

AH216

Berlin's Museum Controversies

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

Course Times: Seven Fridays, 10:00 – 17:30

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Office Hours: by email appointment & Thursdays 14:00-15:30

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 19th 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

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(including expectations regarding participation and course assignments)

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; 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. **Grading Criteria:** Structure, Relevance to the topic; Awareness of context and scholarly debates, during the presentation and in the Q&A session afterwards; timing; relevance and structure of presentation notes

Writing Assignments

Due to the block seminar structure students do not submit a mid-term essay, but instead upload six to seven shorter weekly responses to our visits in a shared document, of ca. 350 – 500 words each.

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 drive: 33,3%

Final Essay: 33,3%

Schedule

Scheduled class times are available online under the relevant course heading
<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/>

Week 1

31.10.2020, Friday, 10:00-17:30

Berlin's Museum Discourse: Past and Present

Part I: 10:00 – 12:30 (Seminar Room or Zoom)

- Introduction to the Course
- Identify relevant Themes (e. g. What is a Collection; Who has access to a Collection; Who makes sense of a Collection; Who chooses what to present and how; What is "Shared Legacy"; Private/Public Dichotomy; The Role of the Curator/Custodian; Permanent Collection vs. Exhibition)
- The Humboldt Forum (Relationship btw. Architecture and Use; Mission Statement; Criticisms; Object Histories; The Cupola Cross Debate; The Benin Bronze Debate; the Humboldt Statues)

Part II: Excursion, from 14:00-17:30

- Humboldt Forum
- Topographies: City Palace, Altes Museum, Museum Island
- Take pictures of Dedications / Texts found on Museum Island / Sculptures in public space on the island; Architectural features. Upload them online and add a response, present them in our next Class

TASK for all participants / presentation sign-up:

Please choose one topic from the list of presentations by adding your names behind.

Readings:

Frederic Studemann, Berlin's Stadtschloss and the Trouble with History, in: Financial Times, September 13 2019
<https://www.ft.com/content/3b93a910-d42b-11e9-8367-807ebd53ab77>

Kwame Opoku, "Looted/Stolen Cultural Artefacts declared 'Shared Heritage'" (PDF published on website of the Humboldt Forum's critics)

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

Additional:

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

Peter Klaus Schuster, The Birth of a Nation from the Spirit of Art. In: Spirit of an Age: Nineteenth century painting from the Nationalgalerie, Berlin. Ed. Françoise Foster-Hahn. London 2001, pp. 11-17

Karsten Schubert, The Curators' Egg. The evolution of the museum concept from the French Revolution to the present day, Chapter 3 (Berlin 1900-1930)

Wezel, Elsa van (2009): Denon's Louvre and Schinkel's Altes Museum: War Trophy Museum versus Monument to Piece, in: Napoleon's Legacy: The Rise of the National Museums in Europe 1794-1830, ed. by Ellinoor Bergvelt, Debora J. Meijers, Lieske Tibbe, Elsa van Wezel, Berlin, pp. 157-172

Week 2

06.11.2020, Friday, 9:30 – 17:00

Museum Temples in the 21st Century

Part I, 9:30 – 11:30, Format TBC (Seminar Room or Zoom)

- Discussion of Pictures taken last week
- The Current Situation (Architectural Projects; Archeological Promenade; Asisi Panorama; Mise en scene of Collection Highlights (e. g. Nefertiti); Education and Visitor Management; Digitisation Projects and Google Museums)

Part II, 13:00 – 17:00

- Visit of Neues Museum [Archeological Promenade; Highlights (Nefertiti); Discussion of War Losses; Schievelbein Frieze]
- Past and Present Architecture: From Schinkel to David Chipperfield (James Simon Galerie, Neues Museum, Haus Bastian)

Readings:

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>

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>

Andrew McClellan, The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2008, chapter: Restitution and Repatriation, pp. 233-268

Additional:

Adrian von Buttlar, Neues Museum, Architectural Guide, Berlin/Munich 2010 (excerpts)

Jung, Mariana, 100 years of the Discovery of Nefertiti, in: In the light of Amarna. 100 years of the Nefertiti Discovery (2013), ed. by Friederike Seyfried, exh.cat., Petersberg, pp. 421-426

Olaf Matthes, Ludwig Borchardt, James Simon and the Colourful Nefertiti Bust in the First Year After Her Discovery, in: *ibid.*, pp. 427-437

Week 3

13.11.2020, Friday, 9:30-17:30

Art for the Nation

- What Art belongs into a National Gallery?
- Where do objects come from?
- In how far have acquisition practices changed?
- Who visits the museums? How can diversity be achieved?

Part I, 9:30 – 11:30 (Seminar Room or Zoom)

- The Berlin Museums and Acquisition Politics (Wilhelm II and museum directors); Museum Conceptions and political considerations and conflicts; National Heritage Laws

Part II, 13:00 – 15:00

- Visit of Alte Nationalgalerie

Part III, 15:00 – 17:30

- Visit of Haus Bastian, the State Museum's new Education Center. Conversation with Patrick Pesch, TBC

Readings:

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. pp. 78-99

Schuster, Peter-Klaus (2004): From the Kronprinzenpalais to the Neue Nationalgalerie, in: Arcadia and Metropolis. Masterworks of German Expressionism from the Nationalgalerie Berlin, ed. by id., Munich/Berlin/London, pp. 12-18

Week 4

20.11.2020, Friday, 10:00-17:30

Revamping old Narratives

- Who chooses what story to tell?
- Which themes are not covered adequately?
- How can a permanent exhibition still be dynamic and flexible enough?

Part I, 10:00 – 13:00, times TBC

- Visit to German Historical Museum (Deutsches Historisches Museum: How "German" History is told in the Permanent Exhibition; New Section on German Colonialism)

Part II, 14:00 – 17:00

- Visit to Jewish Museum, New Permanent Exhibition (launched in late August 2020)

Readings (TBC):

Bill Niven, Colourful but Confusing. The Permanent Exhibition in the German Historical Museum. Zeitgeschichte-online. Geschichtsbilder des Deutschen Historischen Museums. Die Dauerausstellung in der Diskussion, ed. Jan-Holger Kirsch/Irmgard Zündorf (2007)

Week 5

27.11.2020, Friday, 10:00-17:30

Cold War Relic: The Cultural Forum on Potsdamer Platz

- What is the political significance of the Cultural Forum, from the 1960s up until today?
- What challenges do the museums on Potsdamer Platz face?

Part I, 10:00 – 12:00 (Seminar Room or Zoom)

- Inside the White Cube? New National Gallery
- The new building of the National Gallery by Herzog & de Meuron

Part II, 13:00 – 15:00

- Visit to Gemäldegalerie, Old Masters' Gallery

Part III, 15:00 – 17:00

- Walk across Kulturforum: the Politics of Space on Potsdamer Platz

Readings:

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>

Jarzombek, Mark, Mies van der Rohe's New National Gallery and the Problem of Context, in: *Assemblage*, No. 2 (Feb. 1987), pp. 32-43

Altshuler, Bruce (2007): Collecting the New: A Historical Introduction, in: *Museums and Contemporary Art. Collecting the New*, ed. by Altshuler, Princeton/Oxford, pp. 1-15

Week 6

04.12.2020, Friday, 09:30-13:30

Part I: Museums in Dahlem: On the Periphery of the City

- How does a monographic museum function? What are its limitations, its potential?
- How do we deal with museums which are not centrally located?
- How can museums address their difficult legacy, e. g. a Nazi building or a mission statement which reflects the cultural situation of the 1960s?

Part I, 9:30 – 11:00

- Brücke Museum

Part II, 11:00 – 13:30

- Kunsthaus Dahlem

Readings:

Ian Johnson, "Berlin: The End of a Museum Idyll". In: *New York Review of Books*, Feb 29, 2016:
<http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/02/29/berlin-dahlem-museums-humboldt-forum/>

Nikola Doll, "The Arno Breker State Atelier." Shorter PDF version of the following publication: Nikola Doll, *Arno Breker - Das Staatsatelier Arno Breker. Bau- und Nutzungsgeschichte, 1938-1945*, Berlin 2014

Week 6

06.12.2020, Sunday, 14:00 – 17:00

Part II: MEK, Museum of European Cultures

- What is the future of the museum complex in Berlin Dahlem, which formerly also housed the Old Masters Gallery and the Ethnographic Museum?
- What is the relationship between the Ethnographic Collections and the Museum of European Cultures?
- Visit of the MEK's Permanent Exhibition
- Fast Fashion Temporary Show

Week 7

11.12.2020, 9:30–17:30

The Contemporary Art Museum

Part I, 9:30 – 11:30, Seminar Room

- The Controversy surrounding the Flick Collection and more generally the problem of private loans in public museums
- Art and Gentrification Debates
- Current Debates concerning Hamburger Bahnhof
- The Museum of Contemporary Art as a Place for Institutional Critique

Part II, 13:00 – 17:00, Hamburger Bahnhof

- Hamburger Bahnhof / Museum of the Present
- Conclusion

Readings:

Rosalyn Deutsche and Isabelle Graw, (De)Facing the Flick Collection: Should Art Replace Political Reparations for Nazi War Crimes? Panel Discussion, Barnard College, March 25, 2005, In: *Texte zur Kunst* <https://www.textezurkunst.de/58/defacing-flick-collection/>

“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>

Additional:

Blume, Eugen (2004): *Museum für Gegenwart*, in: *Friedrich Christian Flick Collection im Hamburger Bahnhof*, ed. by Eugen Blume, Joachim Jäger, Gabriele Knapstein, Berlin/Cologne, pp. 513-517

Schuster, Peter-Klaus (2004): *The Museum as the Site of the German's Dramatic Conflict with Art*, in: *Friedrich Christian Flick Collection im Hamburger Bahnhof*, op. cit., Berlin/Cologne, pp. 507-512

Hans Belting, “Contemporary Art and the Museum in the Global Age”. In: Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg (ed.), *Contemporary Art and the Museum*, Ostfildern 2007, pp. 16-38

Hans Belting, “The Narrative of Art in the New Museum: The Search for a Profile”. In: Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism*, Chicago and London 2003, pp. 96-111;

Andrea Fraser, *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique*. In: *Artforum*, New York: Sep 2005, Vol. 44, Issue 1

Essay Deadlines

Final essay due on 16 December

For further information see pp. 2-3 of syllabus, essay topics will be announced via email.

Library and Book Purchase Policies

Most texts will be accessible through a special folder on google drive or will be circulated beforehand.

The following course books can be picked up from the library (subject to availability):

List of Presentation Topics

Africa on Display at Humboldt Forum: The Case of the Benin Bronzes

The Neues Museum: A Showcase of contemporary Restoration Ethics

The James Simon Gallery: Most Expensive Cloakroom or Necessity?

Restitution Debates: The Case of the Troy Treasures

The reception of Nefertiti

Wilhelm von Bode's acquisition activities: Art and Politics

The "Basilica" at Bode Museum

The Staircase Frieze at Alte Nationalgalerie

Hugo von Tschudi and the Nationalgalerie: Quality versus national Canon

The Berlin Museums during National-Socialism and the Second World War

Mies van der Rohe and the Neue Nationalgalerie (New National Gallery)

Hans Scharoun, the "Kulturforum" (Cultural Forum) and its legacy

Private Loans in Public Museums: Problems and Debates

The Flick Collection