LONDON MUSEUMS

Instructor: Dr. Ann Matchette
Course number: ARTHS 111 (also cross-listed as ANTH 111 and SOC 111)

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 galleries in 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 LORE. 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.

Class Times
Because this course is divided between the classroom and site visits, it’s extremely important that you regularly consult your syllabus or LORE so that you will know where we will be meeting and how to prepare. Class times will normally be 10am-1pm, unless otherwise stated.

Office Hours
Ann Matchette also teaches at other universities in London. She will only be at the ACCENT Study Center
on Wednesdays when we have class there, and is happy to meet with students around the edges of class or by special arrangement. To contact her outside of class times, please email a.matchette@qmul.ac.uk.

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. LORE 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
As with all courses, regular class attendance is required and monitored. Given that so much of the learning takes place outside the classroom, it is essential that you attend all site visits. Under the program rules only 2 absences per course will be permitted. Attendance is also factored into the class participation grade.

Assessment
Grades are composed of four elements. There are three 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 though class participation.

1. Critical Review (15% of final mark)
Due: 15 October 2014
Word limit: 1000 words
This is a short piece of writing that reflects critically on two museum visits undertaken during the course (you should select two sites from those visited thus far: the British Museum, Museum of London, Wellcome Collection, Hunterian Museum, and National Gallery). The purpose of this exercise is two-fold. First, it provides an assessable written response to our individual site visits, which requires you to apply the concepts of the week’s reading to a specific context (use your museum handout as a starting point). The review 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 and make connections between site visits and related concepts in readings (i.e. through a logical comparison). The review should include images if possible, especially if you are discussing a particular display that would benefit from illustration. 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. Quality of the analysis made on site, 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 (35% of final grade) Due: 19 November 2014 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. one image, object, or installation from a museum, gallery, or historic site in London) of your choice. You will interrogate how its current setting conditions the way we perceive it, and 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.

The purpose of this exercise is for you to explore these concepts more deeply, test the theories in practice for yourself, and demonstrate the ability to analyze, explain, and negotiate complex ideas in a sustained piece of writing.

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 approved by the instructor by email no later than 5 November. You will receive a full written brief 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 object 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.

3. Final Exam (40% 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 Wednesday 3 September 2014
Lecture: What Is a Museum?
Seminar: Museums as a ‘Way of Seeing’
Key topics: Approaches to collecting, institutions and authority, and the place of cultural capital. What are museums for?
This session will offer an introduction to the course, highlighting major themes that we will address over the semester.

Reading:

Week Two: Collecting Others Wednesday 10 September 2014
Site Visit: British Museum
Meet at front entrance steps on Great Russell Street www.britishmuseum.org
Key topics: The ‘universal museum’, globalization, and the politics of representation

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/b00qsvj1
2. Benin Plaque: The Oba with Europeans (16th century AD)
http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/player/b00tt59m

Further Reading:
‘Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums: Museums Serve Every Nation’,
reprinted in Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations, ed. Ivan Karp et al, Durham:
Duke University Press, 2006
190-202
Beth Lord, ‘Representing Enlightenment Space’, in Reshaping Museum Space, ed. Suzanne MacLeod,
London: Routledge, 2005, 146-57
Jean Baudrillard, ‘The Violence of the Global’
Magnus Fiskesjo, ‘Global Repatriation and ‘Universal Museums’, Anthropology News (March 2010)
Constantine Sandis, ‘Two Tales of One City: Cultural Understanding and the Parthenon Sculptures’,
Museum Management and Curatorship, 23, no. 1 (2008), 5-21 ‘The Global Repatriation Debate and the
New ‘Universal Museums’, in The Handbook of Postcolonialism and Archaeology, ed. Jane Lydon and
Uzma Rizvi, World Archaeological Congress Research Handbooks, Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast
Press, 2010, pp. 303-10
Yannis Hamilakis, ‘Stories from Exile: Fragments from the Cultural Biography of the Parthenon or’Elgin’
Marbles’, World Archaeology, 31 (1999), 303-20
Annie E. Coombes, ‘Material Culture at the Crossroads of Knowledge: The Case of the Benin Bronzes’,
repr. in Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, ed. Stuart Hall, London: Open
University, 1997, 219ff
122-45
‘A History of the World in 100 Objects’, review of the radio program in The Independent
www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/a-history-of-the-world--in-100objects-radio-4-1876911.html

Week Three: Difficult Subjects/Objects Wednesday 17 September 2014
Guest Lecture
Leon Robinson, collector and filmmaker, will discuss his own collecting practices and exhibitions on Black
History
Seminar:
Collecting and Curiosity: Feedback session on independent site visit to the Hunterian Museum or
Wellcome Collection
Key topics: Collections and ethics, ‘extreme’ collecting, objects and knowledge

Reading:
Richard Sandell, Museums, Prejudice, and the Reframing of Difference, Oxford:
Routledge, 2007
http://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2014/SOC564/um/Sandell_Richard_Museums__Prejudice
_and_the_Reframing_of_Difference_2006.pdf

Further reading:
Week Four: Collecting London Wednesday 24 September 2014
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: Hidden histories, city histories, ‘high’ and ‘low’, ephemera

Reading:

Further reading:
Kevin Moore, Museums and Popular Culture, London: Cassell, 2000

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 Wednesday 1 October 2014
Lecture: Strategies for Showing Us
Seminar: Public museums and rituals of citizenship
Key topics: Museums and moral reform in the 19th century, display strategies, and nationalism

Reading:

Further reading:

Week Six: Art for the Nation Wednesday 8 October 2014
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: Art and Progress Wednesday 15 October 2014 (today’s class will meet in the afternoon)
Lecture: Public Display and Displaying the Public
Seminar: Exhibition-ism
Key Topics: Great Exhibition of 1851, public space, seeing and being seen

Critical Review Due

Reading:

Further Reading:

Week Eight MIDTERM BREAK (no class)

Week Nine: Imperial Designs Wednesday 29 October 2014 Site visit: Victoria & Albert Museum Meet at the front entrance to the V&A on Cromwell Road (South Kensington tube) www.vam.ac.uk
Key topics: Empire and postcolonialism, art and design

Reading:

Further readings:

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 Wednesday 5 November 2014
Lecture: The White Cube and Beyond
Seminar: Art exhibitions in unlikely spaces (guest speaker TBC)

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 and Its Publics Wednesday 12 November 2014
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:
Nicholas Serota, Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art, London: Thames & Hudson, 1996

Week Twelve: Art on the Edge Wednesday 19 November 2014
Site visit: Street Art (meeting place TBC)
Key topics: Insiders and outsiders, centers and periphery, multi-sensorial art
Reading:
Dave Beech, ‘Institutionalisation for All’, Art Monthly, 294 (March 2006), 7-10

Further reading:
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.

Week Thirteen: Museums and Memory Wednesday 26 November 2014
Lecture: Museums, Memorials, and Meaning
Seminar: Rememberance and Place: The Blitz, 9/11, and 7/7
Key topics: History vs. memory, multimedia exhibitions and design

Reading:
Susan A. Crane, ‘Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum’, History and Theory, 36, no. 4 (December 1997), pp. 44-63

Further reading:
Susan A. Crane, ‘Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory’, The American Historical Review, 102, no. 5 (Dec., 1997), pp. 1372-1385
Tim Benton, ed., Understanding Heritage and Memory, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010

Week Fourteen: Materializing Memory Wednesday 3 December 2014
Site visit: Imperial War Museum www.iwm.org.uk Meet at front entrance. (Lambeth North tube station)
Key topics: History, time, and nostalgia, museums and conflict

Reading:
Sue Malvern, ‘War, Memory and Museums: Art and Artefact in the Imperial War Museum, History Workshop Journal, 49 (2000), 177-203

Further readings:
Gaynor Kavanagh, Museums and the First World War, Leicester: Leicester UP, 1994
Susan Pearce, ‘Objects as Meaning; Or Narrating the Past’, in Objects of Knowledge, ed. Susan Pearce,
Week Fifteen: Museum Futures Wednesday 10 December 2014
Final Discussion: Where is the Museum Going?
Site visit: Institute of Sexology’s ‘Undress Your Mind’ exhibition Wellcome Collection 183 Euston Road (near Euston Station, a short walk from campus) www.wellcomecollection.org

Reading:

Further reading:

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 particularly good ones are:
Victoria & Albert Museum http://collections.vam.ac.uk/
The British Museum www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx
The Tate Gallery www.tate.org.uk/collection/

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 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 his novels that reveal the Victorian city in 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/item8775