Cultures of Display: The Berlin Art Museums

Seminar Leaders: Dr. Andrea Meyer, Prof. Dr. Aya Soika
Times: 24 April – 23 May 2014
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Location: The Berlin Museums / Seminar Room
Emergency Mobile Number: 0176 781 84232 (Aya Soika)
Concentration requirements: Arts and Aesthetics

Course Description

“Art” is not only the objects and events ranged under this name, but the contexts in which these objects and happenings are assembled and presented. A knowledge of the history, politics and challenges particular to the display and storing of art is essential to any understanding of the value and interpretation of the art object. This course introduces the only UNESCO heritage site in the world to be constituted by five geographically proximate art museums: the Old Museum, the New Museum, the Old National Gallery, the Bode Museum and the Pergamon Museum, on the “museum island” in Berlin. We will first consider the desires and goals that lay behind the building and definition of the nineteenth-century museum, from the reassertion of a “Prussian” identity following the Napoleonic Wars, to the grand ambitions of the German Empire. We will consider how the conceptualization of the twentieth-century museum reacted against these aims and aesthetics, and how the damage to the nineteenth-century landscape of Berlin in the First and Second World Wars affected the presentation of the city’s art heritage. Through a combination of the study of façades, interiors and the placement of individual works, we will consider issues of appropriation, provenance and restitution.

Requirements

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is essential. Absences can only be excused if a medical note is submitted to the registrar’s office and a short notification via email, if possible sent before the beginning of class, is appreciated.

It is recommended to take notes of works discussed in museums and class. Please note: Notebooks (and other electronic devices) may not be used in class. Please bring pencil (in museums!) and your notebook instead.
Punctuality
Punctuality is essential. Please make sure you depart early in order to reach the museums and/or seminar room, and please lock in your coats and bags before the beginning of class. The itinerary can be checked on www.bvg.de, but make sure you are also equipped with a city map. For Museum Island the nearest train station is Hackescher Markt. Friedrichstrasse is another possibility. For the New National Gallery take the S- or U-Bahn to Potsdamer Platz and then walk for ca. 10 minutes; for Hamburger Bahnhof take the S-Train to Hauptbahnhof and walk along Invalidenstrasse.

Reading & Other Tasks
Reading assignments have to be done in advance of class. In addition to the general preparatory reading, there will be a variety of tasks, such as the discussion of relevant questions/themes before classes in a communal document and the preparation of questions for the meetings with curators and other scholars.

Presentation
Each student will deliver a joint team presentation (teams of two, one TU, one Bard in Berlin Student). Presentations should last no longer than fifteen to twenty minutes. Please make sure that you rehearse beforehand in order to avoid exceeding this timeframe. A 1-2 page document (ca. 750-1000 words) with structured presentation notes (and, where applicable, a power point presentation) should be submitted via email to both course leaders on the day before class by 3:00 pm. This document can complement or serve as hand-out during the presentation.

Essays
There will be one essay, due on 25th May (for the Bard in Berlin students), of ca. 2500 - 3000 words. Students are encouraged to discuss a clearly confined question – which they are free to choose in consultation with the course leaders - with reference to the themes covered in the course, possibly also in relation to the presentation. Drafts of the long essay may be submitted and discussed in the course of weeks 13 and 14. Please note that prior consultation with the Bard in Berlin Writing Centre may be recommended in order to reflect upon writing and structure.

Late Submission
Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Essays that are more than 24 hours late will not be accepted.

Grade Breakdown
Listed below is the percentage grade allotted to each essay, and to classroom participation and assignments. Seminar Grade = Attendance/Participation/Preparation of Art Works and Texts & Tasks
Seminar Grade: 40%
Presentation: 30%
Essay: 30%
Schedule

Week 1

Thursday, April 24, 17:00 – 20:00
17:00 – 18:00, Seminar Room
Introduction/Course overview
18:00–20:00, On Site
The State Museums Berlin: The Current Situation
Visit to Altes Museum and Humboldt-Box

Reading:


Week 2

Wednesday, May 14, 16:30 – 18:00, Bode Museum
Guest: Dr. Julien Chapuis, Curator of the Bode-Museum Sculpture Collection

Reading:

Thursday, May 15, 16:30 – 20:00, Neues Museum
16:30 – 18:00
The Display of Cultural History/Chipperfield’s Re-Construction
18:30 – 20:00
Nefertiti Reception History/Restitution Debates

Reading:

- Jung, Mariana, 100 years of the Discovery of Nefertiti, in: In the light of Amarna. 100 years of the Nefertiti Discovery (2013), ed. by Friederike Seyfried, exh.cat., Petersberg, pp. 421-426
- Olaf Matthes, Ludwig Borchardt, James Simon and the Colourful Nefertiti Bust in the First Year After Her Discovery, in: ibid., pp. 427-437

Additional reading:


Friday, May 16, 15:30 – 18:00, Pergamonmuseum/Museum für Islamische Kunst
The Altar in Imperial Germany
Guest: Nikolaus Bernau, Art Historian and Writer

Reading:


Week 3

Thursday, May 22, 10:00 – 18:00
10:00-13:30, Alte Nationalgalerie
National Identity/The Exterior and Interior Architectural Design/French Impressionism Reception History
14:30-18:00, Seminar Room
The Modern Part of the National Gallery in the Kronprinzenpalais
Student Presentations
Reading:


Friday, May 23, 10:00 – 16:30

10:00 – 13:00
Neue Nationalgalerie / Exhibiting after 1968 (Visit of current exhibition) Gemäldegalerie - Kulturforum-Urban Space

14:00 – 16:30
On Curating. Hamburger Bahnhof
Guest: Gabriele Knapstein (TBC)

Reading:


List of Presentation Topics

1. The Neues Museum and its construction in the 19th century
2. David Chipperfield’s Reconstruction
4. The reception of Nefertiti
5. Wilhelm von Bode’s acquisition activities
6. Wilhelm von Bode and his concept of the “Style Room”
7. The political significance of the Pergamon Altar in Wilhelmine Germany
8. The Staircase Frieze in the Nationalgalerie
9. Hugo von Tschudi and the Nationalgalerie
10. The “Museum der Lebenden” (museum of living artists) and Ludwig Justi
11. The “Entartete Kunst” (Degenerate Art) campaign and the National Gallery 1937
12. The Berlin Museums during National-Socialism and the Second World War
13. Mies van der Rohe and the Neue Nationalgalerie (New National Gallery)
14. Hans Scharoun, the “Kulturforum” (Cultural Forum) and its legacy
15. Private Loans in Public Museums: Problems and Debates (Flick, Marx etc.)