

Spaces of Art:
The place of art in the contemporary museum, gallery and studio

KHC VA 102 A1
Fall 2013
Thursdays 6-9 pm
Room: KHC107

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Office hours: Thursdays 10 – 12

Office location: College of Fine Arts, 855 Commonwealth Ave, Room 314, 3rd Floor

Course Description

The goal of this course is for students to experience and reflect upon works of art within different architectural, institutional and cultural contexts. Though the focus will be on looking at work in three contemporary museums in Boston, students will also visit the intimate setting of the art studio, as well as several commercial galleries. In contrast to much of contemporary visual experience, which is mediated through screens and via printed material, students in this course will have the opportunity to give in-depth consideration to primary sources. Readings by theorists, artists, and critics will provide a broader context and raise important questions about the shifting role of art in public space (as well as the place of the artist in the private studio). The museums themselves provide a record of the rise of modernism in the 19th century to the post-everything 21st century. With first-hand experience looking at art, and in conversation with artists, curators, and other museum professionals, students will be challenged to think critically about the role of material form as related to meaning in specific works, and more broadly about the larger social context surrounding groups of work in an exhibition and institution. Writings by and about contemporary artists will help to deepen students' consideration of the museum as an institution that is not only a container for art and artifacts, but often an instigator of - or at least a subject and source for - recent works of art.

Most class lectures and discussions will take place at area museums, as on the syllabus (see the agenda for museum meetings at bottom of syllabus). Approximately every three weeks students will meet in the classroom at BU for a recap discussion and presentation on a new topic and assignment, with more background material and time for questions. The museums that will be visited - and compared - are the Museum of Fine Arts, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and The Institute of Contemporary Art.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course students should learn about and be able to:

1. *Consider the ways in which the contemporary museum reflects institutional and cultural values.*

2. *Understand how and why contemporary art is so different from historical art, and be able to speak and write clearly and persuasively about the relationship between form (materials and facture), content and context in a work of art.*
3. *Place a work of art culturally and historically, while also being sensitive to the particularity of an individual artist's choices about materials in relation to their biography and background.*
4. *Consider and use drawing as a form of seeing. Students will learn to use simple drawing methods taught in class to draw from works of art as an important means of understanding artistic choices. No previous drawing experience is necessary. Anyone can draw if they learn to see relationships.*
5. *Develop both creative and critical thinking by integrating conceptual ideas with intuitive practices such as drawing and on-site note-taking.*

Assignments / Grading:

- Sketchbook with drawings and research notes + short written responses: 20%

Spiral bound unlined blank book (specs to be given)

Purpose:

To record on-site impressions, ideas, visual thinking; to record thoughts and questions about the reading in preparation for writings; to prepare for class discussions. The larger point of this assignment is to develop the habit of response based on sitting with a place or idea as a means to go beyond first impressions.

Assignment:

Always bring your sketchbook to class and to the museum when you visit on your own. Each week, your sketchbook should include:

1. Notes from the reading ahead of each class meeting in response to weekly questions
2. Drawings done in class and independently
3. Notes in relation to the museum site / art in museum that connect what you see and experience to your reading

Evaluation:

You will copy or scan and email your notes to hand in with the related larger assignments. Grading will be based on thoroughness of in-person response to the museum / objects and connection of notes in museum to reading.

A high grade will be given to sketchbooks that are used consistently in response to experience, including the readings. As much as notes from the readings, sketchbook should include questions that arise from the readings and/or viewings.

- Discussion participation: 10%
- Blog assignment: 10%
- Midterm comparison and presentation at museum: 20%
- Final visual presentation in classroom with images / quotes: 15%
- Final 5 page curatorial proposal including images and 1 page press release or 5 page visual project proposal with reference to artists and supporting visual work and press release: 25%

Required Texts:

All readings (below) will be posted on Blackboard or can be found online through given links.

Attendance

Attendance in class is required, and is critical for successful completion of the course, since the class meets weekly and the point is to meet together on site. Missing more than one class will probably cause your grade to suffer, and missing three will bring it down.

Academic Dishonesty

Students are required to adhere to the Boston University and Kilachand Honors College Academic Conduct Codes. The Academic Conduct Code can be found at <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

Course Outline & Readings

Each week you will read related material prior to visiting museum, studios or galleries and review material again after your visit for a short written response. Please see specific instructions for the sketchbook and midterm/final project assignments.

Week 1. Introduction: Class format / Lecture:

Museums and shifting meanings in art from the late 19th – late 20th century

- **Readings/Reflection for week 2:**

Witold Rybczynski, "Art Inside the Walls" pp 120 – 138 in Looking Around: A Journey Through Architecture

Sebastian Smee, "New look rewrites museum founder's vision for her guests" *The Boston Globe*, January 21, 2010:

http://www.boston.com/ae/theater_arts/articles/2010/01/21/new_look_rewrites_museum_founders_vision_for_her_guests/

John Tittmann, "Distractions from the Gardner's Visceral Mission?" *The Boston Musical Intelligencer: a virtual journal and blog of the classical music scene in Boston*. January 16, 2010: <http://classical-scene.com/2012/01/16/gardners-visceral-mission/>

Please write 5 quotes or more quotes from the readings in your sketchbook prior to class. Make short notes about how each writer discuss the museum and museum architecture - and the Gardner Museum in particular - in relation to the rise of modernity. More specifically, how does each writer consider the role of beauty and aesthetics in the mission of the museum? How about "problems of modernity"?

Week 2. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum meeting. Possible visiting curator.

- **Reading / Reflection for week 3:**

Arthur Danto, "Museums and the Thirsty Millions" in After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History, pp 175 – 190.

Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins" pp 43 – 56 in The Anti-Aesthetic, edited by Hal Foster

Geoff Edgers, "Time for tinkering at the MFA's New Wing", *Boston Globe*, July 4, 2010.

http://www.boston.com/ae/theater_arts/articles/2010/07/04/putting_things_in_their_place_at_the_mfas_new_wing/?page=2

During / after the class meeting in the Gardner: Take notes about your own visceral response to the original museum and the Piano addition in class. Make an individual visit to the museum afterward. What

is compelling about each space? How does having one kind of space adjacent to the other change the experience of each? How is your reading of / your relationship to the artwork in the two different spaces different?

Danto and Crimp readings: Please write at least 5 quotes from each reading in your sketchbook. How do Danto and Crimp discuss the museum and museum architecture in relation to beauty and aesthetics?

Week 3. MFA meeting: The re-imagined archive.

Possible guest from MFA who directed installation of New Wing in conversation with architect with background in museum design

- **Blog assignment for Week 4: 2-page piece in style of newspaper/magazine blog post with supporting visual material (see full instructions)**

During / after the class meeting in the MFA: Take notes about your own visceral response to the original museum and the Foster Art of the Americas wing in class. Make an individual visit to the museum afterward. What is compelling about each space? How does having the Art of the Americas wing connected to the original museum building change your experience of each? How is your reading of / your relationship to the artwork on the different floors of the Art of the Americas wing different?

Based on all of the readings, what do you think has changed for museum audiences from the late 19th to the late 20th century? How do Danto and Crimp write about “problems of modernity” in a different way than Rybczynski?

Week 4. KHC Classroom meeting and blog presentations / discussion about readings and student experiences of both museums. Painting comparison project assigned due week 7 on paper / Weeks 7-8 to class

- **Readings for Week 5:**

“Foreword” by Lisa Wainwright, “Preface” by Mary Jane Jacob and “Introduction” by Michelle Grabner, pp ix - 14 in The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists
Sebastian Smee, selections from ebook Frame by Frame: Treasures Tucked Away in New England Museum Collections. Please read 7 entries of your choice and print 3 images from your reading for next class.
BR&S art blog “Art for Breakfast” entries: <http://artforbreakfast.org/>. Read at least 3.

Week 5. Classroom meeting in CFA room 306, 855 Commonwealth Avenue, 3rd floor The space of the studio:

Visiting artist presentation by nationally-known painter who works with historical imagery + studio visits with CFA professors + short drawing exercises in studio classroom.

- **Homework for Weeks 6-8: Midterm Comparison Project (see full instructions)**
Return to the MFA or Gardner on your own prior to Week 6 class and follow Comparison Project instructions.
- **Additional readings/viewing about the re-imagining of art history and contemporary figure painting:**
Review more *Frame by Frame* and *Art for Breakfast* examples.
“Mickalene Thomas” interview by Sean Landers. *BOMB 116, Summer 2011, ART*:
<http://bombsite.com/issues/116/articles/5105>
PBS Art 21: Video of artist Kerry James Marshall: <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/kerry-james-marshall>
ArtForum / “500 words: Nicole Eisenman 09.06.08”: <http://artforum.com/words/id=21064>
Mary Bergstein, “The Artist in His Studio: Photography, Art and the Masculine Mystique” pp 195 – 215 in The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists, Mary Jane Jacob and Michelle Grabner, eds.

Week 6. MFA meeting. Drawing together at the MFA in preparation for comparison assignment / Discussion about the re-imagining of art history and the figure in contemporary art.

- **Continue with comparison project:** Select readings from monographs about chosen artists (check out from Mugar)

Weeks 7-8. Gardner / MFA meetings. Student comparison presentations in front of paintings: materials/context/meaning in contemporary and historical works.

- **Continue with above readings and preparation through week 8. Reading/Viewing for Week 9:**
New American Painting blog entries: <http://newamericanpaintings.wordpress.com/>
BR&S current reviews: <http://www.bigredandshiny.com/cgi-bin/BRS.cgi?>
Readings: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" pp 217 – 225 from Illuminations, translated by Harry Zohn
(possibly also selections from The Undiscovered Country, Hammer Museum of Art)

Sketchbook response to be given in relation to Benjamin's ideas about authenticity and a work of art.

Week 9. No meeting 10/31 – Saturday, November 2 class meeting on Newbury Street to see galleries 10:30 – 1:30 pm with the chance to speak with select gallerists. We will discuss what we see over lunch. Aspects of the discussion will cover the idea of new hybrids related to reading – painting and photography / painting and sculpture

- **Readings for Week 10:**
Selection from Kynaston McShine, The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect
Selection from Art and Aesthetics after Adorno, edited by J.M. Bernstein, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010
Fraser, Andrea (September 2005), "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," Artforum 44, no. 1: 278–283.
Martha Schwendener, "At the mausoleum, art about art houses", The New York Times, February *, 2012
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/arts/design/spies-in-the-house-of-art-at-the-metropolitan-museum.html?_r=2&

Short response to galleries: Take on the role of a museum curator in the MFA or Gardner and write a formal letter to the Director of your museum about why you wish to purchase these three pieces for the museum. Include information provided by the artist about the intention behind his/her work. If appropriate, reference your ideas about the authenticity of the work – what makes it unique (or not).

Week 10. KHC Classroom meeting: Institutional Critique: Andrea Fraser as example. Final project plans discussed (see full instructions)

- **Readings for Week 11:**
Selections from Hal Foster, The Art-Architecture Complex
Olafur Eliasson, Take Your Time:
http://www.olafureliasson.net/publications/download_texts/Take_your_time.pdf
Olafur Eliasson, "Models are Real" pp 18 – 25 in Models: 306090 Books, Volume 11, Edited by Emily Abruzzo, Eric Ellingsen and Jonathan D. Solomon. New York: 306090, Inc.:
http://www.olafureliasson.net/publications/download_texts/Models_are_Real.pdf

Week 11. Meet at KHC to travel to and from the ICA by T. Contemporary art/architecture/installation at the ICA Boston. Possible visit with curator.

- **Individually-assigned project-related readings for projects presented Weeks 12/13 and due in written form by Thursday, December 12 at noon.**

Week 12. KHC Classroom meetings for final presentations

- **Work on final presentations and individual research readings.**

Week 13. KHC Classroom meeting for final presentations, cont.

- **Complete written component of final**

Typical museum meeting agenda:

- Discuss the reading for 30 – 45 minutes and assign homework.
- Look together and discuss museum and collection as class for 1 hour or more with focus that relates to reading.
OR
Curator/artist visit.
- Drawing lesson/exercises In a select area of museum. During this time I will come around and check in individually with you about what they are seeing/thinking.
- Regroup and check out discussion/homework questions.