Class details

CORE-UA9723001 Expressive Culture
The Poetics and Politics of Art & Museum Display in Washington DC
Fall 2015
Wednesdays, 1:15-4:15
Location varies

Instructor Details

Prerequisites

An inquiring mind and physical stamina

Class Description

Museum ...is a word acquiring new significance...Not the museum in the narrow sense of a particular building or institution, but as a potent social metaphor and as a means whereby societies represent their relationship to their own history and to that of other cultures. Museums, in this sense, map out geographies of taste and values.


With its vast array of institutions dedicated to distinct cultural groupings and its formation inextricably linked to the halls of power, the museum culture in our nation’s capitol is uniquely Washington D.C. Taking advantage of behind-the-scenes access to some of the most prestigious museums in the world and their staff, students will explore various approaches to interpreting art and will develop tools for appreciating their aesthetic experiences. We will also look critically at the ways in which museums—through their policies, programs, exhibitions, and architecture—can define regional or national values, shape cultural attitudes, inform social and political views, and even effect one’s understanding of the meaning of a work of art.

Starting our class at The Phillips Collection, America’s first museum of modern art, we will visit other pioneering private and public museums both old and new and have the opportunity to meet with staff members actively involved in different activities. We will explore the collections, learn about the inner workings of the exhibition process, and investigate the diverse educational missions these museums fulfill. Against the backdrop of the Capitol Building where legislation is made influencing museums on the National Mall and beyond, we will examine the political sides of this cultural history and the unusual array of institutions that have been legislated into existence, specifically museums dedicated to defined constituencies.

The class structure is divided into three sections: 1) tour/lecture, 2) viewing and talking about art, and 3) discussion.
Desired Outcomes

The goals of this course are: 1) to introduce students to varied methodologies of art interpretation with the aim of developing a critical command of the tools for understanding and appreciating the art on display; 2) to encourage students to engage critically with primary artifacts from diverse cultures and reflect on the manner in which they are presented in different museum contexts; 3) to provide students with opportunities for studying the historical and changing notion of the museum and the role these institutions play in our society in the construction of national and cultural identity; 4) for students to learn to navigate with confidence and critical insight through the museum landscape in D.C.; 5) for students to develop and demonstrate increasingly sophisticated expertise in critical reading and writing about the issues explored throughout the semester.

Assessment Components

Participation: 20%
Weekly Response Entries: 15%
Online Journal: 10%
Final paper: 20%
Exams: 35% (Midterm 15%; Final 20%)

Participation—Active participation in discussions is a critical part of the learning experience and will count for 20% of your grade. Attendance and punctuality are included in this component. All assignments should be read before class and you should bring the texts with you to enable you to more actively participate in the discussion. Come prepared with questions. You will be taking notes during the visits, so please bring a pencil (art museums generally frown on the use of pens in the galleries).

Online Journal—You will keep a weekly journal to include the following components:

1) During each museum visit, you will select one work that caught your attention—painting, sculpture, photograph—and spend 15 minutes on your own with this object right before the mid-session break. You should identify this work (note the artist and/or culture in which it was created, the medium, date, dimensions, and copy the label text) and, using terminology learned from the readings and in class, provide a brief visual analysis of the work. Your final paper assignment (see below) will be based on one of these selections.

2) After identifying the work of art, take note of how it is presented (location in gallery space, placement of label, lighting, etc.) as well as the name and location of the exhibition where it is on display. Is it featured in a monographic (single artist) or thematic exhibition (multiple artists organized around a theme) or part of the museum’s permanent collection? Is it located on a major sightline, in a well-lit vitrine, set apart from or located in close proximity to other similar works? Note the architecture of the room or gallery it is in, any sub-headings or wall text within which this work is situated, and the wall color. If permitted, you should photograph your chosen object and installation framework—the label, any wall text introducing the gallery where it was displayed—as part of your records or download an image of it from the museum’s web page.

3) Post your image(s) on to the site provided on NYU Classes. Add a few words describing your response to and perhaps raising questions about this work. If successful, your entries should inspire others to comment or make further inquiries.

You are encouraged to use this opportunity creatively and dynamically. You can upload sketches, photographs, postcards, or brochures that you find useful. Final journals entries must be made by the last day of class, December 9. You are strongly advised to keep your journal active and up-to-date throughout the semester, which will make this a stress-free exercise. If completed correctly, one of these weekly exercises will fulfill the
requirements for one third of the final paper assignment.

**Weekly Response Entries**—The Forum section of NYU Classes will provide a vehicle for weekly 1 to 2-page response papers, in which students will compose thoughtful attention to the week’s subject. You can use this opportunity to summarize main topics raised by the readings, analyze select passages in greater detail, pose questions, and reflect on how the museum experience (when applicable) related to issues raised in the articles. You are encouraged to use this as an opportunity to read and comment on papers uploaded by your classmates. They will be graded privately on a scale of ☑️, ☑️ or ☐️.

**Final Paper**—For your final assignment, **due in class on December 9**, you will select one work of art from among those you’ve written about in your journal and develop an exhibition proposal crafted utilizing one of the interpretative approaches discussed during the semester. Do not leave this assignment for the last minute; it will be much more beneficial and easier for you to complete this exercise over the course of the semester. You will receive a separate handout with details of this assignment. **NO PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE DEADLINE WITHOUT PRIOR AUTHORIZATION. ASSIGNMENTS SUBMITTED AFTER THIS DATE WILL RESULT IN ZERO POINTS.**

**Midterm and Final Exams**—The mid-term and final exams will be comprised of three parts: definitions of terms, identification of works art with short answers, and an essay question. The essay section on both exams will be take-home. The exams are designed to encourage you to synthesize the material you've learned through the readings and classroom experiences.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade A:</strong> The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays / exam questions and his/her work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade B:</strong> The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade C:</strong> The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade D:</strong> The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade F:</strong> The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grade conversion

NYU Washington, DC uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-90</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89-87</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86-84</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83-80</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79-77</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-74</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-70</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69-67</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-66</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 65</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attendance Policy

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. **To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students' semester grades.** Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. At all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with the Academic Program Coordinator in advance of their missed class. For an excused absence, students must produce a doctor’s note dated with the exact dates of the missed class and/or exam.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Academic Program Coordinator prior to the date(s) in question, who will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty members. If faculty members do receive notification, the student has not procured an excused absence.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each instructor to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should
initiate email and/or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

We will meet at the main entrance (unless otherwise directed) of the museum indicated for each session. Addresses and directions for each of these museums can be found at:

- National Gallery of Art
- National Museum of Women in the Arts
- Phillips Collection
- Smithsonian American Art Museum
- Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
- Smithsonian National Museum of African Art
- Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian
- Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery
- Smithsonian Sackler/Freer Galleries
Late Submission of Work

1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed. (If the assignment must be submitted in person, the Academic Program Coordinator can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 9–5, M–F.)

3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g.,: A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for every day it is late, including weekends.

4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.

6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.

7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.

Students with Disabilities

Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at +1-212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

Plagiarism Policy

As the University's policy on "Academic Integrity for Students at NYU" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others." Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images, or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU Washington, DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set
out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity


**Religious Observances**

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.

Students must notify their professor and the Office of Academic Support in writing via email at least one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

**Required Text(s)**


**Supplemental Text(s) (i.e., not required for purchase)**


We will be reading several chapters out of this small book. Although the assigned chapters will be available on NYU Classes, this very readable and inexpensive text is a good book to have for further reference.
Internet Research Guidelines

It is highly recommended that everyone visit the website for the individual museum being visited each week, even if a specific link is not indicated in the syllabus for that day. Doing so will enrich your visit and enable you to come class better prepared to engage in discussion with our hosts.

Additional Required Equipment

Camera is helpful but not required

Session 1 – Wednesday, September 2, 2015

The Phillips Collection

INTRODUCTION: Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display

Session 2 – Wednesday, September 9, 2015

Hirshhorn Museum
Entrance at Independence Ave. and 7th St. [L’Enfant Plaza or Smithsonian Metro]

Guest Lecturers Melissa Chiu, Director, and Melissa Ho, Curator

Reading Assignment:
* Smithsonian Institution Budget Justification to Congress FY 2016: “Valuing World Cultures” and “Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden,” 80; 94-98


James Demetrion, An introduction to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution (1987)


Watch: TED Talk: Shirin Neshat, Art in Exile

**** OPTIONAL BUT HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

PORTRAYING HISTORY: GENDER AND POLITICS IN IRAN:
Panel Discussion with artist Shirin Neshat, 7 pm at Hirshhorn

Session 3 – Wednesday, September 16, 2015

Asian Art at the Sackler/Freer
Meet at Freer entrance  (Mall side)
Guest lecturer, Dr. Martha Bari
Topic: Poetics and Politics of Asian Art on the National Mall: The Challenge of Museum Legacies

Reading Assignment:
* Smithsonian Institution Budget Justification to Congress FY 2016: “Valuing World Cultures” and “Arthur M. Sackler Gallery/Freer Gallery,” 80-84


• Linda Merrill, “Composing the Collection,” and “The Late Years,” in Thomas Lawton and Linda Merrill, Freer: A Legacy of Art (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1993), 176-201; 234-253.

• “Freer Gallery of Art,” Smithsonian Institution Archives, http://siarchives.si.edu/history/freer-gallery-art

• “Peacock Room REMIX, Freer|Sackler website, http://www.asia.si.edu/filthylucre/default.asp
Watch video by clicking on top banner. Then click on “Explore: Darren Waterston’s Filthy Lucre,” and “Explore: The Peacock Room” at the bottom of the page.

Session 4 – Wednesday, September 23, 2015

The Phillips Collection

Reading Assignment:


Kimono Fray at MFA: https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/2015/07/18/counter-protesters-join-kimono-fray-mfa/ZgVWiT3yZSIQxGhAOFM/story.html#In

Session 5 – Wednesday, September 30, 2015

National Gallery of Art
Guest Lecturer TBD

Reading Assignment:
*Alan Wallach and Carol Duncan, “The Universal Survey Museum,” Art History (December 1980), 448-469.


**Session 6 – Wednesday, October 7, 2015**

**Smithsonian American Art Museum**  
**Guest Lecturer Dr. E. Carmen Ramos, SAAM Curator of Latino Art**

Visit: [http://americanart.si.edu/visit/about/history/](http://americanart.si.edu/visit/about/history/)

**Reading Assignment:**

*Smithsonian Institution Budget Justification to Congress FY 2016:* “Intro, Understanding the American Experience” and “Smithsonian American Art Museum,” 106; 149-154

  
  Steven D. Lavine & Ivan Karp, “Museums and Multiculturalism,” 1-9
  
  Jane Livingston and John Beardsley, “The Poetics and Politics of Hispanic Art: An New Perspective,” 104-120
  
  Peter Marzio, “Minorities in Fine-Arts Museums in the United States,” 121-127

(To learn more about the artist, visit: [http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/glenn-ligon](http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/glenn-ligon) and look and some of the related videos)


**Session 7 – Wednesday, October 14, 2015**

**The Phillips Collection**  
**Topic: Man Ray=Human Equations: Anatomy of an Exhibition**  
**Guest: Christine Hollins, Director of Institutional Giving**


In advance of next week’s discussion, view:

*Installing the Wolfgang Laib Wax Room: [https://vimeo.com/61817943](https://vimeo.com/61817943)*

**We will go to the galleries and listen to** Contemplative Audio Tours:  
**The Rothko Room:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVOURKf0J8k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVOURKf0J8k)  
**Renoir’s Luncheon of the Boating Party:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MR7hmcOfUF4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MR7hmcOfUF4)
BRING HEADPHONES

Session 8 – Wednesday, October 21, 2015

Midterm Exam / The Phillips Collection

Following the midterm exam, we will meet with
Klaus Ottmann, Deputy Director for Curatorial and Academic Affairs
Topic: ART, CONTEMPLATION, AND WELLNESS

Reading Assignment:
* Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making*
* Edward Gero, “Reflections and Rumination on the Road to Rothko and Red”

Session 9 – Wednesday, October 28, 2015

National Portrait Gallery
Guest Lecturers Asma Naeem and Ann Shumard
Topic: The Poetics and Politics of Portraiture

Reading Assignment:
* Smithsonian Institution Budget Justification to Congress FY 2016: “Intro, Understanding the American Experience” and “National Portrait Gallery,” 106; 138-144

Session 10 – Wednesday, November 4, 2015

National Museum of African Art
Guest Lecturer: Independent Curator, Adrienne Childs, exhibition co-curator

Reading Assignment:
* Smithsonian Institution Budget Justification to Congress FY 2016: “Valuing World Cultures” and “National Museum of African Art,” 80; 99-105

Visit: http://conversations.africa.si.edu/

Exhibition reviews and controversies:


https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/smithsonians-cosby-show-must-go-on/2015/08/16/c16c8262-3d32-11e5-8e98-115a3cf7d7ae_story.html

---

**Session 11 – Wednesday, November 11, 2015**

**The Phillips Collection**

Discussion

**Reading Assignment:**


---

**Session 12 – Wednesday, November 18, 2015**

**National Museum of American Indian**

**Guest Lecturer Dr. Gabrielle Tayac**, Historian and curator

Jerome Grant, Executive Chef

Meet in Mitsitam Café (ground floor) for lunch of native foods with award winning chef. Vouchers for the Café will be provided. Bring an appetite!

Visit:

And read an interview with Executive Chef about how the cafe reflects the mission of the museum:
http://artworks.arts.gov/?p=10870

**Reading Assignment:**
* Smithsonian Institution Budget Justification to Congress FY 2016: “Intro, Understanding the American Experience” and “National Museum of the American Indian,” 106; 134-137


* Please note that class will not meet next week (November 25) due to the Thanksgiving holiday.

**Session 13 – **Wednesday, December 2, 2015**

**National Museum of Women in the Arts**
New York Ave. and 13th St. [Metro Center or McPherson Sq. Metro]

**Guest Lecturer Dr. Virginia Treanor, Curator**

VIEW: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3we9ItJy50

**Reading Assignment:**

*In *Gender Perspectives: Essays on Women in Museums* (1994):

  -The Impact of Feminist Scholarship: New Approaches to History, Art, & Science, 38
    -Marcia Tucker, “From Theory to Practice: Correcting Inequalities,” 51-54
  -The Impact of Feminist Scholarship in Collections, Exhibitions, and Publications, 56


**Session 14 – Wednesday, December 9, 2015**

*****FINAL PAPER DUE***

**The Phillips Collection**

* Smithsonian Institution Budget Justification to Congress FY 2016: “Intro, Understanding the American Experience” and “National Museum of African American History and Culture,” 106; 115-125


Session 15 – Wednesday, December 16, 2015

**FINAL EXAM The Phillips Collection**

**Classroom Etiquette**

Arrive with sufficient time to deposit coats & oversize bags in cloakroom. Backpacks and other large items cannot be brought into the galleries. You are expected to take notes and are responsible for all material discussed with our special guest lecturers. Bring notepad and pencil, since pens are generally frowned upon in museum galleries.

**Required Co-curricular Activities**

**Suggested Co-curricular Activities**

There are numerous events organized at the museums to include special artist’s lectures and symposia. Every Thursday evening The Phillips Collection is open until 8 pm and hosts a variety of special activities. You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of all these opportunities.

PORTRAYING HISTORY: GENDER AND POLITICS IN IRAN: Panel Discussion with artist Shirin Neshat, 7 pm at Hirshhorn Museum

**Your Instructor**