

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 3:00-4:00 or by appointment

Course description:

In this class students will participate in every aspect of curating a small exhibition and installing art around campus. Using original objects from the George Mason University's Art Collection, students will choose a theme, write a proposal, create a checklist and select objects, design layout/placement of objects, conduct archival research, write wall text, design and write a short exhibition catalogue or exhibition website, create marketing materials, plan educational programs, help install and deinstall works, and give tours. This course will differ from the typical seminar in that it will explore the practical side of curatorial work in addition to scholarly research.

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 600-1000 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 on GMU campus
- 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:

- During this course you will be working on 2 simultaneous projects:
 - Group exhibition of Haitian art in the ½ Gillespie Gallery, Art and Design Building: opening April 8
 - “Selections from the Collection” in the ½ Gillespie Gallery, Art and Design Building: opening April 8
 - Graduate students will select 2 objects from GMU collection to research, write wall text, and install
 - Undergraduate students will select 1 object from GMU collection to research, write wall text, and install
- The course will take a considerable amount of time especially during installation weeks. As with any museum exhibition, please be ready for extra unexpected issues to arise.
- **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 1st.
- **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.
- **Object selection assignment (collection objects):** (10% of your grade) Due Feb. 18
- **Exhibition proposal (Haitian art):** (20% of your grade) Due Feb. 25
- **Promotion/Publicity assignment (Haitian Art):** (10% of your grade) Due Mar. 4 (revise and finalize by Apr. 1)
- **Exhibition design (Haitian Art):** (10% of your grade) Due Mar. 11
- **Wall text assignment (collection objects/Haitian art):** (20% of your grade) Due Mar. 25
- **Gallery talk :** (10% of your grade) Due Apr. 15, 22, or 29

- **Educational programs assignment:** (10% of your grade) Due Apr. 29
- **Final Portfolio** (compilation of above assignments): Due May 6

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	C+	77-79
A	93-97	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D	60-69
B	83-86	F	59 and low
B-	80-82		

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. 31	Last day to add classes
Feb. 7	Last day to drop classes
Mar. 18	No class (Spring break)
Apr. 8	Exhibition opens
Apr. 11-15	Opening Reception TBD
May 6	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. 28 Introduction

Feb. 4 Introduction to GMU's Art Collection

*We will meet at Gillespie Gallery in the Art and Design Building. Group 1 meets at 10:30/Group 2 meets at 11:45

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. 31) 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 at least once by 8pm on Wednesday and submitted your final post by mid-night on Thursday.**

Feb. 11 Object Selection (GMU collection)

Small group sessions in the Gillespie Gallery, Art and Design Building (preparation for **Object Selection** assignment due next week)

10:30-11:00 3 students

11:00-11:30 3 students

11:30-12:00 3 students

12:00-12:30 3 students

12:30-1:00 3 students

*Take a picture on your phone of the objects on which you wish to focus, and make a note of object data for assignment

*If you need more time to make your selection, you can schedule a time to return to the gallery over the course of the next week

Reading:

1. George chapters 1 and 2, 28-67

Feb. 18 Haitian Art: Guest lecture with Donor

We will meet in the Gillespie Gallery. We will determine whether to use all or a portion of the donated works in the exhibition. Each student will choose 1 painting on which to focus and write a **wall text**.

Background reading:

2. Dash, J. Michael. "The Visual Arts & Architecture" in *Culture & Customs of Haiti*, Greenwood Publishing Group, inc., 2000, 135-152, on blackboard
3. Poupeye, Veerle. *Caribbean Art*. World of Art. New York, N.Y: Thames and Hudson, 1998 "Introduction" 9-24; "Popular Religion, the Festival Arts and the Visionary" 81-110, on blackboard

Object Selection Assignment (Collection objects):

1. Choose 1-2 (1 undergrads/2 grads) objects from the GMU collection on which you would like to focus for the semester.
2. Upload each image as a separate post to the discussion board on blackboard and note artist, title, date, dimensions, medium.
3. Write a justification for each object, and preliminary thoughts on where you might like to install the work on campus. Start with a close formal analysis of the object (describe it in detail). What drew you to the object you chose? Why do you think the GMU community should learn more about the object? Which university space do you think would be the most appropriate for display and why? (+/- 500 words per object)
4. You will work with me and the museum curator to finalize your selections for research and display. (See **wall text** assignment for research instructions)

Feb. 25 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/> (this text relates to proposal)

Exhibition proposal due (Haitian Art):

1. See sample proposals on blackboard
2. Using sources from the class bibliography on blackboard, write an 800-1000 word preliminary proposal for an exhibition of the Haitian paintings in the GMU collection. [This can be a proposal for an *ideal* exhibition, and does not necessarily have to be feasible within the class framework]. 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/historical relevance, lack of coverage in previous exhibitions, audience interest) and a description of each thematic section (include at least three sections)
 - a. If you find additional sources, you may add them to the class bibliography
 - b. Your proposal may include comparative or contextual images outside the collection (our final exhibition will not include these)
3. Include 3-5 representative images to illustrate your proposal (images should be chosen from the collection).

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. Submit your proposal via the discussion board. Also bring 17 copies of your proposal to class. We will read and workshop the proposals in class. Selections from the strongest proposals will be revised and edited by **Mar. 25** for use as the introductory wall text and catalogue introduction.

Mar. 4 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 (Haitian Art) (5-6 students each task):

*Preliminary mockups are due Mar. 4; final versions should be revised and launched by Apr. 1

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/website: create social media content (facebook, twitter, instagram), share with appropriate venues (LAS, History, AVT, AAAS) (see George p. 233)
 - a. Work with Visual Resources Curator, Stephanie Sheridan
 - b. Bring printout of sample text and image to class
 - c. Website will evolve over the semester. You can start a preliminary mockup. Final version will include wall text from the exhibition and installation photographs.
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
5. Exhibition brochure:
 - a. Work on mockup of design with sample images
 - b. Text will derive from final wall text for the exhibition

Planning the opening (in class):

1. Food
2. Music
3. Sponsors

Mar. 11 Considering Space: Exhibition Design

*We will meet in the Gillespie Gallery, 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. 7) 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 at least once by 8pm on Wednesday and submitted your final post by mid-night on Thursday.**

Exhibition Design Assignment (Haitian Art):

1. Using the gallery floor plan on blackboard, propose an exhibition layout. On a separate sheet explain your organizational choices and the logic of your arrangement. You may hand draw your layout or use a digital platform.
 - Create thematic sections. These can be based on formal properties of the works (color or shape), subject matter, chronology, or something else. Which images should we see first as we enter the gallery? Which images should be highlighted? Why?
 - Propose placement of wall text, maps, or any other supplementary materials. Where are the best sight lines for this material? Which images should be in proximity to supplementary materials? How much text is too much or too little? Find a balance between explanation and visual impact.
2. 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. I will bring in printouts of the art works to use in the space.

Mar. 18 No class, spring break

Begin/continue researching collection objects (to be submitted as part of **wall text** assignment):

1. Conduct background research at the library on your artists/objects:
 - a. Biographical information: training, key exhibitions, awards
 - b. Scholarly accounts that describe the significance of the artist and his/her work
 - c. Historical context: movement to which work pertains, social environment in which it was produced
2. Create bibliography of 8-10 sources for each object (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
- 3. Annotate your additions to the bibliography with a reason for inclusion. What do your selected texts add to the understanding of the topic?

Mar. 25 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

Wall Text Assignment (collection objects):

1. Finalize your bibliography of 8-10 sources for each the collection objects you are researching (see above)
2. Using your bibliography write an exhibition label for a general audience for each of your assigned objects. The exhibition label should be approximately one paragraph long (200-300 words) and clearly and engagingly written. **There is nothing worse than a wordy or boring wall text!** Start with a formal analysis that guides the viewer through the important aspects of the work. Then include a few sentences about the historical relevance of the object (within its art historical movement and/or social historical context). If relevant, you may also discuss how the object ended up in the collection.
3. 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.
4. Upload your texts to the discussion board in blackboard. Also bring 5 printed copies to class. Each wall text should have 3 sections: 1) Object description, 2) biography, 3) bibliography
5. 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.

Wall Text Assignment (Haitian objects):

1. Write an exhibition label for a general audience for your assigned object. The exhibition label should be approximately one paragraph long (200-300 words) and clearly and

engagingly written. Start with a formal analysis that guides the viewer through the important aspects of the work. You may also discuss the specifics of the subject matter. For Haitian objects, historical context/donor information will be discussed in the introductory wall text.

2. Upload your texts to the discussion board in blackboard. Also bring 5 printed copies to class. Haitian art wall text should will only have 1 section: Object description
3. 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.

In class: Introductory Wall Text on Haitian Art

- a. I will bring excerpts from proposals to class and assign small groups to work on sections of introductory text
- b. Introductory text +/- 500 words
- c. Artist bio +/- 200 words

Apr. 1 Installation: Collection objects-throughout the week and on Friday, schedule TBD
Finalize all **promotion assignments** from **Mar. 4**

Reading:

1. George chapter 6 124-151

Apr. 8 Installation Haitian art-throughout the week and on Friday, schedule TBD
Gillespie Gallery, Art and Design Building

Reading:

1. George chapters 9 and 10

Apr. 11-15 Opening date and time TBD

Apr. 15 Gallery talks (8 presentations on collection objects)

Reading:

1. George chapter 11

Gallery talks:

1. Prepare a 5 min. (per object) gallery talk on the 2-3 objects you researched
2. Discuss how and why you chose your object; give us some background on the piece and the artist; discuss why you chose to hang it where it is.

Apr. 22 Gallery talks (8 presentations on collection objects)

Reading:

1. George chapter 12

Apr. 29 Gallery talks (Haitian art: 3 teams)

1. Each team should come up with a hook or thematic way to present the Haitian galleries
2. Talks should include:
 - a. Background information about Haitian art
 - b. Donation and relation to GMU collection
 - c. Selection of works to highlight

- d. Process of preparing the exhibition
3. Talks should be about 15-20 minutes in length
4. Faculty and students will be invited to attend these talks

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 or theme 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 6 Closing discussion

Final Portfolios due May 6

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

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