

FA351 Wannsee: Laboratory for the Future

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Course Description

Taught by curator and writer Avi Feldman, who runs a gallery in Wannsee, this course offers an interdisciplinary exploration of a district with particular historical interest in Berlin. Wannsee is a place of radical contradictions. Surrounded by forests, parks and castles, it has since the 19th century attracted both affluent industrialist and artists. Long known as a popular destination for summer excursions and water sports, its name is at the same time forever darkened by association with the Wannsee Konferenz of 1942, when the Holocaust was planned by the officials of the Nazi regime. Following World War II, Wannsee's strategic location between Berlin and Potsdam (the capital city of Brandenburg), made it a border zone between West and East Berlin.

Against this backdrop, the course will explore Wannsee's political, social and environmental landscapes, past and present. Students address theoretical and archival materials, to reflect on cultural and artistic movements from the early twentieth century, such as Lebensreform ('life-reform') and Ausdruckstanz ('Expressionist dance'). As well as examining the contemporary relevance of these movements, the course will focus on curatorial knowledge and practice by exploring recent exhibitions, video, performance and installation works made in and about Wannsee in-collaboration with artists and curators such as Yael Bartana; Shelley Harten; aaajiao; Gábor Kristóf; Ran Zhang; Muhammad Toukhy; Navot Miller; and a research-based exhibition by students of Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design Halle curated by Avi Feldman with Nike Bätzner.

These works and conversations offer an opportunity to consider recent research on trauma and performance art that raises themes of salvation and the desire for change. Field research will include meeting local residents engaged in political and artistic practices; visits to Wannsee's inter-religious cemetery; Glienicke Brücke (the "Bridge of Spies"); Strandbad Wannsee (an open-air lido, and now also protected historical monument, where choreographer Rudolf von Laban worked); and institutions at the vicinity of Wannsee such as Kunsthaus Dahlem, Georg Kolbe Museum, and the island of Schwanenwerder, once the home of renowned Jewish art collectors and public figures displaced by Nazi figures such as Albert Speer ('Hitler's architect') and Joseph Goebbels (Nazi Propaganda Minister).

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, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

In the case of unavoidable absence, a short notification via email sent before the beginning of class is appreciated.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Punctuality

Punctuality is essential. For off campus visits please make sure you depart early in order to reach the site/museum 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, and warm cloths.

Weekly Readings

Weekly readings and other assignments/materials will be sent via email following each weekly meeting. Please check your emails and let me know if you have any questions as soon as possible.

Assessment

The course assessment consists of the overall seminar work (response papers, presentations, regular class participation), one essay/presentation and one curatorial/creative project. See also "Grade Breakdown."

Writing Assignment/Project

Students can choose to write a mid-term essay for this course (ca. 3000 words), or to present a text/theme relevant to the course in class. A range of texts/topics/questions will be suggested and discussed in class in advance. Also, the concept, format and scope of the curatorial/creative project will be discussed individually with each student.

The midterm essay is due via email on Friday, March 14, 2025, midnight. The final curatorial/creative project is due on Monday, May 5, midnight.

Off Campus

We will have three visits to sites in Wannsee and museums in its vicinity on the following Saturdays: February 01, April 26, May 3, 2025.

Exhibition

There is a possibility to curate and execute an exhibition at the Wannsee Contemporary gallery in May 2025. The exhibition should be a collaborative work of the class students. This option will be discussed in class at the beginning of the semester.

* Students can request to submit a final essay (ca. 3000 words) instead of a curatorial/creative project.

Essays should include footnotes/references, bibliography and a list of illustrations (if needed). The structure and draft of your essays can be discussed – please schedule this with me in advance.

Grading Criteria:

Line of argument/s with regard to essay/curatorial/creative project topic/question; Awareness of context and existing literature/exhibitions/art works on the topic; structure and format; Innovation.

Policy on Late Submission of Paper/Project

Essays/Projects that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Seminar Grade*: 33,3% *Attendance (participation/preparation, responses/tasks and presentations)
Essay/Presentation: 33,3 %
Curatorial/Creative Project: 33,3 %

Schedule

Week 1: Why Wannsee
29.01, Wednesday, 10:00-13:15

An introduction to the political, social and environmental landscapes that shape Berlin-Wannsee past, present and futures. How can we engage in a critical exploration and investigation of this region of Berlin through artistic and curatorial imagination and activism?

Week 2: Off Campus: Visiting Wannsee Contemporary
01.02, Saturday, 12:00-17:00

Visit to the gallery Wannsee Contemporary and the exhibition ANIMA by students of Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design Halle. Following visit to the exhibition we will explore other sites in Wannsee and its vicinity such as Wannsee's inter-religious cemetery, Glienicker Brücke, Villa Oppenheim and Villa Schöningen.

Week 3: Body Politic: Expressionist dance and Lebensreform ('life-reform') in Wannsee
12.02, Wednesday, 10:00-13:15

What between expressionist dance and the Lebensreform movement? Who were the artists and thinkers associated with these two body-related social movements, and how it all might be relevant (again) to our present time?

Reading:

1. Live Better! Bernisches Historisches Museum, 2020, p. 5-16 (catalogue)
2. Dana Mills, Dance and Activism, Bloomsbury Academic, 2021, p. 1-18
3. Susan Manning and Lucia Ruprecht, University of Illinois Press, 2012, p. 1-8

Week 4: Wannsee and the Holocaust
19.02, Wednesday, 10:00-13:15

In between Art and the final solution: How the genocide of European Jews and the atrocities of WWII have shaped culture and memory in Germany; Wannsee as a case study.

Reading:

1. Katie Digan, Place of Memory: The Case of the House of the Wannsee Conference, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 19-28

Week 5: Visiting Lecture with artist Yael Bartana
26.02, Wednesday, 10:00-13:15

Yael Bartana will reflect, share thoughts and present her artistic work in Wannsee created for her solo exhibition 'Redemption Now' at the Jewish Museum Berlin (2021); her solo exhibition 'Rehearsal for Redemption' at Wannsee Contemporary (2023), and her very recent participation at the German pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

Reading:

Yael Bartana. The Book of Malka Germania; Editors: Shelley Harten, Gregor Lersch, Jewish Museum Berlin, 2021

Week 6: Students Presentations/ Text Reading and Discussion

05.03, Wednesday, 10:00-13:15

The schedule of the day and relevant text will be discussed in advance in class.

*** Midterm text - for students who chose to write a text instead of presenting in class - is due on Friday, 14 of March 2025 (please email your essays to me directly).**

Week 7: Wannsee, or The End of Berlin

12.03, Wednesday, 10:00-13:15

Between West and East Germany, between landfill and a research center, an investigation into Wannsee's contemporary past and hidden sites. Some examples of sites to be discussed: Wannsee's nuclear research reactor operating until 2019; Berlin-Wannsee municipal waste disposal site opened in 1954; and the Berlin Rowing Club which since 1909 and to this day is a men-only club.

Reading:

1. Susan Pollock and Reinhard Bernbeck, A Gate to a Darker World: Excavating at the Tempelhof Airport, Ethics and the Archaeology of Violence, ed: Alfredo González-Ruibal and Gabriel Moshenska, Springer, 2015, p. 137-152.

Week 8: Wannsee Contemporary?

19.03, Wednesday, 10:00-13:15

Through the exploration of works and exhibitions by artists/curators Ran Zhang, Gábor Kristóf, Yael Bartana, Shelley Harten, and Muhammad Toukhy – all recently curated or created new works related to Wannsee – we will decipher together whether a contemporary Wannsee exists and speculate on its future/s.

Week 9: Unlearning the Future

02.04, Wednesday, 10:00-13:15

Provenance research, looted art, or in the specific case of Germany – Nazi Plunder – have gained in recent years extensive recognition by researchers, institutions and the public alike. By examining art objects, artifacts and architectural buildings and structures related to Wannsee, we will trace the history of objects, investigate their relation to our social sphere, and perceive how they influence humans and their lives.

Reading:

1. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History*, Verso, 2019, p. 1-12, 22-34, 63-66

Week 10: De-Integrate

09.04, Wednesday, 10:00-13:15

In the face of the rise of the extreme far-right, antisemitism, xenophobia and racism in Germany, we will discuss theories and methods of shaping our present time, and how concepts such as Theater of Memory (Michal Y. Bodemann) and Theater of Integration (Max Czollek), can be used in the re-thinking and re-imagining shared future/s.

Reading:

1. Max Czollek, *Gegenwartsbewältigung [Overcoming the Present]*, TRANSIT vol. 12, no. 2, p.144-151

2. Esra Özyürek, *Subcontractors of Guilt*, Stanford University Press, 2023, p.103-129

Fall break Monday, April 14, - Sunday, April 20, 2025

Week 11: Off Campus - Georg Kolbe Museum and House of the Wannsee Conference
26.04, Saturday, 12:00-17:30

Visiting the exhibition '75 Jahre Georg Kolbe Museum' at Georg Kolbe Museum and the House of the Wannsee Conference (Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz).

Week 12: Off Campus - Kunsthaus Dahlem and Brücke-Museum
03.05, Saturday, 12:00-17:30

Visiting the exhibition 'Nothing without Nature« – Ewald Mataré's Animal Sculptures' Kunsthaus Dahlem, and the exhibition 'Brücke. 120 Jahre, 120 Werke, 120 Personen — Eine Jubiläumsausstellung, Brücke-Museum

*** Final curatorial/creative project is due on Monday, 05 of May 2025.**