AH235 Reframing Museum Collections

Seminar Leader: Jenny Dirksen
Course Times: Thursdays, 15:45-19:00
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Office Hours: Thursdays, 11:00-13:00

Course Description

Throughout the past two decades, a history of art hitherto defined by an almost exclusively North-Atlantic perspective has been slowly broadening its horizons. As a consequence, art-historical narratives are now being generated that are informed by critical theory and postcolonial studies. These new approaches move away from the Western canon toward a more global art history. Collection displays of museums have been resistant to such a development for a long time. How can a museum frame its holdings in such a way as to critically reflect upon the art narratives it presents? What special challenges might a museum of modern art face? How could radical changes in outlook affect not only the display of collections, but also an institution’s understanding of art and of its own trajectory? The course addresses these questions by taking as an example the Nationalgalerie of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and its 18th-21st century art collections. For more than two years, the institution has been working on the project “Hello World. Revising a Collection,” researching its own history and holdings. A preliminary visit to the exhibition of the same title is encouraged (28 April to 26 August, 2018, Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin). The course includes off-campus visits to some of the displays and depots of the Alte Nationalgalerie, Neue Nationalgalerie, Museum Berggruen, Sammlung Scharf-Gerstenberg and Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin.

Requirements

Attendance
Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than one absence (e.g. one double session) will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. If absent, please send a short notification via email, if possible before the beginning of class. Punctuality is essential. Please note that the use of smartphones and notebooks is not allowed during seminars on and off-campus. Students are advised to consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Assessment
Students will be evaluated based on the overall seminar work. Each student will be asked to prepare a short oral presentation intended to introduce the scheduled reading or the off-site venue. The presentations will be assigned during the first class. Together with overall attendance and participation in discussions they will contribute one part of the course assessment, the other is comprised by the writing assignments (see also ‘Grade Breakdown’).

Course Material
The course material will be available digitally via google classroom, and also in printed form.
Writing Assignments
There are two essays for this course, one mid-term essay (ca. 2500 words) and one longer final essay (ca. 3500 words). A range of prompts will be provided in advance.
The mid-term essay is due 21 October, midnight.
The final essay is due 20 December, midnight.
Essays should include references, bibliography and a list of illustrations. The structure and draft of your essay can be discussed in individual tutorials.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers
Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C.
Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.
(From the Student Handbook on the submission of essays)

Grade Breakdown
Seminar Grade: 50% (attendance and participation in discussions 30%, presentations 20%)
Essay 1: 20%
Essay 2: 30%

Schedule
Week 1
06.09.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00
Introduction
Reading:

Week 2
13.09.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00
Introduction
Reading:

Week 3
20.09.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00
Museum visit Alte Nationalgalerie
Reading:
Week 4  
27.09.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00  
Museum visit Museum Berggruen  
Reading:  

Week 5  
04.10.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00  
Museum visit Sammlung Scharf-Gerstenberg

Week 6  
11.10.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00  
Storage visit Neue Nationalgalerie

Week 7  
18.10.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00  
Museum visit Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin  
Reading:  

Week 8  
25.10.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00  
Seminar discussion: global art history and museums of modern art  

Fall Break  
29.10.-04.11.2018

Week 9  
08.11.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00  
Seminar discussion  
Conversation with Sven Beckstette, Curator Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin  
Reading:  

Week 10  
15.11.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00  
Seminar discussion: global art history and museums of contemporary art  
Reading:  
Week 11
22.11.2018, Thursday
Seminar discussion: global art history, art collections and ethnographic collections

Week 12
29.11.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00
Seminar discussion
Conversation with Anna-Catharina Gebbers, Curator Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin
Reading:

Week 13
06.12.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00
Exhibition visit “How to talk with birds, trees, fish, shells, snakes, bulls and lions” at Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin
Reading:

Week 14
13.12.2018, Thursday, 15:45-19:00
Wrap-up Session

Week 15
Completion week