Title: **VISUALISING FROM THE ARCHIVE**

**Exploring the Ashoka Archive through visual storytelling**

Semester: SPRING 2024

Instructor: Vishwajyoti Ghosh

Prerequisites: Research based on materials available in the Ashoka Archive, writing, basic drawing, basic research photography, working knowledge of design software like Photoshop, Canva, Krita etc.

**Course Description:**

**Introduction: Why go in to the Archive?**

The word "archive" has an interesting history, dating back to ancient languages. In Latin, it comes from "*archivum*" or "*archium*," while in Greek, it's related to "*arkheion*." This term not only referred to the place where important records were kept but also the people responsible for managing them, the "archons" or citizens.

Archives are like a time capsule, preserving the past. They're unique to individuals, organisations and specific periods in history, so no two archives are the same. They serve as a reminder of everything we might forget but should always remember. Archives hold a special power because archives act as the keepers of our collective memories, providing a glimpse into the worlds of writers, artists, thinkers and organisations, that helps us understand the different worlds where the materials in the archives come from. They're like hidden treasure troves for storytelling enthusiasts, creative minds, artists and scholars.

**Exploring the Ashoka Archives:** The Ashoka Archives is building up to offer an incredible wealth of knowledge, stories, experiences, correspondences, and images. It's truly astonishing that such an amazing resource is now on campus. As an educational institution, it's exceptionally vital to emphasize that without an archive, a significant portion of cultural history, can get lost due to various reasons.

Centred around the Ashoka Archives, this course aims to delve into distinctive viewpoints of scholars through active engagement with archives and the materials that pique their individual interests. Scholars will also delve into the dual role of archives, serving as both tools and points of reference for shaping their artistic and storytelling visions. A primary emphasis of the program will be to openly and candidly investigate how archival materials can be harnessed to spark new artistic possibilities. Through art, visual storytelling, graphic narratives, there’s an opportunity for the scholars to reinvigorate and re-examine the information available but also to generate new creations and events that can themselves be archived, allowing the scholar artists to contribute their unique voices to the historical record.

**What this course is about**

The fundamental concept here is to utilize the Archive as a platform for artistic discussion and intellectual exchange. This will offer not only the institution but also scholars and practitioners a chance to develop fresh, critical, and imaginative methods to engage the public. This engagement will be based on the materials found in the Ashoka Archive. The emphasis lies on both the Archive itself and individual scholars, who will collaboratively produce knowledge, visual narratives, and expertise. The process is as crucial as the final results, ensuring that visual exploration aligns seamlessly with the creation of knowledge and artistic expression.

The course is designed to empower scholars in conjunction with the Archive over a single semester:

* **Creative Documentation:** These projects will focus on creating content to enrich the archive's knowledge repository, ultimately leading to tangible outcomes such as mini-books, zines, and catalogues.
* **Creative Projects:** These initiatives aim to support creative expressions that interpret the archive's collections through visual stories, comics, artwork, and other artistic endeavours.

This approach can help the scholars in negotiating their findings, research and learnings through visual interpretations in multi-disciplinary formats that is much required in today’s realm of information & content, where visual storytelling is an alternate and a popular form of information, opinion and communication.

**Learning Objectives:** These learning objectives will guide scholars through the course, enabling them to not only delve into the archival materials available but also develop a skill set that combines historical interpretation, visual storytelling, and ethical considerations in presenting interpreted narratives inspired from the archive.

Understanding Archives: Define the concept of archives and their significance in preserving historical records. Explain the role of university archives in the history making and the process of documentation within the framework of an academic institution.

Research and Selection: Develop the skills to identify and select relevant materials from the university archive. Distinguish between primary and secondary sources and understand the value of primary materials in historical research.

Visual Analysis: Learn to critically analyse visual materials, including photographs, documents, and artifacts. Identify key elements of visual analysis, such as authorship, date, context, and significance.

Material Context: Gain an understanding of the historical context in which the selected materials were created. Recognize the broader historical events and societal influences that may have shaped the materials.

Visual Storytelling: Master the principles of visual storytelling, including design, composition, and narrative. Develop the ability to create visually engaging and informative materials based on historical content. Explore the use of digital tools and design software for creating visual materials. Learn to articulate the stories and insights conveyed through visual interpretation.

Ethical Considerations: Explore the ethical considerations when working with historical materials, including issues related to copyright, privacy, and cultural sensitivity. Learn to handle and cite archival materials with integrity and respect for the rights of individuals involved.

Interdisciplinary Skills: Encourage interdisciplinary thinking by connecting historical materials with various academic disciplines. Foster the ability to draw insights and connections between archival content and other fields of study.

Reflection and Analysis: Encourage critical thinking by reflecting on the impact of visual interpretation on historical understanding. Analyse the choices made during the interpretation process and their implications.

Collaboration and Peer Review: Foster collaboration by engaging in peer review and constructive feedback with fellow students. Learn from others' interpretations and perspectives.

+ Final Project:

* 1. Apply the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the course to create a final visual interpretation project using materials from the university archive.
	2. Present the project to the class, showcasing the historical context, significance, and storytelling elements.

**Course Modules:**

The proposed modules aim to provide scholars with valuable skills in archival research, critical analysis, visual design, and storytelling while fostering a deeper connection to their university's archive and the materials available. The idea would be in exploring from the diversity of materials to create diversity of practice involved in visual interpretations. The core idea here will be to discuss the materials available to create forms and works that can bring new practice-based influences and ideas, their working process and explore the architecture of visual storytelling in these works.

Weeks 1-2: Introduction and understanding the University Archive

In this initial module, scholars will be introduced to the concept of university archive. They will gain an understanding of what these archives are, why they are essential for preserving historical records, and how they play a significant role in documenting academic works, arts, historical materials etc.

Weeks 2-3: Understanding the Archives & Research Skills and Selection

Scholars will be initiated with practical skills for conducting archival research. They will receive hands-on guidance on searching for materials within the university archive's catalogue or database. The module will emphasize the importance of reliable sources and the value of primary documents in historical research. Scholars will be encouraged to select a specific topic or theme related to their interest or a particular collection within the archive.

Weeks 3-4: Selection of material + Analysing and Placing in Context

In this module, the focus will be on how to critically analyse the materials selected by the scholars. They will delve into key elements of analysis, including authorship, date, context, and significance. Additionally, they will explore historical context, including the important events, and the broader historical backdrop. Scholars will be encouraged to ask probing questions about the materials they're examining and to uncover the stories and insights they hold. Scholars will also be sensitised how to handle and cite archival materials appropriately, with a strong emphasis on giving credit to the source and respecting the rights and privacy of individuals involved.

Week 5: Presentation of final material selected + their visual ideas

Selection and research of interesting archival material will be followed to process and distill the findings to create the core conceptual idea and be presented in the studio sessions for the benefit of collective brainstorming and discussions. These discussions with fellow classmates will led to an inter-disciplinary ideation and conceptualization, moving closer to shape and sharpen the core project ideas of the scholars. The scholars will also be expected to share the processing of their research findings along with their influences and inspirations.

Weeks 6-7: Mastering Visual Storytelling

Moving on from research, the course will now discuss the working process of creating a visual narrative using multiple influences of form and genres. This will include detailed discussions on the various possibilities of the form i.e., different forms that can be explored - doodle narratives, popular comics, mobile based narratives, photo comics, design, layouts, page architecture, typography, sequential storytelling and the work process involved in each, enabling the students to make informed choices in sync with their ideas. Students will explore various tools and software for creating visual materials, and they'll discuss the strengths and limitations of popular software including open-source alternatives. Practical exercises will be provided to enable students to create engaging and informative visual materials, which may include designing inarratives, zines, or digital outputs.

Week 8: Presentation of a final project draft followed by discussion on similar ideas & influences

The following week the students will be expected to present their ideas and preliminary drafts as scribbles/ sketches with fellow batchmates, followed by open discussions, suggestions and ideation to evolve a clear understanding to flesh out the final narrative. Peer review and discussion will be encouraged to facilitate mutual learning. Each scholar/ project will be further exposed to similar works through display and in-depth discussions on influences and ideas related to the project to lend a visual and storytelling perspective, enabling the practitioner to take one’s work further.

Besides creating multiple micro narratives through the semester, finally, the semester will move to its last weeks to create a bigger multi-page graphic narrative.

Weeks 9-14: Final completion with a mid-level presentation in week 8.

A mid-level draft presentation will be shared in the studio to display the work in progress after 2 weeks then followed by the final 4 weeks or the end of the semester, ready for display, presentation and production. Studio presence in these weeks will be a must.

Output Participation:

Though the output will be individual, the process of production will be based on archival research, short studio collaborations and conversations and work-in-progress presentations at regular intervals as discussed above.

Course Deliverables: Every student will be expected to develop, produce multiple research-based short visual stories and graphic narratives/ comics.

Evaluation and Grading Rubrics: Scholars will be assessed based on their ability to select, analyse, and create visual materials. Assessment criteria may include the depth of research analysis, quality of their visual materials and their adherence to ethical guidelines. Presentations and students' participation in discussions will also be considered in their evaluation.

Conceptual clarity & Research – 20%

Ability to understand concepts comprehensively, remember and articulate them. Pursuing research to acquire broader understanding. Relating acquired knowledge to improve information organisation. The ability to fully comprehend, remember, and communicate concepts.

Originality & Visualization – 20%

The ability to come up with original ideas inspired from the archival material, the skill to articulate visually.

Exploration, Execution– 40%

Ability to deeply enquire a wide variety of explorations and bring it into practice. To improvise and pivot when required. The journey from visualisation to final execution.

Problem Solving & Improvisation -10%

Having a methodological approach to address visual challenges. The willingness to connect ones academic practice and those notions to one's own work.

Teamwork, Class Participation, Time Management -10%

Efficiency and the capacity to manage time and participates in joint feedback sessions, collective display and collective work effectively

Attendance Policy: 90% minimum attendance

Preliminary Reading List:

1. "Archives: Principles and Practices" by Laura A. Millar

2. "The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History" by Jaimie Baron

3. Digital memory and the Archive by Wolfgang Ernst

4. Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art by Okwui Enwezor

5. Managing Archival and Manuscript Repositories by Michael J. Kurtz

6. Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative by Edward R. Tufte

7. Design for Information: An Introduction to the Histories, Theories, and Best Practices Behind Effective Information Visualizations by Isabel Meirelles

8. Access to History: The Archive and the User by David Thomas, Simon Fowler, and Valerie Johnson

9. Copyright for Archivists and Records Managers by Tim Padfield

10. The New Historicism and Other Old-Fashioned Topics by Arnold Rampersad

11. Information Design Workbook: Graphic Approaches, Solutions, and Inspiration + 30 Case Studies by Kim Baer