

Course Last Updated 4/1/2024



London Museums: Introduction to British Museology, Society and Culture

Section I: Course Overview

Course Code: ARH314

Subject Area(s): Art History

Prerequisites: None

Language of Instruction: English

Total Contact Hours: 45

Credits: 3

Course Fees: N/A

Course Description

This course is an introduction to museology and museums as reflections of the British psyche and unique cultural constructs that help us understand 'Britishness'. This is a field-study intensive course with visits to different museums, from the famous and vast 'global' British Museum to the small and privately-owned Saatchi Gallery to help understand how they operate by exploring different types of museums.

Study of the museums considers and analyses the ways in which imperialism and its legacy, as well as Britain's global relationships have influenced museum development and how this gives rise to the politics of patrimony. This includes looking at questions of cultural appropriation and the political debate on repatriation versus protection, the impact of the Classical period on British society in the past and present, its importance to class and education in Britain, and how this is reflected in museum collections. Classroom material and activities are designed to evoke the critical thinking and analytical skills to better understand complex decision-making processes of conservators and restorers and their role in the museum industry, the origins of museums from individuals to trade exhibitions and current museum professionals, as well as the impact museum audiences have on the work of museums.

Learning Objectives

- Evaluate the material culture of museum exhibitions

- Discuss current issues in museum missions, representation of the past, including the examples of the impact of Empire, interpretation of cultural objects, and the role of museums in society.
- Compare and Contrast the societal processes within home and host communities and the implications of sustainability and migration and their expressions in the contemporary museum.

Section II: Instructor & Course Details

Instructor Details

Name: TBC

Contact Information: TBC

Term: TBC

Course Day and Time: TBC

Office Hours: TBC

Grading & Assessment

The instructor assesses students' mastery of course learning objectives by using the forms of assessment below. Each of these assessments is weighted toward the final grade. The Assessment Overview section provides further details for each.

Engagement - 20%

Reading summaries - 15%

Museum worksheets - 10%

Midterm home exam: museum review - 25%

Essay Outline - 5%

Final essay: Create an exhibition - 25%

Assessment Overview

This section provides a brief description of each form of assessment listed above. Forms of assessment may be slightly modified in the term syllabus.

Engagement (20%): Students are expected to be engaged in class, to have read the [CEA CAPA Engagement Policy](#), and to understand the [Class Engagement Rubric](#) that outlines how engagement is graded.

Weekly class seminars will allow students the opportunity to discuss and analyze a wide range of topics based on assigned readings and field studies. Regular participation in seminar discussion is a vital component of the course. Students are expected to have completed the readings prior to each class as well as the gallery exercises and to contribute to the discussion in an informed manner. Gallery work will involve completing exercise sheets, reviewing and analyzing both aspects of the museum, such as outreach, the museum in general or a specific gallery or display. The exercise sheets include questions that need to be answered or data that must be entered

into a table. Completed gallery work sheets will be used for seminar discussion and will be assessed as part of your participation grade.

Reading Summaries (15%): Every in-class session will be accompanied by reading material/s. Students are required to submit a summary of the reading material, based on a specific question, prior to class.

Museum Worksheets (10%): In every museum visit, students will receive worksheets to fill out during their exploration of the museum. Worksheets will include questions linking previous in-class discussions to the visit, as well as discussions that will continue in the following weeks. Class discussions and reading materials are meant to enrich the museum visits and provide further insight, and students are expected to implement these in their answers.

Home Exam (midterm) (museum review – 1,500 words, 25%): For your home exam you must visit independently one of the following museums:

The Welcome Collection (choose one exhibition)

Sir John Soane's Museum

The London Mithraeum

The British Library: Treasures of the British Library

(Entry to all these museums is free. Make sure to check opening hours before your visit).

Answer the following question:

1. How does the museum interact with the public space around it? What role does the architecture of a museum play in its mission and execution of this mission?

In the museums that you chose - does the building stand out or blends in to its surrounding?

What kind of statement do you think the architecture is making, and how does it relate to the content of the museum or collection? Is the museum accessible? Is it inviting? Give examples. (25%)

2. Exhibition space: how is the museum or exhibition organized?

What is the leading logic behind it? What design choices were made and why, do you think? what kind of texts appear in the exhibition space – on the walls and on labels? Are they helpful? Informative? Who do you think is the intended audience of these texts? (25%)

3. The Museum and Society: How does the museum engage with contemporary discourse?

Museums adjust and update their exhibition spaces and their approach to their collection as times and attitudes change. Do you see an example for that in the museum you chose? How does the museum address its own history, or the history of London/ the UK? Does it address problematic topics or controversies? Is it done successfully? In your opinion, what is the role of museums today - how should interact with the public they serve? Is the role of museums, or are the techniques it uses, changing? (50%)

In your research for the paper, use field observations when possible (gallery evaluations and exercise sheets) and the recommended reading and books for the topic you are discussing. Use 2-4 academic/professional secondary sources. Resource selection and use will be assessed as part of your final mark.

Essay Outline (5%): Status update on the research project.

Final Assignment: Curate an Exhibition (2,000 words 25%): For your final assignment you are required to conceptualize an exhibition. Your exhibition can be about any topic/ artist/ place you choose. It can revolve around a theme, a timeframe, an artistic movement, a specific artist, etc.

- What is the exhibition about? Provide a title and introductory text (one written on the wall as the introductory text to all visitors).
- Where does the exhibition take place? In a museum (is so, which one)? A gallery? In a public space?
- How would you tell the story that you hope to tell? What is the scope of the exhibition and its display techniques?

Provide 3-5 objects or artworks that will be part of your exhibition: how will they be display? Why are they instrumental for this exhibition? Provide images if possible.

- Why did you choose this theme? What do you hope visitors will take away from this exhibition?
- In what sense is your exhibition part of the broader cultural and social landscape? Does it correspond with other exhibitions that took place in recent years? Does it reflect current debates?

All exhibition themes must be approved by the instructor before the submission of the essay.

You need to use 3-7 academic/professional secondary sources. Resource selection and use will be assessed as part of your final mark.

Active Learning

Experiential learning is an essential component of education abroad, and participation in field studies is a required part of coursework. In this course, students explore the city in which they are studying using a variety of methods. This provides the opportunity to gain nuance and perspective on the host context and course content, as well as to collect information and resources for assigned papers, projects, and presentations.

The assigned field component(s) are:

- 7 museum visits. Please see details in the weekly course schedule below.
- For their midterm exam students will also be required to go independently to a museum of their choice (out of a list provided later in the term).

Readings and Resources

The below readings and resources are representative of what will be assigned as required in this course but may vary slightly in the term syllabus.

All students are given access to the online library of the University of New Haven (UNH), accessible [here](#), and are expected to comply with [UNH Policies](#) regarding library usage.

Wherever possible, required readings are made accessible through the online library or Canvas. Students are responsible for obtaining all required readings.

Each course utilizes Canvas as its LMS. Students are expected to check Canvas regularly for updates and deadlines. Canvas is also the primary platform for contacting your instructor in case of questions or concerns about the course.

Required Readings

Davis, J. (2019). Are natural history museums inherently racist?

Duncan, C. (2001). *Civilizing rituals: Inside public art museums*. London: Routledge.

Duthie, E. (2011). (PDF) The British Museum: An imperial museum in a Post-Imperial World.

Janes, R. R., & Sandell, R. (2019). *Museum activism*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Macdonald, S. (2011). *A companion to museum studies*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Macdonald, S., & Leahy, H. R. (2015). *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*. Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Molina, S. (2019). Sustaining the lives of art objects.

Vergo, P. (2013). *The New Museology*. London: Reaktion Books.

Yerkovich, S. (2020). *A practical guide to museum ethics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Course Calendar

Session 1	
Topics	INTRODUCTION TO COURSE GOALS AND STRUCTURE
Activity	Overview of museum studies; how we think about museums and why they matter. The principles of material culture. The history of Museums: from curiosity cabinets to displays of the future
Readings and Assignments	

Session 2	
Topics	VISIT TO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
Activity	The history of museums: owning, naming, and categorizing the natural world. The past, the present, and the future of public museums.
Readings and Assignments	Readings: Saumarez Smith, C. "Museums, Artefacts, and Meanings", in P. Vergo (ed.), <i>The New Museology</i> , Reaktion Books, pp. 6-21. Davis, Josh. "Are Natural History Museums Inherently Racist?", Natural History Museum, 7/19/2019: https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2019/july/are-natural-history-museums-inherently-racist.html Assignments: Students must submit summary of reading material prior to class.

Session 3	
Topics	THE GREAT EXHIBITION + VISIT TO V&A
Activity	In the first half of the class we discuss the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the history of display in Britain, with its relations to the British Empire. We will then walk together to the V&A and see how these principals have evolved over time.
Readings and Assignments	Assignments: Museum worksheet

Session 4	
Topics	ART MUSEUMS AND EXHIBITIONS
Activity	In the first half of the class we will consider what is the role of an art museum? How do they function as cultural institutions, and why do we value them as societies? We will then discuss the role of the curator, and principals of curating permanent and temporary exhibitions.
Readings and Assignments	Readings: Duncan, Carol. <i>Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums</i> . London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 7-21 (chapter 1, The Art Museum as Ritual). Assignments: Students must submit summary of reading material prior to class.

Session 5	
Topics	TATE BRITAIN VISIT

Activity	We will explore the permeant exhibitions of the Tate Britain and consider how national identity is constructed through art. We will then look at the current exhibition of John Singer Sargent. Students will consider the various aspects of the changing exhibition: curational choices, purpose, and audience.
Readings and Assignments	Readings: History of the Tate https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/history-tate Assignments: Museum Worksheet

Session 6	
Topics	MUSEUMS AND COLONIALISM: WORLD HISTORY MUSEUMS
Activity	The material, historical, and conceptual connection between museums and colonialism. We will look into the current debate: what is the problem? And how do different museums react and respond to the growing criticism and demand for change?
Readings and Assignments	Readings: Duthie, Emily. "The British Museum: An Imperial Museum in a Post-Imperial World", Public History Review 18:12, 2011, pp. 12-25. Assignments: Students must submit summary of reading material prior to class. Midterm essay due March 1st, 23:59

Session 7	
Topics	Midterm Break

Session 8	
Topics	BRITISH MUSEUM VISIT
Activity	Continuing our discussion from last week, this week we will visit the British Museum and look at some of its most prominent objects. Many of them are contested, and are under demand to be returned to their places of origin. We will consider how these objects are displayed and discussed within the museum space, and we will also hear alternative narratives to those offered by the museum.
Readings and Assignments	Readings: The Parthenon Sculptures, The British Museum: https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection/parthenon-sculptures The Benin Bronzes, The British Museum: https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection/benin-bronzes

Session 9	
Topics	MUSEUM CONSERVATION, RESTORATION AND THE ETHICS AND ROLE OF SCIENTIFIC INTERVENTIONS
Activity	What is conservation? What does a conservator actually do? And how did this practice change and evolve over time? Conservation is one of the main functions of museums today, though it takes place mostly behind the scenes, and is therefore less known by the general public. Combining science, art historical knowledge, and ethics, conservation is a surprisingly complex and nuanced practice.

Readings and Assignments	<p>Readings: Eastop, Dinah. "Conservation Practices as Enacted Ethics", in Marstine, J. (ed.), Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics, Routledge, 2011, pp. 426-444 Molina, Sarah. "Sustaining the Life of Objects": https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/sustaining-lives-art-objects/2019-05</p> <p>Assignments: Students must submit summary of reading material prior to class.</p>
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Session 10	
Topics	RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION: THE WALLACE COLLECTION
Activity	We will meet with senior conservator for the Wallace Collection and hear about the work they do and the importance of conservation departments in museums today.
Readings and Assignments	

Session 11	
Topics	MUSEUM CURATION+ ESSAY WORKSHOP
Activity	How are histories narrated through objects? What can objects and material culture tell us about the past and the present, that text can't? We will look at several study cases of local history museums and see how they communicate with the public and how their social role today. The second part of class will be devoted to the final essay, and students will start to flesh out their ideas for their own exhibitions.
Readings and Assignments	<p>Readings: Watson, Sheila. (2015) 'Emotions in the history museum' in Message, K. and Witcomb, A. (eds) The International Handbooks of Museums Studies, Volume 1: Museum Theory, pp. 283- 301</p> <p>Assignments: Students must submit summary of reading material prior to class.</p>

Session 12	
Topics	THE CULT OF BEAUTY EXHIBITION
Activity	We will explore the Cult of Beauty exhibition and focus on storytelling and curation. Students will write a review of the exhibition.
Readings and Assignments	<p>Readings: The history of the Foundling Museum https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/our-story/history/</p>

Session 13	
Topics	MUSEUMS, COMMUNITIES, AND ACTIVISM
Activity	In the last in-class session we will consider museums as political sites. We will discuss this through two lenses. The first, museums that consider their purpose to be political, whether in their themes or in the communities that they serve. The second lens will be political actions within museums. From the suffragettes to Just Stop Oil, museums and works of art find themselves under attack by activists. We will ask if and how museums can function as political spaces; can art serve as a tool for political change? And how can museums change and adapt to new political and social realities?

Readings and Assignments	<p>Readings: Crooke, Elizabeth, "Museums and Community", in Macdonald, S. (ed.), A Companion to Museum Studies, Blackwell, 2006, pp. 170-185. Gauld, Nicola. "I Attack this Work of Art Deliberately': Suffragette Activism in the Museum", in Janes, R. and Sandell, R. (eds.), Museum Activism, Routledge, 2019, pp. 369-279.</p> <p>Assignments: Students must submit summary of reading material prior to class. Final essays due ...</p>
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Session 14	
Topics	BLACK CULTURAL ARCHIVES VISIT
Activity	We will hear from archivists from the Black Cultural Archives about the history and purpose of the archives, and the community they serve. We will also learn about the black abolitionist movement in Georgian London, and how the archives preserve this history, and continues it today. Students will have a chance to handle object from Benin, and we will see a different approach to these objects than the one offered by the British Museum.
Readings and Assignments	<p>Readings: History of the Black Cultural Archives: https://blackculturalarchives.org/our-story</p>

Session 15	
Topics	Student Exhibition Showcase
Activity	Students will present their curated exhibits
Readings and Assignments	All outstanding assignments due

Section III: Academic Policies and Standards

Academic Policies

Students are expected to review and understand all CEA CAPA student policies, including our [Academic Policies](#) and [Engagement Policy](#). CEA CAPA reserves the right to change, update, revise, or amend existing policies and/or procedures at any time. Additional requirements that may be associated with a specific course or program are addressed in the term syllabus.

Student Learning & Development Objectives

CEA CAPA has identified [Student Learning and Development Objectives \(SLDOs\)](#) for all programs in all locations: content in context, navigating differences, power and equity, critical thinking and intellectual curiosity, career and professional development, and sustainability and migration.

These are meta-level learning objectives that transcend coursework and are infused across all elements of program delivery, beyond specifics of course offerings, addressing student learning holistically and framing it a larger learning context.

