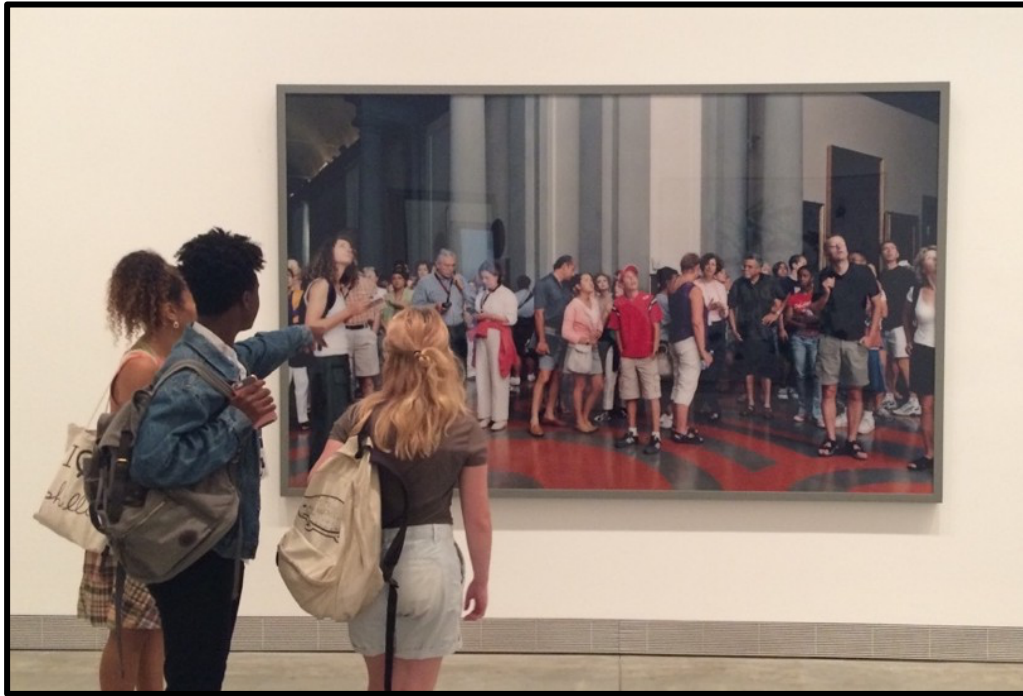


HART B275: Museum Studies: History, Theory, Practice

Professor: Monique Scott

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This course provides students an in-depth introduction to the history, theory and practice of museums. It approaches the museum as a site of critical inquiry for some of the most pressing social, cultural and political concerns of the late 19th, 20th and early 21st century. The course also introduces students to the interdisciplinary theoretical discourse and debates that ground museum studies as a discipline. Using the museums of Philadelphia as a laboratory, we will spend time examining museums in practice and meeting with a range of museum professionals in art, anthropology, and science museums. Through forays into museum practice and museum scholarship, students will come to understand the significance of the modern museum historically, at present, and into a future filled with new opportunities.

Students will gain an appreciation for:

- The history of museums as institutions of recreation, education and leisure and how the museum itself became a symbol of power, prestige and sometimes alienation
- Debates around the ethics and politics of collecting objects of art, culture and nature
- The museum as a “cultural text”, subject to the same form of critical inquiry as other objects of study
- An experience-based framework for understanding the museum, which centers on students’ own experiences in the museum, as well as the experiences of various professionals that work in the museum (educators, security guards, docents, curators etc)
- The synergies between museological theory and museum practice

Week	Date	Topic	Presenters	Field Trip
1	9/3	Introduction to the Course		
2	9/10	Introduction to Museum Studies		
3	9/17	Foundations of the Museum	Group 1	
4	9/24	Exhibiting Culture	Group 2	
5	10/1			Penn Museum
6	10/8	Exhibiting Art	Group 3	
		<i>fall break</i>		
7	10/22			PMA
8	10/29	Exhibiting Science	Group 4	
9	11/5			Franklin Institute
10	11/12	Museum Ethics	Group 5	
11	11/19	Museum Activism	Group 6	
		<i>thanksgiving break</i>		
12	12/3	Exhibit Working Session		
14	12/10	Final Group Presentations		

MUSEUM VISITS

We will visit Philadelphia museums for three class sessions. In these instances, the Museum is our classroom or “laboratory.” These museum visits are integral to the course and should not be missed. The museum visits will be of no cost to students, and I will provide SEPTA instructions for each visit. I also importantly ask that students engage with the museum professionals we encounter during our museum visits **attentively and respectfully**. Please be ready to ask questions and engage in conversation. These museum curators and museum professionals are taking time out of their busy days to meet with you as a favor to me. (And who knows where a meaningful connection or internship might grow!)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) Class Participation: (30%)

Students are required to attend class, do all of the required readings and assignments and actively participate in discussions based on their readings of the assigned material. In addition to lectures, learning in this class will happen heavily through discussions and group activities. Therefore, the best way to learn and to perform well in this class is to participate and engage with your classmates and me.

Consistent attendance is essential to your progress and participation. Students must provide a valid explanation for any missed classes; please contact me, if possible, before class to explain, or within 24 hours of the missed class. In the case of a sustained medical issue or repeated illnesses, we will need to work through your dean.

2) Weekly Discussion Leaders: (20%)

Each week, a group of students will serve as discussion leaders to guide and moderate an in-class discussion relevant to the readings. Discussion leaders should discuss the readings by: pulling out a key topic or topics of interest from the readings and connect the discussion to a case study (or case studies) from the current world of museums (not a museum example from the assigned readings). The discussion leaders should prepare slides to prompt interesting, thought-provoking conversation and may even suggest group work. They should incorporate visual images of the museum or museum exhibitions used as case study. Slides should not be a summary of readings. Please upload any links or materials you'd like to share with the class on Moodle by the Tuesday at noon prior to class.

3) Weekly Reading Responses: (20%)

All students should submit weekly reading responses about that week's readings before midnight on the Tuesday prior to class. Your first reading response is due next week! These short essays should contain your critical reflections on the readings and should include citations. These responses should be approximately 2-3 pages (double spaced). These are ungraded but please feel free to contact me to check in about how you're doing.

Note: Students serving as Discussion Leaders DO NOT NEED to submit a Reading Response for the week of their presentation.

Museum Week Responses:

On the weeks that we visit museums, no formal reading response is due on Tuesday. Instead, students should prepare an informal reflection on the museum visit and associated readings after the visit. These should be submitted by midnight on Moodle (same day while things are fresh in your head!). Please take a look at your classmates' reflections as well!

4) THE MID-TERM: Exhibition "Critiques (10%)

Due Friday Nov 13 (via email by midnight); 3-5 pages; See Moodle for description & sample

Students will conduct an *informal* evaluation of a museum exhibition they are visiting the first time (in the Philadelphia area or elsewhere). The goal of this exercise is analyzing the ways in which the various elements of the museum visit produce an experience in an exhibition. Students should consider things such as the signs leading up to the museum and the museum

architecture to the gallery design and exhibition layout and the labels and storyline of the exhibition. Students should also attend to their sensory experiences and emotions as they experience the museum space and the exhibition. For example, what emotions do you feel entering the space (enthusiasm, awkwardness, excitement intimidation, familiarity)? What emotions do you feel in relation to other museum visitors (sense of community, alienation)? What emotions do you feel encountering the exhibition for the first time (awe, sadness, nostalgia, inspiration)? What does the exhibition do for your sense of your self, your identity (your sense of politics, gender, nationalism, class, age etc.)

5) **GROUP PROJECT: Exhibition Proposal: (20%-- and, immeasurably, because you care)**
Due Friday 12/18 (via email by midnight)

Students will collaborate in groups on the production of an exhibition proposal using objects from the College's collections. Working in groups of four or five, you will meet weekly in the last hour of class to design the exhibition—(1) browsing the collections and choosing objects of interest; (2) determining the exhibition theme and goal; (3) researching specific objects for display & (4) ultimately developing the overall exhibition proposal with introductory text and labels for each object. Note: each group member will individually choose two objects to research and will write labels for those objects. The final exhibition proposal should be a comprehensive overview of the exhibition compiled by everyone in the group. Note: Students can call upon the Special Collections staff for research relevant to particular objects: <https://www.brynmawr.edu/lits/lits-staff-department#Speccoll>

At the end of the semester, you will present your works-in-progress exhibition proposal to the class. Wahoo! Presentations are limited to @20 minutes. Because the presentation happens prior to the deadline for the final paper, the presentation really is a “work-in-progress” opportunity to get feedback from your classmates.

Because this group assignment is hard to grade, it is only 10% of your grade. BUT the assignment is a very significant ongoing responsibility, and one that really shows your commitment to our class. Also teamwork makes the dreamwork; give your most to the assignment for the sake of your team. If you need to talk to me with concerns about your ability to contribute to this work or about group dynamics, please talk to me.

NOTE: How to Submit Written Assignments

Submit all written assignments (weekly reading responses & midterm) to me via email with the document saved as your name, date and assignment title. For example:

Scott, M_ Exhibiting Art Reading Response_11.22.21

Scott, M_ Exhibition Critique_10.22.21

READINGS

This course has one text that we'll revisit throughout the course (available by PDF on Moodle):
Macdonald, Sharon. 2006 *A Companion Guide to Museum Studies*. London: Blackwell.

Articles are available as PDFs on Moodle.

Students can also take advantage of the Library's Museum Studies Research Guide:
<https://guides.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/c.php?g=570906&p=3963262>

Week 2 (9/12): Introduction to Museum Studies

- Mason, Robinson and Coffield (2018) *Museum and Gallery Studies: the Basics* pp. 10-53
- Macdonald, Sharon. "Expanding Museum Studies: An Introduction" (In Macdonald, 2006)
- Mason, Rhiannon "Cultural Theory and Museum Studies" (In Macdonald, 2006)

Week 3 (9/19): Foundations of the Museum

- Abt, Jeffrey "The Origins of the Public Museum" (In Macdonald, 2006)
- Rydell, Robert W. "World Fairs and Museums" (In Macdonald, 2006)

Week 4 (9/26): Exhibiting Culture

- Kuper, Adam. (2023) *The Museum of Other People: From Colonial Acquisitions to Cosmopolitan Exhibitions*, pp 2-72 (Chapters 1-3). Pantheon: New York City

Week 5 (10/3): Penn Museum visit

- [Check moodle for links and readings](#)

Week 6 (10/10) Exhibiting Art

- McClellan, Andrew (2003), "A Brief History of the Art Museum Public" *Art and Its Publics* Blackwell: Oxford, pp1-50.
- Eilean Hooper Greenhill (2000), "Changing Values in the Art Museum: rethinking communication and learning" *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 6:1, 9-31

FALL BREAK

Week 7 (10/24) Visit to the Philadelphia Museum of Art

- [Check moodle for links and readings](#)

Week 8 (10/31): Exhibiting Science

- Conn, Steven. Science Museums and the Culture Wars (In Macdonald, 2006)
- Rader, Karen and Victoria Cain (2008) "From natural history to science: display and the transformation of American museums of science and nature." *Museums and Society*, Jul. 2008. 6(2) 152-171

Week 9 (11/7): Visit to the Franklin Institute/Academy of Natural Sciences

- Check moodle for links and readings

Week 10 (11/14): Museum Ethics—Collecting, Conservation & Care

- Marstine, Janet (2011) *Museum Ethics*. pp. 1-23
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/27/arts/design/hauser-and-wirth-nyc-museum-shows.html>
- TBD

Week 11 (11/21): Museum Activism

- Janes, Robert and Richard Sandell, (2019) *Museum Activism* "Posterity has arrived: The necessary emergence of museum activism" (Chapter 1)
- Reilly, Maura (2018) "What is Curatorial Activism?" *Curatorial Activism*. Thames and Hudson: London

Take a look at these additional links, if you'd like:

- Social Justice & Reform Resources List: chrome- <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Social-Justice-Resources-for-Museums.pdf>
- <https://publications.risdmuseum.org/grad-show-2021-liberal-arts/kyung-eun-lee>

Statement of (Reciprocal) Care

I care about you. I hope that each student can thrive in the inclusive learning community that we co-create. I also care about your wellbeing as a whole student, inside and outside of the classroom. If you have any challenges or concerns about the classroom environment, or you have challenges or concerns in your life that are affecting your performance in the classroom, please reach out to me. If you are finding it difficult to balance your workload and your wellbeing, please let me know. I'm happy to support you in the best way I can and to connect you with resources on campus that can support you. Please reach out!

I also hope you will care about me. I hope that you will extend me some grace if I make mistakes or if things arise in my life that require us to change our schedule. I also hope that you have respect for me, my experience and my expertise, even though I can be quite informal in the classroom. Also, I am a woman of color that discusses race and equity quite a bit as it applies to museum studies. I often call upon my extensive experience studying perceptions of Africa and race in museums, and my experience being a Black woman anthropologist working in elite predominantly white museums. If you are ever uncomfortable with these race discussions, please talk to me. It will be a safe space for discussion. My comfort in the classroom depends on your comfort in the classroom!

Campus-wide Policies

Access and Disability Statement:

I am committed to partnering with you on your academic and intellectual journey. I also recognize that your ability to thrive academically can be impacted by your personal well-being and that stressors may impact you over the course of the semester. If the stressors are academic, I welcome the opportunity to discuss and address those stressors with you in order to find solutions together. If you are experiencing challenges or questions related to emotional health, finances, physical health, relationships, learning strategies or differences, or other potential stressors, I hope you will consider reaching out to the many resources available on campus. These resources include MySSP, the Office of Academic Support, the Health and Wellness Center, Counseling Services, Access Services, Religious and Spiritual Life, the Pensby Center, Alliance of Multicultural Organizations, Peer Mentors, Peer Tutors, CDAs, and the Writing Center.

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Access Services. Students can call 610-526-7516 to make an appointment with the Director of Access Services, Deb Alder, or email her at dalder@brynmawr.edu to begin this confidential process. Once registered, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share the verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>) If, at any point in the semester, a disability or personal circumstances affect your learning in this course or if there are ways in which the overall structure of the course and general classroom interactions could be adapted to facilitate full participation, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Title IX Statement:

Bryn Mawr is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive living and learning environment where all can feel secure and free from harassment. All forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic violence, and dating violence are violations of Bryn Mawr's policies, whether they occur on or off campus. Bryn Mawr faculty are committed to helping to create a safe learning environment for all students and for the College community as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination, harassment, or violence, know that help and support are available. Staff members are trained to support students in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more.

The College strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of sexual misconduct. Please be aware that all Bryn Mawr employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors, clergy, and healthcare providers) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the Bi-College Title IX Coordinator, Kimberly Taylor.

Information about the College's Sexual Misconduct policy, reporting options, and a list of campus and local resources can be found on the College's website: <https://www.brynmawr.edu/titleix/>