LONDON MUSEUMS

Instructor: Dr Ann Matchette

Aims and Objectives
This course introduces students to the rich museum culture of London. Through lectures, seminars, and visits to museums such as the British Museum, National Gallery, Imperial War Museum, Museum of London, Tate Modern, and the East End we will explore how museums create histories of art, society, and national identity. The course draws on the approaches of several disciplines – art, social, and cultural history, anthropology, social geography, and critical theory – to interrogate the ways that museums reflect and shape what we know and how we see. Exploring a selection of sites dating from the eighteenth century to the present day, we will consider the historical context in which these museums came about, the nature of their collections, and debates on current presentation, considering issues of museology, curatorial practice, and the construction of knowledge.

Learning Outcomes
Over the course of the semester you will develop skills in visual literacy, by learning how to ‘read’ museum exhibits and spaces. You will gain a broad understanding of a series of important moments in European art and British history and develop critical awareness of how these moments have been interpreted in the past and are being continually re-interpreted through on-going debates about the role of museums and the politics of display and curation. You will also be introduced to some of the practical challenges of museums today and their intersections with commercial sectors of society. By the end, you will very likely have a different impression of London’s museums than when you first arrived.

Method of Study
The course is taught in a variety of contexts. It is organized around three major themes and is broadly chronological: Cultures of Collecting, The Politics of Display, and Within and Without the Museum. Meetings alternate between campus and museum sites. Themes will be introduced with an interactive lecture and seminar on campus, which is followed the next week with a visit to a museum. That means that much of your learning will take place out of the classroom, on site in London museums.

All set readings are available on the course website. To do well in the course, it is important that you prepare for each class meeting by reading the texts and reviewing the course material ahead of time. Throughout, you are in encouraged to reflect on the topics in light of your own experience here in London. Take time to read, think, and explore the city’s museums outside of class time. You will get the most out of the course if you come to class ready to actively engage with the week’s subject and participate in the class discussions.

COURSE POLICIES

Class Times
Because this course is divided between the classroom and site visits, it’s extremely important that you regularly consult your syllabus or the website so that you will know where we will be meeting and how to prepare.
Contact and Office Hours
Ann Matchette also teaches at other universities in London. She will only be at the ACCENT Study Center when we have class there, and is happy to meet with students around the edges of class or by special arrangement.

Reading Materials
The literature on museums, as a field of academic study, has exploded in the last decade and most books are expensive collections of essays. The website contains both the required reading for each week, along with further reading, extracts, study questions, and websites that will help you prepare for class. Alongside those readings online, there are a number of books in the Study Center library that will support your study on the course. These resources will be especially useful when it comes time to write your essays, but it is also expected that you will make use of online resources such as the University of California Digital Library for accessing journal articles. UC students can also use the British Library on application (see the office for information on how to gain access to these).

Attendance Policy
The attendance policy is written in full in your academic handbook. In short, attendance at ALL sessions and excursions is obligatory, failure of which will result in an automatic grade deduction.

Course Etiquette
Students should aim to participate fully in each class; after all, it forms part of your grade. Please arrive on time for all classes to avoid disruption for your classmates. This is particularly important at site visits as you may not be able to find us after class begins. Turn off your cell phones, and do not text, email, search the internet, or use laptops or tablets in class for anything other than note-taking. These policies stand for meetings in the classroom and on site in museums.

ASSESSMENT
Assessment outline
Grades are composed of four elements. There are four assessments, each designed to help you develop your skills in visual and critical analysis in different but interrelated ways. Full assignment details will be circulated in class, and there will be time to discuss your work individually with the instructor. The final part of the grade is determined through class participation (10%).

1. Presentation (15% of final mark)
Due: session dates and topics assigned in first class
When we are on campus, the second part of class will be a seminar on the independent site visits listed for that session. All students are required to visit at least one of the museums, historic sites, or memorials listed for each class. Students will take turns presenting as teams assigned to one site and lead the discussion on that particular museum or memorial based on one of the week’s reading. You will be briefed one week ahead of your presentation; see me in advance if you want to know which reading to focus on earlier). I encourage the teams to create Powerpoint/Keynote presentations that illustrate both the site and the major themes discussed in the article. The team’s performance will be evaluated on the quality of the presentation and the success in provoking discussion. Presentations will be assigned during the first class.

2. Critical Review (15% of final mark)
Due: 20 September
Word limit: 1000 words
This is a short piece of writing that reflects critically on what we saw at the British Museum by focusing on a single object and its display. The purpose of this exercise is two-fold. First, it provides an assessable written response to the site visit, which requires you to consider and apply the concepts of
the week’s reading to a specific context, namely the idea of an object’s ‘biography’. The assignment also allows you space to reflect critically on authors’ arguments and your personal experience of the museum. In other words, it can and should include your own personal observations but those must be anchored in analysis. A good review does not merely describe the exhibit, but attempts to think more broadly about the significance of what you see. The review should include an image of ‘your object’. You will be given an extended briefing for this exercise, which we will discuss in class.

The critical review will be graded according to the following criteria:
1. Adequate coverage within the word limit (i.e. that students demonstrate direct engagement with main issues of the site).
2. Appropriate object and quality of the analysis, expressing both course content and your original reflections.
3. Clarity and concision of writing, well structured.
4. Correct and consistent presentation, free of grammatical, spelling, and factual errors.

Feedback
You will receive a letter grade and written feedback within 2-3 weeks of submission.

2. Extended Essay (30% of final grade)
Due: 8 November
Word limit: 2,000 words (including footnotes)

In this assignment you are asked to answer an essay question by focusing on a specific example (e.g. an exhibition or installation from a museum, gallery, or historic site in London) of your choice. You will be expected to draw on at least two writers/theorists in the course readings. Students will receive a full written brief outlining the essay question well in advance.

A good essay will first and foremost follow the brief directly in a clear and well-structured manner. It should incorporate concepts and theoretical ideas discussed from at least two readings, but could also include arguments from the further reading list on the syllabus (see website for some of these) and independent research.

Essays must be illustrated, fully referenced, and contain a complete bibliography. You are welcome – even encouraged – to select an example from a museum we have not visited as a class, but in all cases topics must be sent by email to the instructor for approval no later than 26 October. You will be fully briefed prior to this date to help you formulate your paper, and you will be given an opportunity to discuss possible topics.

The essay will be graded according to the following criteria:
1. Selection of an appropriate museum topic, which can be adequately examined within the word limit.
2. Quality of your analysis and interpretation of the site and its context.
3. Relevance of the texts selected and demonstrated understanding of their ideas.
4. Formulation, development, and balance of argument.
5. Clarity of organization and writing style.
6. Correct and consistent presentation, free of grammatical, spelling, and factual errors.

Feedback
You will receive a letter grade and written feedback within 2-3 weeks of submission.
4. Final Exam (30% of final grade)
Time and date TBC

The final exam assesses your comprehension of major conceptual issues on the course and knowledge of specific historical and cultural contexts. The exam is made up of one essay question and several short answer questions. The questions draw on material from readings, lectures, seminars, and site visits.

The exam will be graded according to the following criteria:
1. Quality of response, which directly answers the question in a well-structured and analytical manner.
2. Deployment of specific examples to illustrate your arguments, taken from readings, lectures, site visits, and your own observations and reflections.
3. Engagement with and comprehension of the key concepts relevant to the question.
4. Understanding of the related historical and cultural contexts.
5. Writing is clear and free of grammatical, spelling, and factual errors.

Weekly Schedule

Part I. Cultures of Collecting
Our investigation of London museums can usefully begin with a consideration of why objects come to be in museums in the first place. The basis of any museum is fundamentally tied to practices of collecting. Most major museums in London started with a clutch of objects donated by a single benefactor, which then grew over time. We will look at several collections that began in the 18th and 19th centuries and consider what those collections say about the institutions that house them, and what they say about the individuals who initially created them. To what extent are artifacts continually linked to their former owners? We will also interrogate some problematical aspects of collecting, considering how objects are valued, the nature of possession, and the expression of power relations. What makes it into museums, how do the meanings of those objects change over time, and who determines what we see?

Week One: Introduction
Lecture: What Is a Museum?
Seminar: Things, Objects, Artefacts
Key topics: Approaches to collecting, institutions and authority, and the place of cultural capital. What, or who, are museums for?

This session will offer an introduction to the course, highlighting major themes that we will address over the semester.

Reading:

Further Reading:


**Week Two: Collecting the World**

**Site Visit:** British Museum
Meet at front entrance steps on Great Russell Street
www.britishmuseum.org

**Key topics:** The ‘universal museum’, globalization, cultural identity

**Reading:**


**Listening and Viewing:**

You might also like to take a look at the following websites about a year-long exhibition and radio program at the British Museum that told a history of the world through 100 objects in its permanent collection. The radio program is now finished, but you can still access it online. Read the short newspaper article and access the podcasts for the two objects listed below.

- A History of the World in 100 Objects (official site, with links to each of the 100 episodes including images of objects)
  1. Parthenon Sculpture: Centaur and Lapith
     http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/player/bo0qsvj1
  2. Benin Plaque: The Oba with Europeans (16th century AD)
     http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/player/bo0tt5gm

**Further Reading:**

- Jean Baudrillard, ‘The Violence of the Global’
Week Three: Museums and Biography

Lecture: Housing the Museum

Seminar: Presentations on Wallace Collection, Freud Museum (ticketed £4), Charles Dickens Museum (ticketed £6), Keats House Museum (ticketed £4.50), Handel and Hendrix in London (ticketed £10). Presentations on ticketed museums are optional and at the choice of the student.

Key topics: Collections and identity, house museums, and memorialization

Reading:

Further reading:
Week Four: Representing London
Site visit: Museum of London
www.museumoflondon.org.uk
Meet at front entrance, which is located upstairs from the street. Look for the signs.
(St Paul's tube station)

Key topics: Biography of a city, hidden histories, politics of representation

Reading:

Further reading:

Part II. The Politics of Display
In the second section of the course our attention will shift to the 19th-century foundation of national museums and their legacy. We will consider the social-political motivations that gave rise to the public museum, which was meant to do much more than simply house a collection: it was also ennobling. Museums could educate the people, create good citizens, and lift their spirits. At the same time, museums could also promote British interests, both cultural and economic. We will begin by looking at the role of art in this enterprise, as it was thought in particular to be 'good for you', but we will then turn to other developments in the public museum and its place in a changing world. Throughout we will be looking at the ideologies of museums, whether they've changed over time, and how those ideologies are communicated.

Week Five: Displaying the Nation
Lecture: New Publics for Art
Seminar: Presentations on Trafalgar Square and National Portrait Gallery

Key topics: Moral reform in the 19th century, public museums, and nationalism

Reading:
- Deborah Cherry, 'Statues in the Square: Hauntings at the Heart of Empire', *Art History*, 29, no. 4 (2006), 661-97

Further reading:
- David Carrier, 'Remembering the Past. Art Museums and Memory Theatres', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 61 (2003), 61-65

Week Six: Art for the Nation
Site visit: The National Gallery
Meet in front of the Sainsbury Wing entrance
Trafalgar Square (Charing Cross or Leicester Square tube stations)
www.nationalgallery.org.uk
Key topics: Art and social ‘improvement’, the Italian Renaissance and English identity, architecture and stagecraft
Reading:

Further reading:
• Christopher Whitehead, The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005

Week Seven: Exhibiting Progress
Lecture: Power and Display
Seminar: Presentations on Victoria & Albert Museum, Science Museum, Natural History Museum
Key Topics: Great Exhibition of 1851, public space, knowledge and power
Reading:

Further Reading:
• Jennifer Barrett, Museums and the Public Sphere, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011
• Ruth Adams, ‘The V&A: Empire to Multiculturalism?’, Museum and Society, 8, no. 2, 63-79

Week Eight
MIDTERM BREAK (no class)
Week Nine: Narratives of Science and Technology

*Essay topic proposal due*

Site visit: The Wellcome Collection
Meet at front entrance (within walking distance of campus)
www.wellcomecollection.org

Key topics: Exhibiting science and medicine, institutional authority and audience

Reading:
There is no additional reading for this week, as we'll be drawing on texts from last class for this site. Please review these, and use the extra time to work on your essay topic proposals. Ahead of class, explore the area of the Wellcome Collection’s website as a portal for public access to scientific knowledge: www.wellcomecollection.org/explore. Come to class prepared to talk about the relationship of what you see online compared to what you see in the gallery.

Further reading:

Part III. Within and Without the Museum

In this final section we focus on museums of the 20th and 21st century to explore modern and postmodern responses to the institution. Artists now create works knowing they may be destined for museums and other artists openly challenge the authority of the museum, prompting us to think differently about what these institutions mean. Likewise, the public expect more from their encounters with artifacts and installations, with museums expected to deliver education, experience, and entertainment. Museums mount ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions in a bid to attract new audiences and generate much-needed revenue in an age when funding is severely restricted. At the same time, museums have assumed a new role in the modern era, one that attempts to deal with the history of memory and conflict. New digital technology has pushed the boundaries of what museums offer and extended their reach, while it has also provided a creative alternative to the bricks-and-mortar museum. What are the challenges and opportunities of the museum in the 21st century?

Week Ten: Art and Experience

Lecture: The White Cube and Beyond

Guest Lecture: Sarah Sparkes, artist and curator, will discuss her own artistic practice, collaborations, and exhibitions in unlikely spaces

Key topics: Modernity and postmodernity, institutions and authority, artistic and curatorial agency, audience response

Reading:

Further reading:
- ‘The White Cube and Beyond’, a roundtable discussion with Charlotte Klonk, Niklas Maak, and Thomas Demand, *Tate Etc.*, Issue 21 (Spring 2011), 78-92

**Week Eleven: Art, Space, and Audiences**

*Essays due*

**Site visit:** Tate Modern

Meet at the Main Entrance

There are two entrances to the museum; the Main Entrance is at the west end of the building (to the right as you look at Tate Modern from the river), and is via a ramp which extends down into the Turbine Hall and Level 1. Meet just outside this.

Full details of how to get to Tate Modern can be found at:

www.tate.org.uk/modern

**Key topics:** Public engagement with art, destination museums, cultural consumerism, and the market

**Reading:**


**Further Reading:**


**Press Reviews:**

- ‘The Tate Modern and the Battle for London’s Soul’, *New York Times*, 18 July 2017
  https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/14/guardian-view-on-tate-modern-switch-house-extension
- Will Self, ‘Are the Hyper-rich Ruining the New Tate Modern?’, *Guardian*, 21 November 2014
Week Twelve: Art on the Edge
Site visit: Street Art (meeting place TBC)
Key topics: Insiders and outsiders, centers and periphery, multi-sensorial art
Reading:

Further reading:
- Konstantinos Avramidis and Myrto Tsilimpounidi, eds., Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City, London: Routledge, 2017
- Susan Stewart, 'Ceci Tuera Cela: Graffiti as Crime and Art', in Life After Postmodernism, 161-80

Check out: Sound artist Janet Cardiff has created a ‘walk’ called 'The Missing Voice: Case Study B (1999)', which begins at Whitechapel Gallery in the East End and concludes at Liverpool Station. The work is created entirely through sound, which you experience while walking and listening to an iPod (either borrowed from Whitechapel Gallery or your own). Because it requires you to wear headphones, and to experience it individually, you have to do this on your own. It's well worth it and offers a new perspective on this diverse area of London. For more information and to download the sound file: www.artangel.org.uk/project/the-missing-voice-case-study-b/

Week Thirteen: Museums and Memory
Lecture: Museums, Memorials, and Meaning
Seminar: Presentations on the Holocaust and 7/7 Memorials in Hyde Park; Cenotaph and Monument to Women of WWII at Whitehall
Key topics: History vs. memory, multimedia exhibitions, and design

Reading:

Further reading:
- Susan A. Crane, ‘Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum’, History and Theory, 36, no. 4 (December 1997), pp. 44-63
- Susan A. Crane, 'Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory', The American Historical Review, 102, no. 5 (Dec., 1997), pp. 1372-1385

**Week Fourteen: Materializing Memory**

**Site visit:** Imperial War Museum  
[www.iwm.org.uk](http://www.iwm.org.uk)  
Meet at front entrance.  
(Lambeth North tube station)

**Key topics:** History and memory, museums and conflict

**Reading:**


**Further readings:**


Week Fifteen: Museum Futures
Final discussion and review for exam
Presentation: Virtual museums, social media, and apps

Reading:
• Nina Simon, The Participatory Museum, Santa Cruz: 2.0, 2010
  www.participatorymuseum.org/

Further reading:
• Sian Bayne, Jenn Ross, and Zoe Williamson, 'Objects, Subjects, Bits and Bytes: Learning from the Digital Collection of the National Museums’, Museums and Society, 7, no. 2 (2009), 100-24
• Walter Benjamin, Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

READING MATERIALS

Use of Resources
Along with libraries and electronic databases for journal articles, students will find lots of resources for museum study on the internet. Wikipedia, while containing some basic information, is not wholly reliable and is not an academic source. Use it if you can verify the information. But mostly you are better off using museums’ own websites as a point of departure. They are particularly helpful for researching aspects of their collections, though your research should certainly not be limited to these sites. Some have Facebook pages and Instagram accounts, which you may also find interesting to follow while you are here. Some particularly good museum websites are:

Victoria & Albert Museum
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/

The British Museum
www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx

The Tate Gallery
Some other museums and galleries

Art and Design
Institute of Contemporary Arts
Camden Arts Centre
Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery
Tate Britain
Serpentine Gallery
Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre
Barbican
Design Museum
Geffrye Museum
Wallace Collection

History and Culture
The British Library
Tower of London
National Portrait Gallery
Freud Museum
Handel House Museum
Horniman Museum
The Jewish Museum
Museum of Childhood (V&A)
Museum of Brands, Advertising, and Packaging
National Maritime Museum
Sir John Soane Museum

Science and Medicine
Grant Museum of Zoology (University College London)
Hunterian Museum (just across from The Sir John Soane Museum and part of the Royal College of Surgeons)
Natural History Museum
Science Museum
Wellcome Collection

You may also want to check out these apps

Streetmuseum, the Museum of London’s augmented reality mobile app, which brings the museum’s extensive photograph collection to the palm of your hand. Using the phone’s map or GPS, it leads you to various parts of the city and allows you to view historic images overlaid with the live video feed from where you are standing. Download the Museum of London: Streetmuseum from the App Store for free or for more information see the website: http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/Resources/app/you-are-here-app/index.html

Dickens’s Dark London, also from the Museum of London, is one of the best. It’s an interactive graphic novel that follows Dickens on his night wanderings through London, where as an insomniac he used to gain inspiration for his books based on the places and people he observed. The virtual ramblings are accompanied by audio of passages from Dickens’s novels that reveal the Victorian city in wonderful detail. Illustrations from his original texts are a bonus. The app was created in conjunction with the museum’s major exhibition on Dickens, which is now closed, but the app development is ongoing. It is available for iPad and iPhone. The first installment is free, subsequent
installments are £1.49.

Soho Stories, this app from The National Trust (an organization otherwise best known for fossilizing country manor houses) also utilizes GPS to link your current location with sites and stories of Soho. This app animates your immediate spatial experience with colorful anecdotes related by a number of Soho aficionados, famous and infamous. It’s primarily designed for the iPhone but a lite edition is available for Android.
http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/local-to-you/london-and-south-east/view-page/item8

Instructor Biography

Dr. Ann Matchette is a cultural historian who works across universities and museums. She has taught at Queen Mary University of London, the Royal College of Art, and the Victoria & Albert Museum. Her publications have explored contemporary notions of material value in early modern Italy. Currently she is focusing more on how value is constructed by museums over time. Her work has been supported by the Leverhulme Trust, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and the Kress Foundation