

AH236 Critical Perspectives on Berlin's New Cultural Venue: the Humboldt Forum

Seminar Leader: Tarek Ibrahim, Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, Prof. Dr. Aya Soika

Course Times: Thursdays 14:00 – 17:15

Course Location: Humboldt Forum, Unter den Linden

Email: a.soika@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: by email appointment & Thursdays 11:00-13:00 (please get in touch beforehand)

**Modules: Art and Artists in Contexts,
Methods in Social and Historical Studies,
Art History, Culture and Society**

Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits

Course Description

Hardly any project has been more controversial than the rebuilding of Berlin's City Palace. Ever since its opening in 2021, the Humboldt Forum has brought in more than 2.5 million visitors, constituting one of the centrepieces of the capital's *New Mitte*. Yet, the newly opened cultural venue – which gathers five institutions under its roof – is still very much in the process of considering how to address the challenges that arise from the contradictions between its form (a hybrid of Baroque and modern) and its contents (serving as a home to and meeting place for the cultures of the world). Most delicate is its role as the new home of the Ethnological Museum (previously housed in Berlin-Dahlem) with collection histories that are often inextricably linked to European colonialism. The seminar provides an introduction to the history and current operation of the Humboldt Forum and to the various institutions and collections that it accommodates on more than 16.000 square meters. Furthermore, as a collaborative project with the *Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss*, the class seeks to give students insights into the conceptualisation and planning of cultural events, exhibition projects and educational outreach. Members of the Humboldt Forum's team will introduce students to not only the building and its collections but also to their day-to-day tasks and overall aims.

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. To account for minor circumstances, one absence from AH236 should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Beyond that, unexcused absences will affect the participation grade and you will be asked to make up for it by submitting a 800-word response related to the readings of the missed class. 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 absences, a short notification via email sent before the beginning of class is appreciated. Please keep your bathroom breaks to a minimum. When off campus you should stay with the group while 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 and to our many seminar guests.

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 regularly and read our emails carefully. Please also make sure you can access

the padlet. Should you have any problems or not have received an email by Tuesday before our next class please get in touch with Aya as there might have been a glitch.

Assessment

The course assessment includes the overall seminar work (response papers, regular class participation, a short presentation and a final presentation) and the final project. See also “Grade Breakdown.”

Padlet Responses

Students are asked to submit weekly responses of 200 words each to be uploaded on the class padlet. **Grading Criteria:** Punctuality of Submission, Structure, Relevance to the topic and depth of analysis; Awareness of context and key debates.

Final Project / Essay

In addition to weekly responses, there is one more extensive writing assignment for the course: your final project. Prompts and further instructions will be provided in advance.

A preliminary outline of your final project is due by 4th December (Wednesday), midnight.

The final, written-up piece is due 18 December (Wednesday), midnight. Essays are to be emailed directly to Aya Soika.

Your project’s structure and contents can be discussed in individual meetings. Please note that prior consultation with the Bard in Berlin Writing Centre may be recommended. In principle, your submitted work should engage with relevant sources. The final project should also include references (e. g. in the form of footnotes), a bibliography and a list of illustrations.

Here are some basic points you should bear in mind:

Title and Topic: How does the title of your work as well as your introduction reflect your objectives? What is the aim of your project? Be as clear as possible about aims and objectives.

Background Research: How can you include references to some of the required readings from our course in a meaningful way? Have you researched your topic sufficiently? What kinds of sources have you found and where else could you try to find out more about the topics you discuss?

Facts and contextual information: Have you acquired sufficient foundational knowledge - e. g. are you aware of the necessary foundational information, relevant historical contexts and theoretical debates? Have you been able to acquire a sense of the relevant cultural and political debates or issues related to your project’s topic?

Interpretations, comparisons and/or overview of scholarship: What kinds of approaches to

your topic 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 approach relate to them? Don't be afraid to engage with quotes and other references. These should be accompanied by an annotation providing the source reference.

Format: Your final project essay should be of circa 2.200 words length (+- 10%), including captions and bibliography. The referencing style should be consistent, the format should be double-spaced with 12-point font. Please include page numbers and a title.

Grading Criteria: Line of argument with regard to the question (organisation, coherence and execution of the argument); Awareness of context and existing literature on the topic; structure, quality of writing and format (proofreading; consistent use of annotations, bibliography & list of illustrations is desirable)

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Any work that is submitted up to 24 hours late will be downgraded half a full grade (from B+ to B, for example). Work that is more than 48 hours late cannot receive a grade 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 receive feedback on class progress, oral performance and written work. 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.

Padlet Responses throughout Semester: 30 %

Participation (preparation, short presentations, questions, attendance): 30 %

Final Project Essay & Presentation: 40 %

Schedule

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:

<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/>

Part I:

History, Governance & Partners

Week 1

05.09.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

Crash Course on the Humboldt Forum: History, Debates, Controversies

Introduction and overview of class contents and structure

Screening of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: Opening Speech of the Humboldt Forum, held on 25 September 2021

Location: Humboldt Forum Seminar room

Tarek Ibrahim and Aya Soika

Preparatory watching for general background and critical examination:

 A palace for Berlin and the world? | DW Documentary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P392ewvC_w4

Preparatory Reading:

Natalia Majluf: "Starting from Place: Claims to the Nation and the World." In: (Post)Colonialism and Cultural Heritage. International Debates at the Humboldt Forum, Hansa: Berlin 2021, pp. 13-25

Task: Add your image to the class padlet and present it in class. Address one of these questions: With the help of the film and text you've read, discuss any aims, functions or problems of the Humboldt Forum which strike you as particularly interesting.

All padlet entries should be 200 words long.

Week 2

12.09.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

History of the Site, 1500 until Today

Blown Away: The Palace of the Republic

Location: HF Seminar room ZE, followed by an exhibition visit and a walk-through of the spaces

Guest: Alfred Hagemann, Head of Department “History of the Site”

Preparatory Readings:

Karen Buttler, Hartmut Dorgerloh, Judith Prokasky, and Anke Schnabel: “Blown Away. The Palace of the Republic”. In: Exh. Cat. Blown Away. The Palace of the Republic, Humboldt Forum: Seemann Leipzig 2024, pp. 14-21;

Judith Prokasky: “Building Politics – 800 Years Summarized”. In: Humboldt Forum. The History of the Site. Exhibition Guide. Munich, London, New York 2020, pp. 8-21;

Oliver Wainwright: Berlin’s Bizarre New Museum: a Prussian Palace Rebuilt for EUR 680 Million: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/sep/09/berlin-museum-humboldt-forum>

Further Background Reading:

Reinhard Allings: “1950-1989. Up and Coming”. In: Exh. Cat. Blown Away. The Palace of the Republic, Humboldt Forum: Seemann Leipzig 2024, pp. 33-47;

Reinhard Allings: “1889-1990. The Tipping Point”. In: *ibid.*, pp. 137-141;

Reinhard Allings: “1990-2013. Down and Out”. In: *ibid.*, pp. 151-157

Task: Point out an episode in the history of the site that struck you as particularly interesting.

Or: What could ‘memory work’ with regard to the history of the site entail?

Week 3

19.09.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Strategy, Governance and the Global Cultural Assembly (GCA)

Topic: A new acting agent and pillar of the Humboldt Forum

Location: Humboldt Forum Seminar Room, and the GCA exhibition space

Guest speakers: Feride Gencaslen (Global Cultural Assembly)

Reading (TBD):

Strategy Manifesto: Dignity, Continuity, Transparency

<https://www.humboldtforum.org/en/dignity-continuity-transparency/>

Preparatory Watching:

Clementine Deliss: Curatorial Roundtable Discussion on the “Metabolic Museum”, Mannheim, 2022 (75 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC3gczU3-f8>

Background Reading:

Clementine Deliss: Walking Through. Thoughts on the metabolic practice of the museum, talk given at Goethe Institute Brussels, 3 May 2019 (PDF)

Task: Discuss the potential impact of “strategy” on the museum - and in how far it can be a useful tool in its conception, give one example.

Part II:

Potentials and Pitfalls

Week 4

26.09.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

The Elephant in the Palace - Form, Content (and Controversies)

Topic: Introduction to the “permanent” collections of the Ethnological Museum, followed by a walk-through of the collections

Guests: Verena Rodatus; Maria-Antonie Ellendorff

Readings:

Aboulaye Touré: “Reflections on the Future of Postcolonial Collections. To Whom does Culture Belong?” In: (Post)Colonialism and Cultural Heritage. International Debates at the Humboldt Forum, Hansa: Berlin 2021, pp. 40-54;

George Okello Abungu: “The Question of Restitution and Return: A Dialogue of Interests”. In: (Post)Colonialism and Cultural Heritage. International Debates at the Humboldt Forum, Hansa: Berlin 2021, pp. 101-119

Further Background Readings:

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 (PDF, selected pages).

Léonora Miano: On Greatness. The Question of the Gaze in Germany:

<https://www.humboldtforum.org/en/magazine/article/on-greatness-the-question-of-the-gaze-in-germany/>;

“The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics”, by Felwine Saar and Benedicte Savoy, 2018.

Task: Discuss the political, social or cultural dimension of museum collections, particularly those of ‘ethnographic’ museums, with the help of an example.

Week 5

03.10.2024, No Session in Week 5 due to German federal holiday

Week 6

10.10.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

Contemporary Voices and Partnerships

Guests: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas (artist, Haida people, British Columbia)

Readings:

Klaas Ruitenbeek: “Wang Shu. Design of the “China and Europe” Gallery in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst.” In: Contemporary Art in the Humboldt Forum, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag 2022, pp. 102-111;

Uta Rahman-Steinert: “Ai Weiwei. Teahouse”. In: Contemporary Art in the Humboldt Forum, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag 2022, pp. 112-112;

Alexander Hofmann and Hans-Dieter Hegner: “URA Architects & Engineers: The Japanese Tea House Bōki-an.” In: Contemporary Art in the Humboldt Forum, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag 2022, pp. 122-131;

Aude Christel Mgba: “Justine Gaga. Indignation”. In: Contemporary Art in the Humboldt Forum, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag 2022, pp. 140-147;

Dietmar Rübel: “Kang Sunkoo. Statue of Limitations”. In: Contemporary Art in the Humboldt Forum, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag 2022, pp. 70-81

Further Background Reading:

Regina Wonisch: “Decolonising ethnological museums. Art as a way out of the crisis of representation?” In: Ifa Input 04/2017, pp. 1-9

Task: What functions can contemporary art play in the collections of the Humboldt Forum?
What are potential pitfalls?

Week 7

17.10.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

Behind the Scenes: Exhibition Programming and “Wechselausstellungsflächen”

Case Study I (Ts’uu – Cedar. Of Trees and People)

Case Study II (Against the Current. The Omaha, Francis La Flesche, and His Collection);

Case Study III: Loot

If time allows: Nagaland, TBD

Guests: Anke Daemgen, Stephanie Respondek

Task: Reflect on our visits in Week 4 and Week 6. Is there a particular insight you’d like to come back to? Where do you see the potential for further development?

Reading:

Roland Platz: “Introduction”, In: Voices from North-East India. Nagaland, Berlin 2023, pp. 9-11;

Zubeni Lotha: “Unseeing the Past”. In: *ibid.*, pp. 12-23

24.10.2024: No session, Fall Break

Week 8

31.10.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

Tanzania Exhibition

Feedback round with students after Visit to the Tanzania Exhibition

Guest speaker: Maike Schimanowski

Reading: Study of Exhibition Websites and Exhibition Materials (TBD);

Viola König: Renaming ethnographic museums. Implications and strategies for the presentation of the collections. The example of the Humboldt Forum Berlin. In: *Museumskunde* 81, pp. 80-86 (PDF);

James Clifford on the Museum as “Contact Zone” (1997)

Task: What potential does a temporary show have as compared to a permanent exhibition? How useful to you find Clifford’s idea of the museum as “contact zone”?

Student Presentation: The Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (reflection on Luuk Vulkers: Temporality and Universalism in the Contemporary Ethnographic Museum. Two Collection Presentations at the Tropenmuseum. *Stedelijk Studies*, 8)

Week 9

07.11.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

Diversity and Berlin Global

Guests: Sharon MacDonald (TBD), Brinda Sommer

Reading: (TBD): Sharon Macdonald: Diversity Max. Multiple Differences in Exhibition-Making in Berlin Global in the Humboldt Forum. In: *Doing Diversity in Museums and Heritage. A Berlin Ethnography*, pp. 173-191;

Ahmed: "The language of diversity", in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(2), pp. 235-256

Task: Discuss Sharon Macdonald’s definitions of “Diversity”.

Part III

Practicalities: The Inner Workings of a Cultural Institution

Week 10

14.11.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

Branding, Marketing & Advertising, Publications, Social Media

Guests: Mirko Nowak, Susanne Müller-Wolf; Elaine Yeung

Reading: Jean-Michel Tobelem: "The Marketing Approach in Museums", in: Richard Sandell and Robert R. Janes (eds): *Museum Management and Marketing*, London and New York 2007, pp. 294-312; (TBD): Mark W. Rectanus: "Globalization: Incorporating the Museum", in: *Sharon Macdonald: A Companion to Museum Studies*, London 2006, pp. 382-397

Task: What, to you, is a successful digital strategy for cultural institutions? Check out the Humboldt Forum Website and discuss in how far it matches with your own set of objectives.

Week 11

21.11.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

Location: HF Seminar Room ZE / FM Area, Technical floor, etc.

Management of the Objects: Conservation, Restoration, Off-Site Storage, Registrar

Management of the Building: Sustainability, Security and Facility Management

Part I: Going in and going out of a museum -- decontamination, restoration, conservation, vitrines, lighting

Part II: Energy use, climate control, security (both personnel and technical/vitrines/sensors/cameras), counting visitor numbers, etc.

Guest speakers: Maïke Voelkel, Michael Thoma (Humboldt Forum Service GmbH)

Reading: "Toxic dilemma faced by German Museums repatriating Artefacts", 17 Jan 2023

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/17/toxic-dilemma-german-museums-repatriating-artefacts-pesticides-objects-contaminated>

Task: Raise questions that you consider of interest when discussing the management of the objects and the building. Why do you think these are relevant?

Week 12

28.11.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

Behind the Scenes: Humboldt Forum Akademie

Programme and Events (From Vision to Showtime)

Location: HF Seminar Room ZE, Event spaces, backstage area AND attending a final performance

Topic I: Develop and decision-making in programme strategy, implementation and backstage processes - from idea/theme/vision/cluster to final product.

Guest speakers, part I: Jan Linders, Katharina Kepplinger

Topic II: What the Humboldt Forum offers: Public tours, Events, workshops, etc.

Location: HF Akademie

Guest speakers, part II: Kathrin Kollmeier, Rebekka Straub

Reading: (TBD): Zahava D. Doering: "Strangers, Guests, or Clients? Visitor experiences in museums." In: Richard Sandell and Robert R. Janes (eds): *Museum Management and Marketing*, London and New York 2007, pp. 331-344;

George E. Hein, "Museum Education", in: Sharon Macdonald: *A Companion to Museum Studies*, London 2006, pp. 340-352

Task: What potential do you see in the events programme of a cultural institution, especially of a museum?

Week 13

05.12.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

Student Presentations of Final Projects

Task: Post a sketch and a structure of your final project onto the padlet (200 words), outlining the key aims and objectives.

Week 14

12.12.2024, Thursday, 14:00-17:15

Humboldt Forum, Main Foyer

Student Presentations of Final Projects

Concluding Discussion

Final Project Deadline

For further information on essay guidelines and grading criteria see above (pp. 2-4)

The final project in written-up form is due on 18 December midnight.

Library and Book Purchase Policies

All texts will be made accessible through our class padlet. Additional background readings for essays and presentations will also be made available.