

PROF. CHRISTOPHER B. STEINER
DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY
CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
OFFICE: CUMMINGS 211 (x2797)
OFFICE HOURS: WED. 2:00 – 4:00 PM

SPRING 2006
AHI 258
THURSDAY 1:15 TO 4:00 PM
LYMAN ALLYN ART MUSEUM

Introduction to Museum Studies

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

At the beginning of the 21st century there are upwards of 100,000 museums of all kind around the world. This course is designed as an introduction to the history, theory, practice, and diversity of museums. Why are museums proliferating at such a rapid pace? What function do they serve in society today? Has the function changed over time? Is there a fundamental quality to the “museum” that links such a huge diversity of institutions?

We will begin by examining the institutional background of the museum. What is a museum? Where and when was the idea of the museum first established? We will then consider a variety of museums in the greater New London area. Interspersed with these site visits and discussions, we will explore the basic operational organization of the museum, as well as examine potential links amongst various museums – education, nationalism, political identity, connoisseurship, history, the making of high and popular culture, entertainment, commercial enterprise.

II. COURSE FORMAT

The course is organized as a combination lecture and discussion class. It meets once a week for about three hours, with a 15 minute break in the middle. The first half of the class will normally be given over to a lecture by the instructor or an occasional guest speaker. The remainder of the class will be devoted to discussion and student presentations.

The class will also include several site museum study visits and group discussion about local museums, including the Lyman Allyn Art Museum, the Slater Memorial Museum, the Nautilus Submarine Force Museum, and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center.

III. ASSIGNED READING

Most assigned readings for this course may be found on the course webpage in Adobe Acrobat format. In addition, you may purchase a copy of the course text, Edward P. Alexander, Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums, in the College Bookstore.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In order to pass the course, all assignments and exams must be completed and submitted to the professor in a timely manner. No exceptions.

Plagiarism, cheating, and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and will likely result in a failing grade on the assignment and the course.

Finally, I reserve the right to assign a grade of "F" to anyone who misses more than three classes (without a verifiable and valid excuse).

1. ***Class attendance, participation, and feedback (20%).*** You are required to attend all scheduled classes and on-site museum visits. Informed and active participation in class discussion is essential, and will be taken into account in your final course grade.

- 2. *Museum Visits Journal (20%).*** Each student is responsible for creating a personal journal recording five museum visits throughout the semester. The museums in your journal may not include those specifically attended during class visits. Each of the five journal entries should focus on a different issue or theme: (a) an educational program or tour; (b) an analysis of labels; (c) an analysis of display techniques and lighting; (d) a “critical” review; and (e) a visitor survey/observation. Details are provided on the course webpage for each of the five assignments.
- 3. *Response Papers to On-Site Museum Visits (20%).*** After each of the three on-site museum visits that we will undertake as a class, you are expected to write a 3-4 page double-spaced response. Specific questions will be posed for each on-site visit paper.
- 4. *Midterm Exam (20%).*** To be taken in class on March 30 (1:15 to 2:15 pm).
- 5. *Exhibit Portfolio (20%).*** Topic due March 9; Class presentation on May 11 and final draft due May 15 by 5pm.

V. READING ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1 (JANUARY 26): WHAT IS A MUSEUM?

Key topics: Museum definitions; museum jobs; types of museums; museum memories; objects versus exhibitions;

Film screening in class: Philadelphia Stories: A Collection of Pivotal Museum Memories (American Association of Museums, 2000). 60 mins.

Required reading:

Edward Alexander (1996) “Chapter 1: What is a Museum?” pp. 3-16. In Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums (Alta Mira Press).

WEEK 2 (FEBRUARY 2): CABINETS OF CURIOSITIES – ANCIENT AND MODERN

Key topics: Origins of museums; Charles Willson Peale; Entertainment vs. Education; Offbeat Museums; The Nut Museum

Required reading:

Edward Alexander (1996) “Chapter 3: The Natural History Museum” pp. 39-60. In Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums (Alta Mira Press).

Giuseppe Olmi (2001) “Science-Honour-Metaphor: Italian Cabinets of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” pp. 1-17. In Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe, edited by Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor. New York: House of Stratus.

WEEK 3 (FEBRUARY 9): THE RISE OF PUBLIC ART MUSEUMS

Key topics: From private institution to public institution; museums and authority; museums and classification; museums and class/elitism

Required reading:

Edward Alexander (1996) “Chapter 2: The Art Museum” pp. 17-38. In Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums (Alta Mira Press).

Carol Duncan (2004) "From Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum: The Louvre Museum and the National Gallery, London," pp. 250-77. In Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum, edited by Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago. Ashgate Publishing.

Carol Duncan and Alan Walach (1980) "The Universal Survey Museum," Art History 3(4): 448-69.

Stephen E. Weil (2002) "Courtly Ghosts and Aristocratic Artifacts," pp. 159-69. In Making Museums Matter. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

WEEK 4 (FEBRUARY 16): SLATER MEMORIAL MUSEUM (SITE VISIT #1)

Museum Visits Journal #1 due

Key Topics: Cast collections; art education versus connoisseurship; aesthetic value versus commodity value.

Required reading:

Alan Wallach (1998) "The American Cast Museum: An Episode in the History of the Institutional Definition Art," pp. 38-56. In Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Betsy Fahlman (1991) "A Plaster of Paris Antiquity: Nineteenth-Century Cast Collections," Southeastern College Art Conference Review 12(1): 1-9.

WEEK 5 (FEBRUARY 23): MUSEUMS IN AMERICA - INTO THE 20TH CENTURY

Site Visit Paper #1 due

Key topics: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum; art as commodity; art theft

Required reading: TBA

WEEK 6 (MARCH 2): THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE IN MUSEUMS

Museum Visits Journal #2 due

Key topics: Understanding what museum visitors want; museum education; exhibition interpretation and narratives exhibit development

Required reading:

Edward Alexander (1996) "Chapter 10: The Museum as Exhibition" pp. 175-91. In Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums (Alta Mira Press).

Marilyn G. Hood (1983) "Staying Away: Why People Choose Not to Visit Museums," pp. 150-57. In Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift, edited by Gail Anderson. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.

Lisa C. Roberts (1997) "Changing Practices of Interpretation," pp. 212-232. In Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift, edited by Gail Anderson. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.

WEEK 7 (MARCH 9): THE ROLE OF THE MUSEUM DIRECTOR (RON CRUSAN, GUEST)

Exhibit Portfolio Topic due in class (1 paragraph)

Key topics: Museum administration; mission statement; Board of Trustees; budgets and fundraising; function of a "community" museum; art and diversity;

Required reading:

Edward Alexander (1996) "Chapter 7: The Museum as Collection" pp. 119-37. In Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums (Alta Mira Press).

Stephen E. Weil (2002) "From Being *about* Something to Being *for* Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum," pp. 28-52. In Making Museums Matter. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Stephen E. Weil and Earl F. Cheit (1989) "The Well-Managed Museum," pp. 348-50. In Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift, edited by Gail Anderson. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.

WEEK 8 (MARCH 30): ARCHITECTURES OF DISPLAY: THE MUSEUM BUILDING

Museum Visits Journal #3 due

MIDTERM EXAM to be taken in class (from 1:15 to 2:15 pm)

Key topics: Museum architecture; exhibition design and installation; museums and department stores; museum marketing

Required reading:

Christoph Grunenberg (1999) "The Modern Art Museum," pp. 26-49. In Contemporary Cultures of Display, edited by Emma Barker. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Susanna Sirefman (1999) "Formed and Forming: Contemporary Museum Architecture," Daedalus 128(3): 297-320.

WEEK 9 (APRIL 6) NO CLASS TODAY

WEEK 10 (APRIL 13): MUSEUMS AND NATIONALISM

Museum Visits Journal #4 due

Key topics: World's fairs; national identity; military museums

Required reading:

Roger G. Kennedy (1996) "Some Thoughts about National Museums at the End of the Century," pp. 159-63. In The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology, edited by Gwendolyn Wright. London: National Gallery of Art

WEEK 11 (APRIL 20): NAUTILUS SUBMARINE FORCE MUSEUM (SITE VISIT #2)

Key topics: nationalism and patriotism in museums; museums as memorials; images of peace and war in museums; representation of technology in museums

Required reading: TBA

WEEK 12 (APRIL 27): MUSEUMS AND OTHERNESS

Site Visit Paper #2 due

Key topics: Exhibiting non-Western art; the politics of cultural identity in museum representations; museums, diversity and “voices”

Required reading:

James Clifford (2004) “Histories of the Tribal and the Modern,” pp. 636-52. In Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum, edited by Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago. Ashgate Publishing.

WEEK 13 (MAY 4): MASHANTUCKET PEQUOT MUSEUM (SITE VISIT #3)

Museum Visits Journal #5 due

Key topics: Native American museums; representation of culture and identity in museums; technologies of museum display

Required reading:

Patricia Pearce Erikson (1999) Review of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center. *Museum Anthropology* 23(2): 46-53.

Michael Rowlands (1994) “The Politics of Identity in Archaeology,” pp. 129-43. In Social Construction of the Past: Representation as Power, edited by George C. Bond and Angela Gilliam. New York: Routledge.

WEEK 14 (MAY 11): PRESENTATION OF EXHIBIT PORTFOLIOS

Site Visit Paper #3 due

Near Final Draft of Exhibit Portfolio due