

# AH216

## Berlin's Museum Controversies

Seminar Leaders: Prof. Dr. Aya Soika, Dr. Andrea Meyer (TU Berlin)

Course Times: Seven Fridays, ca. six hours of class in different locations from 10:00 –18:00

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### Course Description

Berlin has a long history as a museum center, possessing collections to rival Paris and London. Recently, the institution of the museum – quintessentially a 19<sup>th</sup> century invention – has been the subject of radical transformation, resulting in changing modes of display and communication and a critical revision of existing notions of its public function. This class looks at some of the crucial themes within the current curatorial discourse, focussing on three sites that are at the center of contemporary German and international discussion of museum politics. The first is the Humboldt Forum, a reconstruction of the former Prussian City Palace and the new home to Berlin's ethnographic collections. Controversy regarding the Forum hinges on the wider issue of European treatment of the colonial past, and the rightful status of objects which had very different functions and meanings in the original contexts from which they were appropriated. Our second site of investigation will be the historical complex on Museum Island, including the recently opened James Simon Gallery. Thirdly, we will examine the planning of a new building for the National Gallery's twentieth-century collection near Potsdamer Platz by Herzog & de Meuron architects. This scheme has raised questions of aesthetic and topographical continuity and compatibility, as well as issues of cost. Pursuing these investigations will give us a unique insight into the decision-making processes, choices, and public discourse surrounding the modern display and understanding of art.

## **Requirements**

### **Covid Preamble**

Subject to further updates we will have to adhere to the Health and Safety Measure of the State Museums. Possibly, museum visits may only be possible individually, i. e. walking through the galleries in small groups or in pairs. If need be, we will structure our visits by providing sheets with group or individual assignments and questions. Group discussions should be possible in the classroom, and, weather-dependent, outdoors – or via zoom in case we have to transition to online teaching. As you know we hope for the best, but are prepared to adjust with the utmost flexibility should the situation require it.

### **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Syllabi should note that, instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, an absence from a double session will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Beyond that, unexcused absences will affect the participation grade. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

In light of the special situation caused by the pandemic, students must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Please get in touch with me via email to discuss how best to catch up.

### **Punctuality and Class Etiquette**

Punctuality is also essential. Turning up late will therefore also affect the participation grade. For off campus visits please make sure you depart early in order to reach the museums before the beginning of class. The itinerary can be checked on [www.bvg.de](http://www.bvg.de); it may be helpful to be equipped with a city map, digital or on paper.

### **Class Etiquette**

In the case of unavoidable absence, a short notification via email sent before the beginning of class is appreciated. Please keep your bathroom breaks to a minimum. Also note that the use of smartphones and notebooks is not allowed during seminars on campus. When off campus you should stay with the group whilst the conversation is still going on. Please do your best to stay focused on the object of our discussion: This includes listening to students' presentations. In case of online teaching you should stay in front of your screen, refrain from eating and avoid multitasking.

### **Making up for missed classes**

Should you have had to miss a Friday class we can try and schedule a shorter zoom session to go through some of the key issues that have been addressed. In addition, missed sessions can be compensated by visiting the place individually and submitting a written response which addresses both, a text read in preparation which can be related to your experience upon your visit. Responses should be of ca. 500 words each.

### **Weekly Readings**

Weekly readings and other specific assignments will be confirmed in an email by the beginning of each week. Please check your bard email addresses and read my emails carefully.

### **Assessment**

The course assessment consists of the overall seminar work (mini presentations and one longer presentation, regular class participation and preparation of individual tutorials), weekly responses, and one long essay. See also “Grade Breakdown.”

### **Presentations**

Students deliver one presentation of ca. ten minutes length (the list of topics will be confirmed). Please make sure that you rehearse beforehand in order to avoid exceeding the timeframe. A one-page document with structured presentation notes should be submitted via a shared document on google drive the evening before class. The presentation counts into the overall participation grade.

### **Writing Assignments**

Short Responses: Due to the block seminar structure students do not submit a mid-term essay, but instead upload seven short weekly responses to our visits in a shared padlet document, each of them ca. 200-300 words long. Grading Criteria: Structure, Relevance to the topic; Awareness of context and scholarly debates, ability to discuss and shortly present the topic in class.

The final essay should be of ca. 3.000 words. A range of prompts will be provided well in advance. Please submit your essay topic to Aya via email two weeks prior to submission, by 2 December. The final term essay is due on 16 December (Wednesday), midnight.

The essay should include footnotes/references, bibliography and a list of illustrations. The structure and draft of your essays can be discussed in individual tutorials. Please note that prior consultation with the Bard in Berlin Writing Centre may be recommended in order to reflect upon writing and structure. Here are some basic points you should bear in mind:

Title and Topic: How does the title of your essay as well as your introduction reflect your objectives?

Background Reading: Have you researched the particular object (art work, building or historical event) sufficiently? What kinds of sources/articles have you found so far and where else could you try to find out more?

Facts and contextual information: Have you acquired sufficient foundational knowledge - e. g. are you aware of the object's date of origin, its technique/materials, size and location, subject-matter etc, and are you aware of further information which requires reading around the subject matter and topic, acquiring a sense of cultural and political debates at the time, of the work's public reception?

Interpretations and overview of scholarship: What kinds of interpretations have you encountered so far? How would you distinguish them in terms of the questions they ask and the methods they apply? How does your own line of argument relate to them? Don't be afraid to engage with and quote from articles you have read, this can show an awareness of the complexity of the topic, or quote from some primary sources such as artists' statements or contemporary reviews. Quotes should be accompanied by an annotation providing the source reference.

**Grading Criteria:** Line of argument with regard to essay question; Awareness of context and existing literature on the topic; structure and format (consistent use of annotations, bibliography & list of illustrations is desirable).

#### **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). Essays that are more than 24 hours late cannot receive a grade of higher than C (see also policy on late submission in the Bard College Berlin Student Handbook) and must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Students are welcome to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and/or feedback. They will also receive written feedback on their mid-term and final essays.

#### **Grade Breakdown**

Listed below is the percentage grade allotted to each essay, and to classroom participation and assignments.

Seminar Grade = Attendance (participation/preparation of art works and texts, occasional responses/tasks and presentations)

Seminar Grade: 33,3%

Weekly Responses uploaded on padlet: 33,3%

Final Essay: 33,3%

## Schedule

### Week 1

29.10.2020, Friday, 10:00-18:00

#### **Berlin's Museum Discourse: Past and Present**

Part I: 10:00 – 11:30 Classroom discussion, location TBC

- Introduction to the Course
- Identify relevant Themes and Questions: What is a museum?
- Why are museums controversial?

**TASK for all participants for this week / our first communal session (to be submitted by Thursday, 12:00)**

**\*\*Why or in how far museums can be considered controversial? \*\***

Please provide a short response (ca. 200-300 words) which gives a specific example. Add your name and an image to go along with it and post it via the padlet by **Thursday noon, 12 pm.**

\*Break and Commute\*

Part II: Museum Island, Excursion, 14:00 – 18:00

We meet on the stairs of Altes Museum, Lustgarten, Unter den Linden at 14:00

- Visit of Altes Museum and Rotunda
- Topographies: City Palace, Lustgarten and Altes Museum, Museum Island
- Humboldt Forum (Relationship btw. Architecture and Use; Mission Statement; Criticisms; Object Histories; The Cupola Cross Debate; The Benin Bronze Debate; the Humboldt Statues)
- Friedrichswerdersche Kirche by Karl Friedrich Schinkel

Follow-up to our first session:

**TASK for all participants to be completed by Week 2 (to be submitted by Thursday, 12:00)**

**\*\* Does your first visit to Museum Island correspond to ideas expressed in the image films or contents of the official website? \*\***

Please watch the two image films and have a look at the website. For your response please address the following questions: Name some of the key information that films and website communicate to their audience/readers. What impression of the States Museums and the Humboldt Forum is conveyed? Upload your response on the padlet, prepare a 3-minute class contribution

Videos to watch:

Official Trailer to the State Museums:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQjfdJC-llj4XqT0b4xoMtA>

Official Website of Humboldt Forum:

<https://www.humboldtforum.org/en/>

From Nefertiti to Beuys — Berlin's museums (1/2) | DW Documentary 2019

For our first session please watch Part 2 of the documentary "From Nefertiti to Beuys".

Watch first few minutes and then skip to minute 30:30 and watch until minute 44 (the part covering Humboldt Forum, with interview of Jonathan Fine, curator)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga5Uc9X6dIA>

If interested part 1 can be accessed via: <https://youtu.be/c3hh-AGsKAg>

Readings:

Gaehtgens, Thomas W. (1996): "The Museum Island in Berlin", in: The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology, ed. by Gwendolyn Wright, Hanover/London, pp. 53-77;

Friedrich von Bose, The Making of Berlin's Humboldt-Forum: Negotiating History and the Cultural Politics of Place, 2013, published in darkmatter (PDF)

## **Week 2**

05.11.2020, Friday, 10:00 – 18:00

### **Museum Temples in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Part I, 10:00 – 11:30, Classroom Discussion, location TBC (Possibly Archäologisches Zentrum, Geschwister-Scholl-Str. 6, Brugsch-Pascha-Saal)

- Reflection of videos and website (as uploaded on padlet)
- The Current Situation (Architectural Projects; Archaeological Promenade; Asisi Panorama; Mise en scène of Collection Highlights; Education and Visitor Management; Digitisation Projects and Google Museums)

**\*Break\***

Part II, 13:00 – 15:00

Visit of Neues Museum, individual entry and check-in of bags and coats

- Architecture – Past and Present: From Schinkel to David Chipperfield (James Simon Galerie, Neues Museum)
- Archaeological Promenade; Highlights (Nefertiti); War Losses; Schievelbein Frieze

Part III, 16:00 – 18:00

Visit of Pergamonmuseum and Museum of Islamic Art (Islamisches Museum)

- What is Islamic Art? Is it possible to use this umbrella term?

**TASK for all participants for this week / this session (Week 2, to be submitted by Thursday, 12:00)**

**\*\* Does your first visit to Museum Island correspond to ideas expressed in the image films or contents of the official website? \*\***

Please watch the two image films and have a look at the website, listed under Week 1. For your response please address the following questions: Name some of the key information that films and website communicate to their audience/readers. What impression of the States Museums and the Humboldt Forum is conveyed? Upload your response on the padlet, prepare a short oral response

Readings and videos to watch:

On the Pergamonmuseum

<https://youtu.be/IQ54mOS2VOo>

From Nefertiti to Beuys — Berlin's museums (1/2) | DW Documentary Part 1, minutes 0 – 8:30 (part on Nefertiti); Part 2, minute 44 – end (part on Museum of Islamic Art)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3hh-AGsKAg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga5Uc9X6dIA&t=2641s>

Have a look at the following brochure:

[https://www.kuk.tu-berlin.de/fileadmin/fg309/bilder/Aktuelles/Objects\\_in\\_Transfer.pdf](https://www.kuk.tu-berlin.de/fileadmin/fg309/bilder/Aktuelles/Objects_in_Transfer.pdf)

(preferably chapter Alternative Narratives by Isabelle Dolezalek)

On the newly opened James Simon Entrance Building:

Oliver Wainwright, David Chipperfield's Berlin temple: 'Like ascending to the realm of the gods'

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jul/08/david-chipperfield-james-simon-gallery-berlin-museum-island>

On the newly opened James Simon Entrance Building:

Kate Brown, Critics Call this New Berlin Museum the Most Expensive Cloakroom in the World, in: artnet, July 10, 2019

<https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/james-simon-gallery-berlin-opening-1596694>

### **Week 3**

12.11.2020, Friday, 10:00-18:00

#### **Art for the Nation**

Part I, 10:00 – 11:30, Classroom discussion, location TBC

- Reflection of visits, videos and website
- Where do objects come from?
- In how far have acquisition practices changed?

\*Break and Commute\*

Part II, 13:00 – 15:00

Meet at 13:00 in front of Alte Nationalgalerie (Old National Gallery)

- What Art belongs into a National Gallery?

Part III, 15:30 – 18:00, Visit of Haus Bastian, the State Museum's new Education Center.

Conversation with Patrick Presch, TBC

- Who visits the museums? How can diversity be achieved? Discussion also in relation to visit of Museum of Islamic Art and its curatorial interventions

**TASK for all participants for this week / this session (Week 3, to be submitted by Thursday, 12:00)**

**\*\*\* Pick one of the "highlights" and discuss why the work has possibly been acquired for the national collection. Consider the works' provenance (where it comes from, whom it belonged to, how it's been acquired) \*\*\***

Upload a picture that is on display on the padlet (options provided), prepare a short oral response

Readings:

Museum website:

<https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/alte-nationalgalerie/collection-research/collection-highlights/>

Forster-Hahn, Françoise (1996): "Shrine of Art or Signature of a New Nation?" The National Gallery(ies) in Berlin, 1848-1968", in: The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology, ed. by Gwendolyn Wright, Hanover/London, pp. 78-99

"After the White Cube. Hal Foster asks what art museums are for". In: *London Review of Books*, vol. 37, no 6, 19 March 2015, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n06/hal-foster/after-the-white-cube>

**Week 4**

19.11.2020, Friday, 10:00-18:00

**The Politics of Ownership**

Part I, 10:00 – 12:00, Classroom or outdoor discussion, location TBC

Part II, 13:30 – 16:00

Humboldt Forum: Exhibition “Berlin Global”

\*Break\*

Part II, 16:30 – 18:00

Humboldt Forum or Bodemuseum (TBC)

**TASK for all participants for this week / this session (Week 4, to be submitted by Thursday, 12:00)**

**\*\*Choose one of the relevant topics (provided on the padlet or related to an image uploaded by you) to the Humboldt Forum, the building’s history and its collections, particularly the question of the Ethnographic Museums. What aspects / themes / objects have triggered controversy? \*\***

Upload your response on the padlet, prepare a short oral response

Readings/videos (TBC):

Official website of the Humboldt Forum. Think about the key information that the website communicates to its readers. What impression of the Humboldt Forum is conveyed?

<https://www.humboldtforum.org/en/>

**Week 5**

26.11.2020, Friday, 10:00 – 18:00

**Cold War Relic: The Cultural Forum on Potsdamer Platz**

Part I, 10:00 – 11:30, Classroom discussion, location TBC

- The Politics of Ownership continued: Provenance controversies in modern art museums
- What is the political significance of the Cultural Forum, from the 1960s up until today?
- What challenges do the museums on Potsdamer Platz face?
- Inside the White Cube? New National Gallery
- The new building of the National Gallery by Herzog & de Meuron

Part II, 13:00 -15:00

Neue Nationalgalerie (New National Gallery, opened in 1968, built by Mies van der Rohe, recently renovated by David Chipperfield architects)

Part III, 16:00 – 18:00

Walk across Kulturforum: the Politics of Space on Potsdamer Platz

Visit to Gemäldegalerie, Old Masters’ Gallery

**TASK for all participants for this week / this session (Week 5, to be submitted by Thursday, 12:00)**

**\*\*\* How is a city forum traditionally defined? What in your opinion makes a successful public cultural space?\*\*\***



Add your response (to the padlet, feel free to upload an image of a possible solution or positive example

Videos:

Official Website of the New National Gallery (link TBC)

Official trailer of Old Master Gallery:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYuwppR\\_eh8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYuwppR_eh8)

Reading:

Kate Brown, The Price to Build Herzog & de Meuron's New Modern Art 'Barn' Museum in Berlin Has More Than Doubled from Its Initial Estimate of €200 Million, in: *artnet*, September 17, 2019

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/museum-der-moderne-berlin-1652566>

## **Week 6**

03.12.2020, Friday, 10:00 – 15:00

### **Museums on the Periphery of the City**

- How do we deal with museums which are not centrally located?
- What challenges do smaller houses face?

Part I, 10:00 – 12:00

- Brücke Museum, Bussardsteig. Meet in the museum at 9:30
- How does a monographic museum function? What are its limitations, its potential?

Part II, 13:00 – 15:00 (with break in between)

- Kunsthaus Dahlem
- How can museums address their difficult legacy, e. g. a Nazi building or a mission statement which reflects the cultural situation of the 1960s?

**TASK for all participants for this week / this session (Week 4, to be submitted by Thursday, 12:00)**

**\*\*\*How can houses deal with a 'poisoned' past or their institution's historical baggage? How does the space affect what's on the inside?\*\*\***

Add your response (ca. 200 words) to the padlet

Readings:

Check out the Website of Brücke Museum and develop questions you'd like to ask Lisa Schmidt or Daniela

Bystron:

<https://www.bruecke-museum.de/en/?referrer=https://www.bruecke-museum.de/en/besuch/24/info>

For the Kunsthaus Dahlem:

<https://kunsthaus-dahlem.de/en/home/>

Catherine Hickley, Sculpture by Arno Breker—one of Hitler's favourite artists—found buried in Berlin museum garden, in: *The Art Newspaper* (see also attached).

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/sculpture-by-arno-breker-one-of-hitler-s-favourite-artists-found-buried-in-berlin-museum-garden>

## **Week 7**

11.12.2020, 10:00–17:30

**Institutional Critique and The Contemporary Art Museum**

Part I, 10:00 – 12:00, classroom discussion, location TBC

- The Museum of Contemporary Art as a Place for Institutional Critique
- Andrea Fraser
- Daniel Buren
- The museum in the digital Age
- Conclusion

\*Break and Commute\*

Part II, 13:30 – 17:30:

Hamburger Bahnhof

Past and present Debates concerning Hamburger Bahnhof / contemporary art museums

**TASK for all participants for this week / this session (Week 7, to be submitted by Thursday, 15:00)**

**\*\*\*Respond to the Statements made by Daniel Buren in his text “Function of the Museum or by those made by Hal Foster”\*\*\***

Add a response (ca. 200 words) to the padlet

Readings:

Daniel Buren, *Function of the Museum* (1970), in: *Theories of Contemporary Art*, ed. by Richard Hertz, Prentice-Hall 1985;

Hal Foster, “After the White Cube. Hal Foster asks what art museums are for”. In: *London Review of Books*, vol. 37, no 6, 19 March 2015, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n06/hal-foster/after-the-white-cube>