-to-Day: Object Preservation; Keeping the Institution Afloat (Fees, De-accessioning, and Funders)**

*Class meets at the Hirshhorn Museum on a weekday during business hours; time to be arranged with student input*

* Museums fees – higher and higher
* Your Board, your albatross: how museum boards work, their duties, responsibilities and failtures. Case in point: LA MOCA. Also Corcoran, National Gallery
* De-accessions
* Meet with Clarke Bedford, Hirshhorn Conservator, in museum’s Conservation Lab

*Readings:*

*Newspaper articles on the Corcoran, LA MOCA, Rales, etc.*

**Week 7: Censorship and The Culture Wars**

* With a focus on the “NEA 4” and the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition scandal at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in the late 1980s, discussion of government funding of the arts and how we define “indecency”
* Portrait Gallery ‘HIDE/SEEK’ scandal of Fall ’10

*Readings*:

Excerpt “Art Politicized” (pp. 169-180); excerpt from “The Art Museum Transformed” (pp. 277-282); excerpt from “Issues of Diversity and Inclusion” (pp. 312-317) in Michael G. Kamman, *Visual Shock: A History of Art Controversies in American Culture*, (Random House, 2006.)

Carole S. Vance, “The War on Culture” (pp. 119-131); Kobena Mercer, “Looking For Trouble” (pp. 360-371); both in Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung, eds. *Theory in Contemporary Art since* *1985*, (Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

Jacqueline Trescott, “Ant-Covered Jesus Video Removed From Smithsonian After Catholic League Complains,” The Washington Post, Dec. 1, 2010, p. A1.

Blake Gopnik, “National Portrait Gallery Bows to Censors,” The Washington Post, Dec. 1, 2010, p. C1.

Holland Cotter, “As Ants Crawl Over Crucifix, Dead Artist Assailed Again,” The New York Times, Dec. 10, 2010, p. A1.

Kennicott, Philip, “’Hide/Seek’ One Year Later,” The Washington Post, Nov. 21, 2011.

**Week 8: The Way Forward**

* Digital art; online exhibitions; use and preservation of digital technology
* Do we need museums anymore? Biennials, galleries, fairs; where the market is now

Guest Speaker: Richard Koshalek, Director, Hirshhorn Museum

*Readings:*

*TBA*

**Week 9/10: In-Class Presentations on Contemporary Museum Issues and Exhibition Proposals**

*Suggested topics for 10-minute in class presentation and paper 2*

*Choice 1*

+ From Andrew Mellon to Duncan Philips, the philanthropists and robber barons who chose Washington as a home for their collections. What does it mean to be a national gallery of art, or to be the steward of a national collection? The politics of public versus private institutions.

+Update on the state of the National Endowment for the Arts (and Rocco Landesman, NEA chair)

+Ramifications of the ”Hide/Seek” exhibition censorship (expand on what was covered in class)

+Funding of major arts institutions: National Gallery of Art, Phillips Collection, Smithsonian Institution

+Admission Fees: Yea or Nay?

+Critique and analysis of a current and/or permanent exhibition: eg: The Hall of Human Origins, National Museum of Natural History and its implications for creationism v. evolution debate; Diamonds and gems exhibit (conflict diamonds, etc) at Natural History

+other report topics related to your internship and interests, to be vetted by me

-OR-

*Choice 2*

+Generate a full exhibition proposal

Justify it to the class, which will act as your curatorial board.

1. Purpose/rationale
2. Full exhibition checklist; object provenance and background
3. Layout of floor plan
4. Potential funders and other sources of funding
5. Exhibition text/curatorial essay