Expressive Culture: Museums in Washington Field Study (MAP-UA 9723)

Thursdays, 1:00-4:00
Location varies

Dr. Wendy Grossman, Curatorial Associate, The Phillips Collection
wg24@nyu.edu
I will be available for individual meetings before or after all class sessions and by appointment.

Prerequisites
N/A

Class Description
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. At each stop, we will have the opportunity to meet with staff members actively involved in different activities in that museum from curatorial specialists to conservators. 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 such as women, Native Americans, and African Americans.

Desired Outcomes
The goals of this course are: 1) to expose 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

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<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Summaries:</td>
<td>15% (5% for 1st paper; 10% for 2nd paper)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>35% (Midterm 15%; Final 20%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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**Journal**—You will keep a weekly journal comprised of three elements:

1. A short discussion of one of the assigned readings that made an impression on you (good or bad). Briefly summarize the reading (include title, author, publication and date) and note the author’s main argument. Write down one question from this reading that you will bring to class that week. This component of your journal is to be completed prior to the class meeting and brought to class for discussion.

2. At the end of each museum visit, you will select one work that caught your attention—painting, sculpture, photograph—and spend a few extra minutes on your own with this object. Your final paper assignment (see below) will be based on one of these selections. You should identify this work (note the artist and/or culture in which it was created, the medium, date, dimensions, and any label copy).

3. After identifying the object, take note of how it is presented (location in gallery space, placement of label, lighting, etc.). Is it a featured work in a specific exhibition (monographic, thematic, etc.), located on a major sightline, in a well-lit vitrine, set apart from or located in close proximity to other similar works? You should photograph your chosen object and installation framework (if permitted) as part of your records or download an image of it from the museum’s web page.

   **NOTE:** For the visit to the National Museum of African Art on March 7th, see the guided journal entry at the end of the syllabus. This is due in class the following session, March 14. This will allow me to provide preliminary feedback on your journal style that can assist you in shaping it for its final submission.

Journals comprise 20% of your grade. You are encouraged to use this opportunity creatively; you can include sketches, photographs, postcards, or brochures that you find useful. You will be graded on successfully fulfilling the required elements and the level of engagement with the ideas being discussed each week. As the semester progresses, you will be expected to demonstrate an increasing level of sophistication in your thoughts and observations. The grading rubric for your journal is in the assignments file in NYU Classes for this course. Please use it as a guideline to make sure that you are addressing every required component of this assignment.

The final journals will be turned in on May 2, a week before the last class meeting. You are strongly advised to keep your journal active and up-to-date throughout the semester, which will make this a stress-free exercise. Place a **bold asterisk (**) beside the journal entry that will serve as the starting point for your final paper. If completed correctly, this entry will fulfill the requirements for one third of the final paper assignment.

**Critical Analysis Papers**—You are required to write two critical response papers based on designated (*) readings on February 21 and April 11. Each critical analysis paper must be 2 to 2 ½ pages (600-700 words) and turned in at the beginning of class on those dates. The reading response assignment is designed to develop your skills in critical reading and writing. See details in separate handout in assignments folder of NYU Classes.
**Final Paper** — For your final assignment, **due in class on May 9**, you will select one work of art from among those you’ve written about in your journal and write three different short contextual scenarios, each one crafted with a different point of view selected from 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.

**Participation**—Active participation in discussions is a critical part of the learning experience and will count for 15% of your grade.

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**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade A:** 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.

**Grade B:** The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

**Grade C:** 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.

**Grade D:** The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

**Grade F:** The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

**Grade conversion**

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

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-94</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>93-90</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-84</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>65-66</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>below 65</td>
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Students are permitted one unexcused absence across the course of the semester. To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with Lauren 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 Lauren prior to the date(s) in question. Lauren will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty. If you have not received notification from Lauren, the student has not procured an excused absence.

If students have more than one unexcused absence they will be penalized by deducting 50% of the class participation grade (e.g.: If the class participation grade is 20% of the final grade, the final participation grade would be reduced by 50%. 80%→ 40%)

If students have more than two unexcused absences they will fail the course. 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.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks) and to remain for the duration of the class. Three late arrivals or earlier departures (10 minutes after the starting time or before the ending time) will be considered one absence.

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.

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, Lauren Sinclair can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 10-6, 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
Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

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

Required Text(s)
2. Course Reader

Supplemental Texts(s) (not required for purchase)
N/A

Internet research will be required for the final paper. Make certain that you are accessing valid sites from authoritative sources. This information will provide background information that will serve you in creating your original approach to your assignment.

Additional
Camera is helpful but not required
Orientation Tour at The Phillips Collection

Please purchase textbook and Course Reader before orientation. You are strongly encouraged to review these readings before our tour of the Phillips in order to enhance your experience and to prepare for ideas explored in the remainder of the course.

Barrett: “Introduction, Interpreting Art,” xv-xxiii

Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Civil War and American Art

Entrance at 8th and G Streets [Gallery Place Metro]

Eleanor Harvey, Curator of Civil War & American Art
Virginia Mecklenburg, Senior Curator

Nancy Villa Bryk, “Reports of our Death have been Exaggerated: Reconsidering the Curator,” Museum News (March/April 2001), 39-41; 67-71.
Website for “The Civil War and American Art”:
   http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/archive/2012/art_civil_war/

National Gallery of Art / West Building

Meet at the 6th & Constitution entrance [Archives, Judiciary Square or Smithsonian Metro]

Arthur Wheelock, Curator of Dutch and Flemish Painting
Mary Morton, Curator of French Painting

Barrett: Chapter 2: “Multiple Interpretations of One Work of Art,” 38-55;
   Chapter 5, “Interpreting Old and Foreign Art,” 111-121.
**Session 3**

**National Portrait Gallery**

**Culture Wars in the Nation’s Capitol [West as America / Hide/Seek]**

Thursday, February 21

Entrance at 8th and F Streets [Gallery Place Metro]

David Ward, Historian, curator of Hide/Seek


Visit exhibition website for a sample of the issues raised in the article:

http://people.virginia.edu/~mmw3v/west/home.htm


Visit exhibition website; go through gallery tour and watch video:

http://npg.si.edu/exhibit/hideseek/index.html

“Between a Cross and a Hard Place,” *ARTnews* 110, no. 2 (February 2011): 98.


**Session 4**

**Hirshhorn Museum**

Thursday, February 28

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

Curator or Educator, tbd

Susan Lake, Chief Conservator

Barrett: Chapter 4: “Interpreting and Appreciation: Abstract Painting,” 87-110;

Chapter 8: “Principles for Interpreting Art,” 197-228.


Visit: [http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/home/#collection=conservation](http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/home/#collection=conservation)

*Explore the site about conservation at the Hirshhorn and view the two related videos on this site*

**Session 5**

**African Voices at the National Museum of Natural History**

Thursday, March 7

**National Museum of African Art**

Meet at the entrance on 10th and Constitution Ave. [Fed Triangle or Archives Metro]

Mary Jo Arnoldi, Chief Curator of African Art, Curator, African Voices

*See special journal assignment accompanying this visit*

Michael Baxandall, “Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of

**Session 6**

Thursday, March 14

**Sackler/Freer: The Role of Ancient Artifacts in the Museum Setting, Diplomacy, & International Politics / The Cyrus Cylinder**

Meet at Freer entrance on Jefferson Dr. [Smithsonian or L’Enfant Plaza Metro]

Alex Nagel, Curator of East Asian Art

*Journal assignment for previous session due in class*


-- Christina Kreps, “Non-Western Models of Museums & Curation in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” 457-72


Optional: visit related short media coverage:
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b79amg_adhA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b79amg_adhA)

**SPRING BREAK:** NO CLASS

**Session 7**

Thursday, March 28

**Midterm Exam / The Phillips Collection**

Meet at Center for Modern Art in the Carriage House behind the Museum

Following the midterm exam, we will meet in the Phillips Galleries for an exercise in viewer response. In addition to studying for the midterm, you are responsible for the following readings:


National Museum of Women in the Arts
New York Ave. and 13th St. [Metro Center or McPherson Sq. Metro]
Elizabeth Keaney, Assistant Educator

Thursday, April 4


Corcoran Gallery of Art
Entrance on 17th St. and New York Ave [Farragut West or Farragut North Metro]
Paul Roth, Senior Curator and Director, Photography and Media Arts
Kaitlin Booher, Asst. Curator of Photography and Media Arts

Thursday, April 11
Barrett: Chapter 3: “Interpreting and Judgment: Controversial Art,” 56-86
Chapter 6: “Interpreting and Medium: Photography” 139-161

National Museum of the American Indian
Entrance on Independence Ave and 3rd St. [L’Enfant Plaza or Federal Center Metro]
Dr. Gabrielle Tayac, Historian and curator
Richard Hetzler, 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!
And read an interview with Executive Chef about how the cafe reflects the mission of the museum: http://artworks.arts.gov/?p=10870

Amy Lonetree, ed., The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations
(2008):
--Aldona Jonaitis and Janet Berlo, “‘Indian Country’ on the National Mall,” 208-240

Session 11
National Gallery / East Building
4th Street entrance to East Building [Archives, Judiciary Square]
Thursday, April 25
Harry Cooper, Curator of Modern Art
Mark Leithauser, Chief of Design, Senior Curator
Barrett: Chapter 1: “About Interpretation: Rene Magritte,” 1-37;
Chapter 7: “A Sampler of Interpretations,” [Hopper], 162-173.
Brian A. Oard, “The Dancing Master: Jackson Pollock, Lavender Mist #1”:
https://sites.google.com/site/beautyandterror/Home/the-dancing-master

Session 12
A Vision for the National Museum of African American History and Culture
“Changing America” at the National Museum of American History
Thursday, May 2
Entrance on Constitution Ave btwn. 12th & 14th Sts. [Fed Triangle or Smithsonian Metro]
Laura Coyle, Collection Manager
*Journals due in class (clearly indicate object selected for final paper)*
Visit: http://nmaahc.si.edu/Exhibitions/ChangingAmerica
Natalie Hopkinson, “The Root: Segregated Museums Mirror History.” npr.org, May 24, 2011:
http://www.npr.org/2011/05/24/136605926/the-root-segregated-museums-mirror-history
The Phillips Collection Model
Meet in lobby of museum
Dorothy Kosinski, Director
Suzanne Wright, Director of Education / Others TBD
* Final papers due

Selections:
--David Rosand, “Sources of Modernism,” 35-37
Martha Nussbaum, “The Silent Crisis,” *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, 1-11

Final exam will be scheduled during the May 20-22 finals period.

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.

N/A

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.

Wendy Grossman is a curatorial associate at The Phillips Collection, where her award-winning exhibition, *Man Ray, African Art and the Modernist Lens*, opened its international tour in 2009. She has over fifteen years of
teaching and curatorial experience. Dr. Grossman’s expertise is in the history of photography, early twentieth-century European and American modernism, the relationship between African art and modern art, and the artist Man Ray. She has lectured internationally, curated exhibitions on these topics, and taught in the University of Maryland overseas program in Vienna, Austria, and at various universities in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. She also served as a visiting professor at Middlebury College, Middlebury Vermont. In addition to several museum internships, her curatorial experience includes two years at The Art Gallery at the University of Maryland, College Park and serving as an independent curator for a number of exhibition projects. She is currently organizing an exhibition for the Phillips titled “Man Ray: Mathematical Objects and Shakespearean Equations.” Dr. Grossman’s articles and essays have been widely published in international journals and edited volumes.