

AH216

Berlin's Museum Controversies

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

Course Times: Seven Fridays, 12:00 –17:30

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Module: Art and Artists in Context

Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits

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, taking the recent transformations in Berlin's museumscape and the discussions that have been sparked by them as its point of departure. To begin with we will explore the Humboldt Forum, a national prestige project that had become the subject of heated debate long before its recent opening. The fact that the building hosts Berlin's colonial ethnographic collections whilst its newly built façade copies the former Prussian City Palace – once the seat of Germany's last emperor and demolished in the early 1950s – allows to take a closer look at the complex relationship between museum space and its collections. We will also pay attention to the ongoing developments on Museum Island and at "Kulturforum" near Potsdamer Platz. Whereas Mies van der Rohe's Neue Nationalgalerie was re-opened in 2021, a new building for the State Museums' comprehensive twentieth-century collection by Herzog & de Meuron architects is underway. However, we will also take the changes at the supposed periphery of the city into consideration, in Dahlem for example, where both the Brücke-Museum and the Kunsthaus Dahlem have effectively revised traditional exhibition and outreach programming. 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

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. 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. One absence should not affect the participation grade or require documentation, but a 1.000 word response is expected to make up for the missed day. 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.

Punctuality

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 and please lock in your coats and bags before the beginning of class. The itinerary can be checked on www.bvg.de; in addition, 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

One missed session can be compensated by visiting the place individually and submitting a written response which addresses the contents and display in relation to our weekly readings. Your response should be of ca. 1.000 words.

Weekly Readings

Weekly readings and other specific assignments will be confirmed in an email by the beginning of each week, all materials are uploaded on our class padlet. Please check your Bard emails, read my emails carefully and make sure you can access the padlet.

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 might be asked to deliver short presentations (the list of topics will be confirmed). Please make sure that you rehearse beforehand in order to avoid exceeding the timeframe. The presentations count 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. 300 words long. **Grading Criteria:** Structure, Relevance to the topic; Awareness of context and scholarly debates, ability to discuss and present the topic in class.

The final essay should be of ca. 3.000 words. 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 20 December (Wednesday), midnight. The essay should include footnotes/references, a 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 receive feedback on performance and written work. They will also receive written feedback on their final essay.

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

Preliminary Session:

08.09.2023, Friday, 14:00–17:30 (details to be confirmed via email)

Participants in this session: Bard College Berlin students (TU students will join once their semester has started)

Week 1

03.11.2023, Friday, 12:00–17:30

Berlin's Museum Discourse: Past and Present

Part I: 12:00–13:30 Classroom discussion, location TBC

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

TASK for all participants for this week / our first communal session (to be submitted by Thursday, 15:00)

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

Please provide a short response (ca. 300 words) which gives a specific example. Add your name and an image to go along with it and post it via the padlet

Part II: Museum Island & Humboldt Forum, 13:45 – 17:30

- Visit of Altes Museum and Rotunda
- Topographies: City Palace, Lustgarten and Altes Museum, Museum Island
- James Simon Gallery, basement: Introduction to the museum's "Kunstkammer" beginnings
- Humboldt Forum (Relationship btw. Architecture and Use; Mission Statement; The Cross Debate)

Readings:

Memory Cultures 2.0 and Museums. Jás Elsner in conversation with Mirjam Sarah Brusius, pp. 99-111 (PDF);

Additional texts (preparatory reading expected):

For background on the history of Museum Island:

Gaetgens, 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 (PDF);

For background on the history of the Humboldt Forum:

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

Videos to watch:

- 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>

-Deutsche Welle film on Humboldt Forum: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P392ewvC_w4

Week 2

10.11.2023, Friday, 12:00–17:30, Meeting: Covered Courtyard Humboldt Forum (check in your bags and coats upon arrival, in the basement)

The Politics of Ownership

Part I, 12:15–14:30, Visit of Ethnografisches Museum

- The Benin Bronze Case, Herero-Girl, Namibia; Royal Throne, Cameroon
- The Luf Boat, German Expeditions in the Pacific

Part II, 14:30–16:00, Classroom Discussion, location TBC (Possibly Humboldt Forum)

- Reflection on visit
- Ethnography & Ethnographic Museums
- Provenance, Looted Art and Restitution

Part III, 16:00–17:30

Museum for Asian Art, TBC

Readings:

Regina Wonisch, Decolonising ethnological museums. Art as a way out of the crisis of representation?, in: ifa, pp. 1-9;

power – relations. A booklet on postcolonial provenance research in the permanent exhibition of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst at the Humboldt Forum, edited by Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2022, 87 pages (PDF, selected object biographies TBC)

Videos to watch:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Opening Speech of Ethnologisches Museum Berlin:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-RMn3vgG9M>

Deutsche Welle Documentary: Africa's looted art: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RXIVr_15JY

TASK for all participants for this week / our first communal session (to be submitted by Thursday, 15:00)

****How can museums address their own past and develop strategies to deal with problematic objects in their collections?*** Please provide a short response (ca. 300 words). Add your name and an image to go along with it and post it via the padlet

Week 3

17.11.2023, Friday, 12:00–17:30

Controversies over archaeological Objects

Part I, 12:00 – 13:45, Visit of Neues Museum

Prior: The James Simon Gallery

Part II, 14:00 – 15:30, Classroom Discussion, location TBC (Possibly Humboldt Forum)

- The “Archaeological Promenade” and the restructuring of Museum Island
- Archaeology and Imperial Politics
- National Cultural Heritage
- Case Study: Nefertiti (in Berlin since 1913)
- Case Study: the Troy Treasures (in Moscow since 1945, formerly Berlin)
- Case Study: The Parthenon Marbles (British Museum)

Part III, 15:30–17:30

Museum of Islamic Art

- What is “Islamic Art”? Is it possible to use this umbrella term for the range of objects from different periods and regions on display in the collection?

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)
Part 1: Minute 0 – 8:30; 21:15 – 28:00: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3hh-AGsKAg>
Part 2: Minute 44 – until end: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga5Uc9X6dIA&t=2641s>

#Nefertitihack and Cultural Commons, “The other Nefertiti”, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1ya6_87t14

Readings:

The latest twist in the 200-year-dispute over the Parthenon Marbles:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/06/first-edition-parthenon-marbles-british-museum>

For the Museum of Islamic Art please go through the following brochure:

https://www.kuk.tu-berlin.de/fileadmin/fg309/bilder/Aktuelles/Objects_in_Transfer.pdf

(read chapter “Alternative Narratives” by Isabelle Dolezalek)

On the 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>

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>

TASK for all participants for this week / our first communal session (to be submitted by Thursday, 15:00)

****In comparison to our discussions last week: What similarities and differences do you see when it comes to archaeological objects?*** Please provide a short response (ca. 300 words). Add your name and an image to go along with it and post it via the padlet

Week 4

24.11.2023, Friday, 12:00–17:30

Who are Museums for? Access & Participation

Part I, 12:00 – 13:30, Haus Bastian (house dedicated to museum education), TBC

Part II, 13:30 – 15:30, New Outreach Work at the Bode Museum (María López-Fanjul), TBC

Part III: 15:45 – 17:30: Class Discussion at Humboldt Forum: Visit of Exhibition “Berlin Global”

Readings:

Andreas Huth, María López Fanjul y Díez del Corral (Hg.), *kritische berichte*, 4.2022, Neue kuratorische Strategien für alte Kunstsammlungen: Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschung als Basis für Outreach (PDF translation);

Words Matter. An unfinished Guide to Word Choices in the Cultural Sector, 136 pages (PDF)

TASK for all participants to be completed by Thursday, 15:00

**** Do our first two visits to Museum Island correspond to ideas expressed in the image films or contents of the museums' official websites?*** Please upload your 300-word response on the padlet (see readings and videos for reference under “Week 3”)

Week 5

01.12.2023, Friday, 12:00–17:30

Cold War Relic: The Cultural Forum on Potsdamer Platz

Part I, 12:00 -14:00

Neue Nationalgalerie (New National Gallery, opened in 1968, built by Mies van der Rohe, recently renovated by David Chipperfield architects and reopened in 2021)
Exhibition: Extreme Tension. Art between Politics and Society 1945-2000

Part II, 14:00 – 15:30

Walk across “Kulturforum”: The Politics of Space on Potsdamer Platz;
Visit to Gemäldegalerie

Part III, 15:45–17:30, Classroom discussion, location TBC

- What is the political significance of the Cultural Forum, from the 1960s up until today?
- What challenges do the museums on Potsdamer Platz face?
- The new building of the National Gallery by Herzog & de Meuron

TASK for all participants for this week, to be submitted by Thursday, 15:00

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

Reading:

Brion O Doherty, Inside the White Cube, Introduction & 1. Notes on the Gallery Space (PDF);

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>

Criticism mounts for Herzog & de Meuron’s new museum in Berlin. Lucia Brandoli, 30 November 2022

<https://www.domusweb.it/en/news/gallery/2022/11/29/the-new-herzog--de-meurons-museum-under-construction-in-berlin-has-been-harshly-criticized.html>

Week 6

08.12.2023, Friday, 12:00–17:30

Museums on the Periphery of the City

Part I, 12:00 – 15:00, Kunsthaus Dahlem

- 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?

Part II, 15:15 – 17:30, Brücke Museum

- How do we deal with museums which are not centrally located?
- What challenges do smaller houses face?
- How does a monographic museum function? What are its limitations, its potential?

TASK for all participants for this week, to be submitted by Thursday, 15:00

How can houses deal with a ‘poisoned’ past or their institution’s historical baggage (such as the Kunsthaus Dahlem or the Haus der Kunst, Munich)? How does the space affect what’s on the inside? Add your response (ca. 300 words) to the padlet

Readings:

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

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>

Week 7

15.12.2023, Friday, 12:00–17:30

New Perspectives: The Museum of Contemporary Art & Culture Institutional Critique and The Contemporary Art Museum

Part I, 12:00 – 14:30, Hamburger Bahnhof

- Eva Fàbregas, Main Hall, Devouring Lovers
- Hamburger Bahnhof’s “Endless Exhibition” – on 19 permanent installations
- The Museum of Contemporary Art as a Place for Institutional Critique (Daniel Buren and other examples)

Part II, 15:00 – 17:30, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, with classroom discussion, TBC

TASK for all participants for this week, 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. 300 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>