Multiculturalism and the New Museology

UW Art History 600: Special Topics in Art History
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00 – 12:15
L140 Elvehjem Building

Nancy Marie Mithlo, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Art History
mithlo@wisc.edu (608) 265-8694
Office hours: Mondays 8:30 to 10:30 and by appointment

Course description: This course critically analyzes how the museum enterprise operates as a social agent in both reflecting and informing public culture. Students will gain an understanding of historical and current trends in museum studies and how these movements are impacted by shifting professional and popular standards. The significance of the object in various cultural contexts will be examined for evidence of paradigmatic core values. Topics include the collection and display of human beings as objects, the art/artifact debate, racist memorabilia, identity construction, indigenous curation methods, commodification and consumerism, repatriation, censorship and contested ideas about authenticity and authority. Case studies are drawn primarily from The United States and Canada and include the plantation museum, American Indian cultural centers, lynching postcards, Japanese internment camps and performance art. The relationship of the museum to a diverse public with often contested agendas will be explored through class discussions, independent student projects and written assignments.

Required texts:


Required articles:
A course reader is available through the L&S Copy Center, 1650 Humanities (263-1803).
Assessment: Student Presentation (15%); Three Response Papers (20% each); Final Research Paper (25%). Guidelines for written assignments will be distributed.

The course may be taken for graduate credit with approval of the instructor. In general, graduate students will be responsible for required and recommended readings as well as extended course assignments.

Each student will be expected to attend all classes and participate in class discussions. Two or more absences will be grounds for subtracting points from your overall average. As a rule, I do not accept late work. In the rare and extenuating instance in which I may accept late work, the paper will be marked down accordingly. Extra credit is not offered.

Teaching philosophy and strategies: I strive to create a participatory classroom discussion setting, utilizing group work, short in-class written responses and student-led presentations. Individualized student research opportunities are encouraged and made available via papers and oral presentations. Active learning is sought, meaning honest self-reflection, questioning and real-world application grounded in careful reading and examination of the required texts.

Please note that the course addresses painful and sensitive issues of slavery, racism, sexism and genocide. In order for the course to be successful, students will be expected to exercise a high degree of intellectual and emotional maturity, respect for others and tolerance for diverse opinions. Civil discourse skills are required.

Week 1: September 4 and 6: What is the “New Museology”?

- Introduction – “A Cultural Inventory of the Classroom”

- Required readings:


Week 2: Sept. 11 and 13: What is the “New Museology”? continued...

- Required readings:


- Recommended reading:


Week 3: Sept. 18 and 20: Historical Precedents

- Required readings:


- **Recommended reading:**


Week 4: Sept. 25 and 27: **Dehumanization: People as Objects**

Response paper #1 due in class September 25th

- **Required readings:**


- **Film**

• **Recommended reading:**


**Week 5: October 2 and 4: Selective Representations**

• **Required readings:**


• **Recommended reading:**


**Week 6: Oct. 9 and 11: Subversive Representations**

• **Required readings:**


- **Recommended reading:**


**Week 7: Oct. 16 and 18: Hateful Things: Problematic Objects**

- **Required readings:**


- **Film**


- **Recommended readings:**


Week 8: Oct. 23 and 25: Repatriation: Representations of Indian Bodies

Response paper #2 due in class October 23

• Required readings:


• Recommended reading:


Week 9: Oct. 30 and Nov. 1: Case Study: Repatriation at the Pueblo of Zuni
• **Required readings:**


• **Film**


• **Recommended reading:**


**Week 10: Nov. 6 and 8: Negotiations and Self-Representations**

Response paper #3 due in class November 6th

• **Readings:**


Week 11: Nov. 13 and 15: Negotiations and Self-Representations continued...

- Required readings:


Week 12: Nov. 20; (Nov. 22: No Class: Thanksgiving Break)

- Required reading:


- Film


Week 13: Nov. 27 and Nov. 29 No class - Research paper preparation

Week 14: Dec. 4 and 6: Student Presentations

  Attendance will be taken.

Week 15: Dec. 11 and 13: Student Presentations

  Attendance will be taken.

Final Papers are due on the day of your scheduled presentation. No extensions are granted.