**Landscapes of Meaning: Museums and Their Objects**

ANTH/ARCG 769, AMST 716, HSAR 716

Professors Anne Underhill and Cyra Levenson

Tuesdays, 9:25 – 11:15 am

51 Hillhouse Avenue, seminar room, first floor

office hours by appointment ([anne.underhill@yale.edu](mailto:anne.underhill@yale.edu), [cyra.levenson@yale.edu](mailto:cyra.levenson@yale.edu))

**Goals**

This seminar explores how museums shape our understanding of the objects they contain through collecting, interpretation, and display. Participants also will discuss broader theoretical and methodological issues such as the roles of museums in society, relationships between museums and communities, management of cultural heritage, and various issues relevant to museum practice. This seminar will take advantage of the rich collections at Yale in museums and other spaces. There will be some meetings at the Peabody Museum and the Yale University Art Gallery, both in public spaces and behind the scenes, in order to explore the many dimensions of meaning created therein. Thank you for your patience as we complete the development of this new course. There also will be several guest speakers and hopefully an optional field trip during fall break.

**Assignments and Grading:**

Written comments and reflections: 10%

Ongoing short reflections/comments on weekly class themes, readings, and speakers exploring topics such as: What issues were presented that were surprising or new? What are the most important concepts or questions discussed? What issues are important that were not addressed? Are there points of connection (or not) between readings and guest presentations? 500 words, Due by Wednesday evening following each class

-Two short project papers: 25% each

1. Visit a museum at Yale or in New Haven, making observations about one or more of the following: the building entrance and architecture, gallery spaces, signage, printed materials, staff interactions, visitor profiles. Can you discern the mission of the institution from your observations? Also consider the website and mission statement as articulated by the institution. Describe your observations and conclusions. 2500-3000 words. \*\*Due in class Tues. Sept. 29 (note the earlier meeting time below for that specific day)
2. After visiting one of the museums on campus, select one or more related objects for further study. First, spend time in front of each object, sketch and write a visual analysis. Then research the objects, looking for information such as biography of the artist/creator, time and place of origin, a summary of how the work was received, understood and/or used in its time, what scholars such as art historians and anthropologists think about the work today. After synthesizing the information you have gathered, create a mock gallery experience or interpretive tool based on your research to help an audience have a deeper engagement with the object. Include a bibliography and refer to any relevant course readings. Write a paper summarizing your research (both personal and bibliographic). Roughly 2500-3000 words. \*\*Due in class Tues. Oct. 20

-Final project: 40%.

Working in small groups, students will participate in one of several interpretive projects aimed at museum audiences on campus including an exhibition display, a podcast series, and a research project. Students are expected to workshop project ideas both in-and-outside of class. It will be up to each individual to define and execute a meaningful contribution to the whole. We aim to finalize projects and teams by September 22. \*\* Due by 5:00 pm on Monday December 14

**Class schedule:**

**Tuesday September 8: Introduction: the study of museums and objects at Yale, and beyond**

**Tuesday September 15: Objects: perception, interaction, and meaning-making**

meet in class and later walk to the Yale University Art Gallery

Readings:

Miller, P. (2014). *How Objects Speak,* Chronicle of Higher Education, first published online August 11, 2014. <http://chronicle.com/article/How-Objects-Speak/148177/>

Newman, G. Bartels, D., Smith, R.(2014)*Are Artworks More Like People Than Artifacts? Individual Concepts and Their Extensions,* in *“*Topics in Cognitive Science**:** The Tracking and Identification of Human Agents”, Volume 6, Issue 4, pages 647–662, October 2014 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/tops.12111/full>

(Newman et al. 2014 also on Classes V2 server as a pdf)

Additional readings posted on Classes V2 server:

Berger (1990) Chapter 1, Hooper-Greenhill 2012, Macdonald (2011)

**Tuesday September 22: Artistic** **production: the making of objects**

Readings:

Chiu 2014, Dietler-Herbich 1989, Knowles 2013

Also:

<http://www.charlierose.com/watch/50095895>

**Tuesday September 29: Object biographies: accessioning and managing collections in museums**

Go directly to the Peabody Museum of Natural History lobby, 9:00 am; to first meet Director David Skelly (and Professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies)

Readings on Classes V2 server: Gardner and Merritt 2012, Gerstenblith 2012.3

Short paper #1 due in class

**Tuesday October 6: Museums and the digital world**

Guest speaker: Ryan Hill, Nolen Curator of Education and Academic Affairs, Yale University Art Gallery

Readings: Bautista and Balsamo 2013, Isaac 2012, Witcomb 2012

Also: [*http://www.bgc.bard.edu/news/events/digital-interpretation.html*](http://www.bgc.bard.edu/news/events/digital-interpretation.html)

**Tuesday October 13: Issues in conservation and preservation: the Haitian portraits project**

Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, West Campus (we are working on arranging transportation for the class)

Guest speakers: Mark Aronson, Chief paintings conservator Yale Center for British Art, Keyjo Lee, PhD Candidate, History of Art and African American studies, Matthew Cushman, Haitian Project Conservator

Readings: Alexander and Alexander 2008, Book 2006, Sease 1998

**Tuesday October 20:** **Preparing exhibitions: goals and strategies**

Richard Kissel, Director of Public Programs, Peabody Museum; Matthew Hargraves, Chief Curator of Collections and Head of Collections Information and Access, Yale Center for British Art; Pam Franks, Deputy Director, Yale University Art Gallery

Readings: Alivizatou 2015, Coombes 2012, McKenna-Kress and Kamien 2013

Also: http://www.centerforbritishart.org/slavery-and-portraiture/audio

Short paper #2 due in class

Fall break for Wednesday-Friday this week (possible optional field trip)

**Tuesday October 27:**  **Collecting and Display**: **current legal and ethical issues**

Guest Speaker: James Whitman, Ford Foundation Professor of Comparative and Foreign Law, Yale Law School. [ASK JIM]

Readings: Curtis 2012, Gerstenblith 2012.1, Marstine 2012, Phelan 2012

link to Dean Holloway’s 2015 Freshman Address :

<http://yalecollege.yale.edu/open-conversation/yales-narrative-and-yours>

[https://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/style/2015/07/07/mfa-backs-down-over-kimono-event-response-protests/lv9NHcnpW0lsRE77d9hvkI/story.html](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__www.bostonglobe.com_lifestyle_style_2015_07_07_mfa-2Dbacks-2Ddown-2Dover-2Dkimono-2Devent-2Dresponse-2Dprotests_lv9NHcnpW0lsRE77d9hvkI_story.html&d=AwMFaQ&c=-dg2m7zWuuDZ0MUcV7Sdqw&r=H3_5NG9oGaOSu4_-B1ToHxeBSxIorWCGQvWYVVQKcq8&m=FAEEH_8hjNgSSvnzBhKK1kXm0FCe-0rqEoEGngItFJ0&s=l8LyNDL5AMkncksrJ1TTa0-KQZx7SOzlpBhcL03vkGM&e=)

**Tuesday November 3:** **Museums: serving communities in the 21st century; Yale and university museums in particular**

Guest Speakers: David Heiser, Head of Education and Outreach, Peabody Museum; and Jessica Sack, Jan and Frederick Mayer Senior Associate Curator of Public Education, Yale University Art Gallery

Readings: Bennett 2011, Chavarria and McBrinn 2015, Nightingale and Mahal 2012

Simon, The Participatory Museum, chapter 1 (and 5 if you have time)

<http://www.participatorymuseum.org/read/>

Burnham, R., & Kai Kee, E. (2011). *Teaching in the art museum: Interpretation as experience*. Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, Introduction (to be added to Classes V2 soon)

**Tuesday November 10: Challenges in preserving cultural heritage throughout the world, especially in times of conflict**

Dr. Stefan Simon, Director, Yale Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Readings: Bauer 2015, Gerstenblith 2012.2

**Tuesday November 17: Directing museums**

Guest Speaker: Jock Reynolds, Henry J. Heinz II Director, Yale University Art Gallery

Readings: Lowry 2013, Semmel 2013

**Tuesday November 24: no class, Thanksgiving break!**

**Tuesday December 1: Student presentations**

**Tuesday December 8: Student presentations**

Your final group projects are due Monday December 14 by 5:00 pm