

Performing the Museum

Course Description:

Museums occupy important roles in our cultural landscape, dedicated as they are to educating the public through archiving, collecting, and displaying artworks and cultural artifacts. In recent decades, art museums have increasingly turned to the work of performance-based artists. Taking this increased visibility as an initial entry point, this course explores the intersection of museums and performance. Over the quarter, we will explore a range of materials: a play based on a 19th century exhibition; essays on world's fairs and expositions; and artists like Marina Abramović and Andrea Fraser, whose performance works have been curated in museums. Of key interest to the course is the way in which nineteenth-century histories of displaying individuals and communities in museums and exhibitionary contexts informs how contemporary museums frame race and gender.

The course is divided into three parts:

- An initial focus on foundational ideas: the archive, the collection, and questions of historicization will frame our discussions around the term 'museum' and how it functions as performance;
- A focus on display: we will question how bodies are framed by and placed within museums; and
- A focus on a series of contemporary case studies. In this final unit, we will question how performers and museum curators negotiate staging performance in museum spaces.

Course Objectives:

1. To understand embodied experiences as key to gaining critical insight about museums and performance.
2. To articulate a definition of museum and performance that is useful for a student's own research interests.
3. To understand the archive, the collection, and display, and articulate each through the lens of performance.
4. To practice close reading, locating an author's project, thesis, and argument development, as well as the urgency of their argument—i.e. why did it matter to write this text?
5. To learn how to effectively use and integrate academic research into a final paper.
6. To practice and improve critical writing skills, with an emphasis on developing a thesis-driven essay.
7. To participate in class discussions, sharing ideas and responding to other students' contributions.

Course Requirements and Expectations:

Museum Visits

Throughout the quarter, students will visit four Los Angeles museums or cultural institutions. These visits are key to the course's methodology and are designed to a) give students the opportunity to learn about particular institutions in Los Angeles and b) frame their understanding of museums and performance through their first-hand experiences at each site.

Students are responsible for visiting: the Museum of Jurassic Technology; the Museum of Tolerance; the Fowler Museum, on UCLA's campus; and for attending a dance performance at the Hammer Museum (performances are April 15-17 and 22- 24). Students should consult the syllabus to note during which week we will discuss each site. The week *before* our class discussion, we will contextualize each museum and brainstorm how students might approach their trips. Students will need to hand in documentation (a ticket, program, etc.) to the instructor to verify their visit. Five percent of students' participation grade is based upon visiting each museum.

Response Papers

Response papers are designed to encourage close reading, clarify understanding of course readings, and can serve as a starting point for a student's final paper. Over the course of the quarter, students will turn in five responses. For the first two, students will be given a set of reading questions to answer. For the following two responses, students will be supplied with a broad question meant to direct their answer, and for the final paper, students will be asked to re-write, incorporating the instructor's edits, a previous response. Papers are due as a hard copy at the beginning of class. Review calendar for specific dates.

For responses three through five, a successful paper will: follow the conventions of an academic paper, begin with a simple thesis that relates the week's readings to each other and/or to our class topics, summarize the author(s) key argument, and end with a question(s) students might ask of the text.

Responses should adhere to MLA formatting guidelines (i.e., 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, double-spaced, footnotes or endnotes, 1 inch margins). Strict 500-word limit.

Final Paper

Students are responsible for a final research paper between 10 and 12 pages. The paper should draw upon the readings we have covered in class, as well as students' individual research. The final paper is a chance for students to focus in more depth on an area of museum performance of interest to them. Students might focus their research on a specific museum, a performance presented in a museum context, or apply theories of the museum and display to a non-museum or performance event. A one-on-one meeting with the instructor, a series of smaller assignments, and peer/instructor feedback will prepare students for the final paper.

A worksheet, which introduces students to research strategies is due week three. In week six, the class will workshop students' preliminary thesis statements. An abstract and annotated bibliography are also due. As the due dates for the smaller assignments approach, students will be given handouts with more specific instructions.

A first draft of the paper is due in class during week eight. Students will receive written feedback on their draft during week nine, in preparation for their final revisions. The final paper is due week eleven.

Grading will be determined based upon content, the quality of research, and clarity of writing. Final papers should adhere to MLA formatting guidelines (i.e., 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, double spaced, footnotes or endnotes, work cited page, 1 inch margins).

Participation

In-class Participation:

Students should arrive to class on time having completed the reading specified on the syllabus with questions and ideas about the reading. Students should contribute to the class discussion through

thoughtful comments/attentive listening.

Students will be graded based upon in-class participation as follows:

- An “A” student enlivens the classroom with her/his engaging questions and discussions. Her/his remarks are insightful and encourage fellow classmates to think differently about class materials. For example, an A student might relate course content to a recent news article she read or readings from another course.
- A “B” grade for participation is given to students who participate but who do so in a more passive fashion. For example, a “B” student might raise questions but does not always listen to peers’ contributions or waits for other students to open a discussion before speaking.
- A “C” is given to a student who may attend classes regularly, but refrains from participation.

Presentations:

Throughout the quarter, students will give two presentations: one informal five-minute description of their final project, which will be followed by five-minutes of suggestions and feedback from the class in week six, and one formal presentation on their final paper in week ten, for which students should prepare a seven to ten minute written presentation. Students will be graded on both of these presentations. A handout and grading rubric will be handed out in class to prepare students for their formal presentation.

In-Class Writing:

The last five minutes of each class will be spent doing an in-class writing exercise. Each student will be asked to think about how the performances, readings, and lecture material discussed that day help you to understand museums and performance in terms of three criteria: 1) Archive/repertoire, 2) Institutions, and 3) Display/exhibition.

NOTE: missing more than 2 classes (a full week of class) will cause a 5% reduction to your final grade for every subsequent class missed (so if you miss 3 classes, you will lose 5% from your final grade; 4 classes missed will result in a 10% deduction, etc.).

Readings:

All chapters and articles will be available as PDFs on the course website. Students will need to acquire hard copies of the two play texts on the syllabus: *Venus* by Suzan-Lori Parks and *36 Views* by Naomi Iizuka. These will be on course reserve and available for purchase at the campus bookstore.

Grades:

Grading Breakdown

Participation: 35%

Active in class participation: 10%

In-class writing: 5%

Informal presentation: 5%

Formal presentation: 10%

Museum visits: 5%

Response Papers: 15%

Final Paper: 50%

Research worksheet: 5%

Abstract: 5%

Annotated Bibliography: 5%

First draft: 10%

Final Paper: 25%

Grading Scale

97-100 A+

87-89 B+

77-79 C+

67-69 D+

59-below F

94-96 A 84-86 B 74-76 C 64-66 D
90-93 A- 80-83 B- 70-73 C- 60-63 D-

Plagiarism:

The school's rules on academic integrity must be followed; students will be held accountable for any violations of school policy.

Calendar

Part I: Foundations

WEEK ONE

Seminar One

What is Performance Studies? What are Museums?

- Introductory lecture on Performance and Museum Studies
- Review syllabus and assignments.

Seminar Two

The Archive: Between the Museum and Performance

- Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
 - "Acts of Transfer," pages 1-33.
- Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25.2 (1995): 9-63.
 - Read pages 9-11.

WEEK TWO

Seminar One

The Institution: Between the Museum and Performance

- Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
 - "The exhibition complex," pages 59-79.
- Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, Ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).
 - "Panopticism," and "Complete and austere institutions," pages 206-225.

Due at the beginning of class: Week one response paper.

Seminar Two

The Collection: Between Objects and Bodies

- Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).
 - "Objects of Desire," pages 132-166.
- ***Visit before class: The Museum of Jurassic Technology.***

Due at the beginning of class: Week two response paper

WEEK THREE

Seminar One

What do we historicize?

- Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach, eds., *Critical Theory and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).
 - Sandra L. Richards, “What is to be Remembered?: Tourism to Ghana’s Slave Castle-Dungeons,” pages 85-107.
- ***Visit before class: The Museum of Tolerance.***

Seminar Two

The Visitor-Centric Museum

- Guest roundtable with Theresa Sotto and Noelle Valentino from the Academic Programs Department at the Hammer Museum.

Due at the beginning of class: Week three response paper.

WEEK FOUR

Seminar One

Workshop on research strategies.

Due at the beginning of class: Research strategies worksheet.

Part II: Histories of Display

Seminar Two

Culture and Power on Display: Expositions and World’s Fairs

Guest Lecture from Professor Lucian Gomoll

- Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp, eds., *Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display* (Washington : Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).
 - Curtis M. Hinsley, “The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893,” pages 344-365.

WEEK FIVE

Seminar One

Displaying the Body: Constructions of Race and Gender

- Suzan Lori Parks, *Venus: a play* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1997).
- Watch before class: *Vénus Noire* (Black Venus, 2010) dir. Abdellatif Kechiche.
- Deborah Willis, ed., *Black Venus, 2010: They Called her ‘Hottentot,’* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).
 - Deborah Willis, Introduction, pages 3-11.
 - Michele Wallace, “The imperial gaze: Venus Hottentot, human display, and world's fairs,” pages 149-154.

Seminar Two

Displayed: Ways of Looking At and Looking Back

- Coco Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 38. 1 (1994): 143-167.
- Watch before class: *The Couple in the Cage: a Guatinaui Odyssey*, 1993 documentary.

Due at the beginning of class: Week five response paper.

WEEK SIX

Seminar One

Student presentation on research project.

Seminar Two

Performing Objects: Display as a Project of Redress

- Fred Wilson and Lisa G. Corrin, *Mining the Museum: An Installation* (Baltimore: Contemporary; New York: New Press, 1994).
 - Lisa G. Corrin, "Mining the museum: artists look at museums, museums look at themselves," pages 1-22.
- Enid Schildkrout, "Ambiguous Messages and Ironic Twists: *Into the Heart of Africa* and *The Other Museum*," *Museum Anthropology* 15.2 (1991): 16-23.
- Shelley Ruth Butler, *Contested Representations: Revisiting into the Heart of Africa* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1999).
 - "Entering the Debates," pages 1-12.
- ***Visit before class: Fowler Museum, UCLA.***

Due at the beginning of class: 500-word abstract and annotated bibliography.

Part III: Performing the Museum

WEEK SEVEN

Seminar One

Live Performance in the Museum

- Mark Franko and André Lepecki, "Editor's Note: Dance in the Museum," *Dance Research Journal* 46.3 (2014): 1-4.
- Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro, *Museum Highlights: the Writings of Andrea Fraser* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
- "Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk," pages 95-114.

Seminar Two

Labor in Museums

- Abigail Levine, "Being a Thing: the Work of Performing in the Museum." *Women & Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory* (2013): 1-13.

Due at the beginning of class: Week seven response paper.

WEEK EIGHT

Seminar One

Dancing with Museums

Guest lecture with Hammer Museum curator Aram Moshayedi (meet at the Hammer Museum)

- Claire Bishop, "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney," *Dance Research Journal* 46.3 (2014): 62-76.
- Aram Moshayedi, "Maria Hassabi: PLASTIC," *Hammer Projects Publications*, four pages.
- Thomas J. Lax, "Maria Hassabi, Glances," *MoMA Publication*, 2-11.
- Discuss: In-gallery performances at the Hammer Museum.

Seminar Two

Staging Art: Black Box/White Cube

- Naomi Iizuka, *36 Views* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2003).

Due at the beginning of class: First draft of final paper.

WEEK NINE

Seminar One

In-class peer-review workshop

Seminar Two

Filming the Museum

- Watch in class: excerpts from Frederick Wiseman's film, *National Gallery*.
- Watch in class: Aurore Gruel and Delphine Ziegler's dance-film, *Chantier des Collections*.

WEEK TEN

Seminar One

Student presentations on final papers.

Seminar Two

Student presentations on final papers.