

## **ARTH 495/599 Objects and Archives in Art History: Curating an Exhibition**

Friday 10:30-1:10

Research Hall 201

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Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-2:00, Friday 2:00-3:00 or by appointment

### **Course description:**

In this class students will participate in every aspect of curating an actual exhibition.

Using original objects from the extensive collection of modern Latin American art at The Art Museum of the Americas in Washington, DC, students will choose an exhibition theme, write a proposal, create a checklist and select objects, propose and seek sources of funding, design the exhibition layout, conduct archival research, write wall text, design and write a short exhibition catalogue, create marketing materials, plan educational programs, help install and deinstall the show, and give gallery tours. The show will take place on George Mason University's Campus in the Fine Arts Gallery in April of 2017 and then, if possible, open at a later date at the Art Museum of the Americas in Washington, DC. This course will differ from the typical seminar in that it will explore the practical side of curatorial work in addition to scholarly research. Students will be expected to attend at least two class sessions on site at the Art Museum of the Americas as well as to conduct research in the museum's archives.

**Course Format:** This class will take the format of a workshop. You will be expected to turn in written material nearly every week.

### **Writing Intensive requirement (undergraduates):**

This course fulfills the Writing Intensive requirement in the Art History major. It does so through the 800-1000 word exhibition proposal and the 1000-1500 word wall text assignment.

Additionally, students have 4 exhibition related assignments of approximately 500 words each and 2 discussion board sessions. Written assignments will undergo a feedback/revision process before they are submitted as part of the final portfolio.

### **Research and Scholarship Intensive Course:**

This class is designated as a Research and Scholarship Intensive Course, which means that students are given the opportunity to actively participate in the process of scholarship and will make a significant contribution to the creation of a disciplinary-appropriate product.

In this RS course, students will:

- Engage in scholarly inquiry by reading and assessing primary and secondary art historical sources as well as assessing visual sources
- Perform specialized research resulting in an exhibition in the GMU Fine Art Gallery.
- Communicate knowledge from original scholarly research in a gallery talk.

### **Objectives:**

- To plan and organize an exhibition of visual art from start to finish
- To assume the role of curator and experience the many aspects of the job

- To perform specialized research on objects in the exhibition and to convey the results of your research to the class

**Course Requirements:**

- **Readings:** Complete all reading **before** the class. If a reading is listed under Feb. 1, for example, it should be completed **before** class on the 1<sup>st</sup> .
- **Attendance/Participation:** (10% of your grade) Since this class is designed as a seminar, class participation is essential. Participation refers to both the content of your verbal contributions as well as your attention and response to others’ comments. The GMU catalogue reads: “Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register...instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as *de facto* evidence of non-participation.” Each week you are required to read assigned material and come to class prepared to discuss ALL assigned readings. Your contributions to class discussions every week will determine your participation grade.
- **Checklist assignment:** (10% of your grade) Due Feb. 9 (this is a Thursday, it needs to be turned in before class on the 10<sup>th</sup>)
- **Exhibition proposal:** (20% of your grade) Due Feb. 24
- **Promotion/Publicity assignment:** (10% of your grade) Due Mar. 3
- **Exhibition design:** (10% of your grade) Due Mar. 10
- **Wall text assignment:** (20% of your grade) Due Mar. 24
- **Gallery talk:** (10% of your grade) Due Apr. 14, 21, or 28
- **Educational programs assignment:** (10% of your grade) Due Apr. 28
- **Final Portfolio** (compilation of above assignments): Due May 5

**Grading Standards:**

C is the average expected performance of a college Student. To receive a C you must complete all readings and assignments on time, demonstrate a basic knowledge of the material, and write competently (all assignments must be well organized and have correct spelling and grammar). To receive a B your work must be substantially better than average and to receive an A truly exceptional. A work is meticulously researched, well written, and imaginative and goes above and beyond the assignment.

A+	98-100	B	83-86
A	93-97	B-	80-82
A-	90-92	C+	77-79
B+	87-89	C	73-76

C- 70-72  
D 60-69

F 59 and low

### **Policies:**

- Students are responsible for all material covered in class (announcements, lectures, discussions) whether you are present or not.
- Late assignments are not acceptable. Any work turned in late without a valid written excuse (i.e. doctor's note) will be graded down 10 points per week late. If an assignment is not turned in by the last day of class you will be given a 0 for that assignment. If you are having difficulty completing an assignment please see me well before the assignment is due. If I am aware of your circumstances I am more than willing to work with you.
- Make-up presentations or extensions will be granted only in the case of documented emergencies.
- GMU operates with an **Honor Code**. It is clearly defined in the catalogue (<http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/>) **Plagiarism** (presenting someone else's ideas or words as your own without proper acknowledgement) violates the Honor Code. I will notify the Honor Committee concerning possible infractions.
- All communications with the professor and fellow students should follow the core rules of Netiquette <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html> . When in doubt be polite and courteous.
- GMU requires you to activate your GMU e-mail account to receive official campus communications. If you prefer to use another address, you must activate the e-mail forwarder. I will use GMU addresses exclusively.
- Accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities, in accordance with law and university policies. Students requiring accommodations must register with the University's Disability Resource Center and produce documentation <http://ds.gmu.edu/documentation/> . Please do this well **before** the first test or presentation in case alternate arrangements need to be made.
- If English is your second language, I encourage you to turn in a rough draft of your paper at least one week before it is due. If needed I will recommend that you work with the Writing Center. **All final papers must be in good standard English.**

### **Other important resources:**

- Diversity
  - Mason values diversity; through the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education (ODIME), Mason seeks to create and sustain inclusive learning environments where all are welcomed, valued, and supported
- Religious holidays
  - University Life religious holiday calendar <http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/> it is the obligation of students, within the first two weeks of the semester, to provide faculty members with the dates of major religious holidays on which they will be absent due to religious observances
- Student privacy
  - student privacy and student rights under FERPA <http://registrar.gmu.edu/ferpa/>
- Student services
  - Online Education Services, University Libraries <http://library.gmu.edu/for/online>

- Writing Center <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>
- Counseling and Psychological Services <http://caps.gmu.edu/>

**Important dates:**

Jan. 30	Last day to add classes
Feb. 17	No class (I'm at a conference)
Feb. 24	Last day to drop classes
Mar. 17	No class (Spring break)
Apr. 12	Exhibition opens
May 5	Last day of class/portfolio due

**Required texts:**

George, Adrian. *The Curator's Handbook: Museums, Commercial Galleries, Independent Spaces* Thames & Hudson, 2015.

**Recommended texts** (select readings from these texts will be posted on blackboard):

Greenberg, Reesa, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne eds. *Thinking about Exhibitions* London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Marincola, Paula ed. *What Makes A Great Exhibition?* Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006.

**Schedule of weekly topics and required reading assignments:**

**Jan. 27** Introduction: Choosing an Exhibition Theme

**Feb. 3** The Role of the Curator: Selecting Objects

\*We will meet at the Art Museum of the Americas at 10:30

201 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006 (<http://museum.oas.org/visit.html>)

Reading:

1. George "Introduction" 1-27
2. Martha Ward "What's Important about the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?" in Greenberg 451-464.
3. Robert Storr "Show and Tell" in Marincola 14-31.

Discussion board:

1. Read the assigned articles before posting to the discussion board
2. Respond to both discussion questions (these will be posted by Monday Jan. 30) and post at least 3-4 comments, or more if you like (meaning that you may add multiple comments or responses to a single thread).
3. You may engage with previous responses or add your own ideas.
4. Be sure to incorporate specific examples from the readings into your discussion. I will join in and guide the discussion.
5. **Be sure you have contributed to the discussion by 8pm on Thursday.**

**Feb. 10** Selecting Objects: Challenges and Considerations/Working with Archives

\*We will meet at the Art Museum of the Americas at 10:30

Reading:

1. George chapters 1 and 2, 28-67

**Exhibition Checklist Assignment:** due by Feb. 9 at 5pm (I will compile and print the list and bring it to class on Friday):

1. Add 2-3 objects related to the exhibition to the preliminary checklist on the discussion board in blackboard. Chose objects from the works we viewed last week at the museum or from the museum collection  
<http://www.artmuseumoftheamericas.org/collection/cpg15x/thumbnails.php?album=1>  
Our goal is to end up with approximately 30-50 objects to include in the exhibition. Be sure to upload an image and include artist, title, date, dimensions, medium.
2. Write a 1-2 sentence justification for your submissions. If there are selections already posted that you would like to dispute or reinforce, you may add justifications to previous entries.
3. The objects you choose will most likely be the objects you will be researching for your wall texts and gallery tours, so choose carefully.
4. We will work with the museum curator in class on Friday to finalize the checklist and assign each person 2-3 works on which to focus their research.

**Feb. 17** No class, I'm at a conference

Start doing background research for your exhibition proposal (due Feb. 24)

**Feb. 24** Exhibiting Cultural Identity/Exhibition Proposal Workshop

Reading (2, 3 & 4 for in class discussion):

1. George chapter 3, 68-87 (guidelines for preparing proposal)
2. Mari Carmen Ramírez "Brokering Identities: art curators and the politics of cultural representation" in Greenberg 21-38.
3. Thelma Golden with Glenn Ligon "With Our Faces to the Rising Sun" in Marincola 62-75
4. Ann Landi "Title Fights: How Museums Name Their Shows" Art News, Dec. 2013.  
<http://www.artnews.com/2013/12/09/how-museums-title-shows/>

**Exhibition proposal due:**

1. Create a bibliography of 8-10 scholarly sources to provide background research for the exhibition (include scholarly monographs, exhibition catalogue, and articles).
  - a. For books/exhibition catalogues search under "books & more"  
<http://library.gmu.edu/>
    - i. GMU catalogue
    - ii. WRLC (consortium library, books arrive within 2 days)
    - iii. Worldcat (books found in this catalogue need to be requested by interlibrary loan)
  - b. For articles see "articles & more" tab to search the following databases: (Art Full Text and Jstor provide downloadable pdfs. Other databases just provide a citation and you will have to go to the library to find the print periodical or request the article via interlibrary loan)
    - i. Art Full Text and Retrospective
    - ii. Artbibliographies Modern

- iii. BHA
  - iv. Handbook of Latin American Studies
  - v. Hispanic American Periodicals Index
  - vi. Jstor
2. Using your bibliographic research as background, write an 800-1000 word preliminary proposal for the exhibition. Be sure to include a catchy title, overview of the general theme: scope, chronological period, and geographic region. Also, write a general justification for the topic (current relevance, lack of coverage in previous exhibitions, audience interest) and a description of each thematic section (include at least three sections)
  3. Include 3-5 sample images to illustrate your proposal
  4. Write a description of and justification for any supplementary materials you would like to include in the exhibition: maps, diagrams, background music, interactive digital tools (within reason), etc.
  5. See sample proposals on blackboard
  6. Submit your proposal via the discussion board. Also bring 15 copies of your proposal to class. We will read and workshop the proposals in class. Selections from the best proposals will be compiled and edited for use as the introductory wall text and catalogue introduction. We will also compile a comprehensive bibliography for our exhibition from those submitted.

### **Mar. 3 Exhibition Theory/Promotion and Publicity**

Reading (2 & 3 for class discussion):

1. George chapter 4 and 5 (skim through so you can use for future reference)
2. Bruce W. Ferguson “Exhibition Rhetorics: material speech and utter sense” in Greenberg 191-200.
3. Mieke Bal “The Discourse of the Museum” in Greenberg 201-218.

### **Promotion assignment** (3-4 students each task):

1. Posters: design, print, and hang posters for the show around campus; look into media announcement in JC
  - a. Bring sample poster design to class; we will finalize selection and hang posters after this class
2. Social media: create social media content (facebook, twitter, instagram), share with appropriate venues (LAS, History, AVT) (see George p. 233)
  - a. Bring printout of sample text and image to class
3. Invitations: VIP list (donors, provost, dean, president, department chairs, others) design and send email invitations and/or print invitations (see George p. 220-226)
  - a. Design an evite or print invitation to bring to class
  - b. We will compile an invitation list in class
4. Newspapers:
  - a. Write a one page press release for the exhibition (see George p. 218); use excerpts from exhibition proposal; include 1-2 key images
  - b. Compile a list of student and local newspapers to contact for a feature or interview about the show

### **Planning the opening** (in class):

1. Food

2. Music
3. Speaker
4. Appreciation/Thanks

**Mar. 10** Considering Space: Exhibition Design

\*We will meet in the Fine Art Gallery in the Art and Design Building

Reading:

1. George chapter 7
2. Debora J. Meijers “The Museum and the ‘Ahistorical’ Exhibition” in Greenberg 7-20.
3. Valery Petrovich Savonov “The One-Picture Gallery” in Greenberg 297-305.

Discussion board:

1. Read the assigned articles before posting to the discussion board
2. Respond to both discussion questions (these will be posted by Monday Mar. 6) and post at least 3-4 comments, or more if you like (meaning that you may add multiple comments or responses to a single thread).
3. You may engage with previous responses or add your own ideas.
4. Be sure to incorporate specific examples from the readings into your discussion. I will join in and guide the discussion.
5. **Be sure you have contributed to the discussion by 8pm on Thursday.**

**Exhibition Design Assignment:**

1. Using the gallery floor plan in blackboard, propose an exhibition layout. On a separate sheet explain your organizational choices and the logic of your arrangement. Be sure to consider thematic sections. You should also consider placement of wall text, maps, or any other supplementary materials.
2. Bring in notecards labeled with title/artist and small sketch or small printouts of your 2-3 assigned objects. Be sure to include measurements. It would also be helpful to have strips of paper measured out in the width of your objects.
3. In class we will work on creating an exhibition design. We will work out which objects go on which walls and elaborate the sub-themes of the exhibition.

**Mar. 13-19** No class, spring break

Begin/continue researching assigned objects:

1. Conduct background research at the library on your artists
2. Make individual appointments to consult the archives at the Art Museum of the Americas, be sure to give Adriana [AospinaJ@oas.org](mailto:AospinaJ@oas.org) at least one week’s notice and notify her which files you would like to consult (artist’s name)
3. What to look for in the archive:
  - a. biographical information: training, key exhibitions, awards
  - b. Laudatory quotes from newspapers
  - c. Scholarly accounts that describe the significance of the artist and his/her work
  - d. Personal statements or letters that describe approach
  - e. If you find any letters, exhibition brochures, or photographs you would like to include in the exhibition, take a digital photograph of it and bring it in for consideration

### **Mar. 24** Wall Text

Reading (for in class discussion):

1. George: chapter 8 214-218
2. Ivan Karp and Fred Wilson “Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums” in Greenberg 251-267.
3. Ingrid Schaffner “Wall Text” in Marincola 154-167.
4. Wendy Earle “Technology in Museums—Less is More!” [http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/technology\\_in\\_museums\\_less\\_is\\_more/14433#.UtBhcPbhFPP](http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/technology_in_museums_less_is_more/14433#.UtBhcPbhFPP)

### **Wall Text Assignment:**

1. Write an exhibition label for a general audience for each of your assigned 2-3 objects. The exhibition label should be approximately one paragraph long (200-300 words) and explain the relevance of the object within the larger theme of the show. The labels should be based on your archival research at the Art Museum of the Americas.
2. Write separate bios (100-200 words) for the artists you worked on and explain his/her significance in the history of art, including training, majors exhibitions, and awards.
3. Upload your texts to the discussion board in blackboard. Also bring 5 printed copies to class.
4. We will exchange the wall text for peer review and close editing in class. Each entry must be clean and proof read before it can be submitted for printing.

### **Mar. 31** Exhibition Catalogue

\*We will meet in computer classroom #

Reading:

1. George chapter 6 124-151

Catalogue workshop:

1. Using Shutterfly, we will design a print on demand catalogue.
2. Be sure to bring your wall text and artists’ bios on a flash drive so we can incorporate them into the catalogue.
3. We will use place holders for the images until high quality photographs can be made

### **Apr. 3-7** Installation-throughout the week schedule TBD

Reading:

1. George chapters 9 and 10

\*Hire photographer (BFA or MFA student) to take high quality images of the artworks this week

### **Apr. 14** Gallery talks (5 presentations)

**Opening: Wednesday Apr. 12, 7:00 pm**

Reading:

1. George chapter 11

Gallery talks:

1. Prepare a 15 min. gallery talk on the 2-3 objects you researched
2. Talks should be comparative in focus. In other words, relate your images to other works in the gallery. How do they fit into the larger theme? How are they unique?

### **Apr. 21** Gallery talks (5 presentations)

Reading:



1. George chapter 12

**Apr. 28** Gallery talks (5 presentations)

**Educational Programs Assignment:**

1. Design a series of 3 workshops for elementary or high school students in conjunction with the exhibition. Each workshop should focus on a different concept, theme, or historical period and should involve active learning exercises (i.e. drawing, on-line research, treasure hunts—be creative here).
2. Write an overview of the overarching goals of the series (2-3 paragraphs).
3. Write a one-paragraph description of the proposed topic for each workshop. Indicate specific works of art that will be the focus of the workshop as well as how the material will be presented.
4. Draw up a list of instructions for your students for each workshop. These instructions should include a list of learning goals and expected outcomes.

**May 1-5** De-Installation-throughout the week schedule TBD

**Final Portfolios due May 5**

Portfolios should include revised versions of the following (revisions should take into account professor's and peers' comments):

1. Checklist assignment
2. Exhibition proposal (your version)
3. Promotion/Publicity assignment
4. Exhibition design (your version)
5. Wall text assignment
6. Educational programs assignment