

**VA-2005/ HIS-3802-1: Sites and Sights: Museums, Exhibitions and the Making of the Art**

**Instructor Sraman Mukherjee**

**Class Meets: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:10 am to 11:40 am**

**Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm or by prior appointment only**

**Course Level: 2000 to 3000 for Visual Arts and 3000 for History**

**Gateway/ Compulsory course for Visual Arts Minor or Concentration and Elective course for History. Course also open for credit and audit by students from any other department/ discipline**

**Course Prerequisites: None**

**Course Description**

How do sites and spaces of visual encounters condition our perceptions of visual images? Seeking answers to these questions, this course brings in dialogue the works of art with the spaces that such works have come to inhabit in our present world – museums, art galleries, and other spaces of visual exhibitions. Moving beyond the established trajectories of looking at exhibitions, museums, and gallery spaces as storehouses of masterpieces of Art, or merely as spaces of ordering, classifying, and displaying objects and images, we will look closely at how exhibition practices of museums and public art galleries, constitute the very category “Art” around a select body of objects and images.

Beginning with early modern royal and notable private collections, and cabinet of curiosities across the world, the course will explore the specific moments of the coming into being of public museums and art galleries through fairs, “freak shows”, and world exhibitions in Europe and across different parts of the world. It will explore how politics of collection, museum acquisition, display, and repatriation are tied with larger questions of colonialism, war, loot, postcolonial nationalist reassertions, and postwar encounters with race and ethnicity. With a specific focus on Asia, the course will map the connected global trajectories of museums, art galleries and memorials as dense narratives of unfolding spatial and temporal complexes. In the process it will highlight the role of the artists, curators, and museum/ gallery visitors in the production of a complex set of dialogues around artistic, and curatorial visions.

The course will end by looking at contemporary South Asia, mapping the challenges of redesigning exhibition orders of older museums and art institutions and spread of museum modes of display and viewing, with different intent, in commemorative sites, theme parks, memorials, and new temples. This co-constitution of art and art museums will be addressed during class discussions and during visits (both on site and virtual) to local galleries, museums,

theme parks, and temples – to the Indian Museum, Kolkata (virtual), the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi (on site), the National Museum, New Delhi (on site,) the National Handloom and Handicrafts Museum, New Delhi, (on site), the Rashtriya Dalit Prerna Sthal, Nodia (on site), the Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex, New Delhi (on site). the British Museum, London (virtual) and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (virtual).

## **Modules**

### **Introduction to the Scope and Aims of the Course:**

#### **Why Museums? Rethinking Exhibitions as Plural visions in space and time**

##### **Suggested Reading**

Appadurai, Arjun and Carol A. Breckenridge, “Museums are Good to Think: Heritage on View in India,” in I. Karp, S. Levine and T. Ybarra-Frausto (Eds.). *Museums and Their Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991, 34-55.

### **Module 1: Paths Taken and Forgotten**

#### **From Cabinet of Curiosities, Freak Shows, and Circus to the Exhibitionary Complex of early International Exhibitions and Public Museums**

##### **Readings:**

1. Duncan, Carol. *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*. London: Routledge, 1996. (Chapter 2)
2. Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London: Routledge, 1995. (Chapter 5- The Exhibitionary Complex)

### **Module 2: Displaying/ Representing**

#### **The “Others” in the “First Cities” of the Empires**

##### **Readings:**

1. Willis, Deborah. *The Black Venus 2010: They Called Her “Hottentot”*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010 (Chapter 14)
2. Mitchell, Timothy. “The World as Exhibition.” *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, vol. 31, no. 9, 1989.
3. Mathur, Saloni. *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*. University of California Press, 2007 (chapter 2)

**Further Reading:**

Breckenridge, Carol A. "The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31/2, 1989, 195-216

**Module 3: Beyond Magic****Museums as Transmutations: Colonial Locations of Imperial Archives****Readings:**

1. Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004 (Chapter 2)
2. Codell, Julie F. "Ironies of Mimicry: The Art of Sayaji Rao III Gaekwad, Maharaja of Baroda, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern India", *Journal of History of Collections*, 15/5, 2003, 127-146.

**Further Reading:**

Prakash, Gyan. "Science 'Gone Native' in Colonial India." *Representations*, 40, Fall 1992, 153-178

**Module 4: Postcolonial Passages****Museums in Postcolonial States****Readings:**

1. Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004 (Chapter 6)
2. Singh, Kavita. "The Museum is National" in Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh eds. *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2015, 107-131
3. Bhatti, Shaila. *Translating Museums: A Counter History of South Asian Museology*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 2016 (Selections To Be Announced)

**Module 5: Memories/ Memorials****Museums as Sites****Readings:**

1. Harris, Clare. "The Potala Palace: Remembering to Forget in Contemporary Tibet", *South Asian Studies*, 2013, 29:1, 61-75
2. Fangqing Lu. "Museum architecture as spatial storytelling of historical time: Manifesting a primary example of Jewish space in Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum", *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, 6, 2017, 442-455

**Further Reading:**

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations*, 26, Spring, 1989, 7-24

**Module 6: The Spill over****Theme Parks and Museums****Readings:**

1. Mathur, Saloni and Kavita Singh. "Reincarnations of the Museum: The Museum in an Age of Religious Revivalism" in Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh eds. *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2015, 203-218.
2. Jain, Kajri. "The Hand Bag That Exploded: Mayawati's Monuments and the Aesthetics of Democracy in Post Reform India", in Partha Chatterjee, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, and Bodhisattva Kar, ed. *New Cultural Histories of India: Materiality and Practices*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014 (Chapter 5)

**Further Reading**

Jain, Kajri. "Post-reform India's automotive-iconic-cement assemblages: uneven globality, territorial spectacle and iconic exhibition value", *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 2015, 1-18.

**Module 7 - Site Visits**

Site Visits to select galleries of the Indian Museum, Kolkata, the National Gallery of Modern Art, the National Museum, the National Handloom and Handicrafts Museum, New Delhi, the Rashtriya Dalit Prerna Sthal, Nodia, the Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex, New Delhi, the British Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

**Module 8: Decolonizing Museums?****Rethinking Exhibitionary Complex as Multiple Temporalities****Readings:**

Brown, Rebecca. *Displaying Time: The Many Temporalities of the Festival of India*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017 (Selections to be announced)

**Further Reading:**

Bharucha, Rustom. "Beyond the box", *Third Text*, 14:52, 2000, 11-19

### **Select List of Further Readings**

- Bloembergen, Marieke. *Colonial Spectacles: The Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the World Exhibitions, 1880-1931*. National University of Singapore Press, 2006.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Impey, O. and A. Macgregor, eds. *The Origins of Museums*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon, 1985.
- Karp, Ivan and Steven D. Lavine. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. DC, Smithsonian Institution, 1991.
- Marchand, Suzanne L. *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Markham, S.F. and H. Hargreaves. *The Museums of India*. London: Museums Association, 1936.
- Preziosi, Donald. "Museology and Museography." Part I, "A Range of Critical Perspectives: The Pblematics of Collecting and Display." *Art Bulletin* 77, no. 1, March 1995.
- Preziosi, Donald, ed. *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*. Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- Vergo, Peter, ed. *The New Museology*. Reaktion Books, 1997

### **Learning Outcomes**

On successful completion of the course, we will be able to:

- a) Explore the main trends in the development of Art History, Visual Culture and Museum Studies by accessing the critical essential skills.
- b) Evaluate the approaches of artists, art historians, and curators to the field of visual arts and museum studies
- c) Explore curatorial practices in the art world
- d) Develop the interests for a future training in art curatorial programme and critical museum studies.

### **Grading Rubric**

This course follows a pattern of continuous assessment and grading through the entire semester including active class participation, and museum and gallery visits, and mid semester and end semester evaluations. The assessment and grading criterion are as follows:

- 1) Students will be assessed on basis on their active engagement with course contents during classes which will carry ten percent (10%) of the total course grades.
- 2) Museum, Gallery and site visits and subsequent submission of one written report on spatial politics gallery display, curatorial visions, and visitor perceptions (within 800 to 1000 words) will carry thirty percent (30%) of the total course grades.
- 3) The mid semester assessment will comprise of a class presentation based on any one site or gallery or an image in a museum chosen by the student in consultation with the instructor. The mid semester evaluation will carry twenty percent (20%) of the total course grades.
4. For the end semester evaluation we will write an essay between 2000 and 2500 words (including footnotes and bibliography). The topic of the end semester assessment has to be chosen by the student from a range of verbal text and visual image prompts provided by the course instructor. The end semester assessments for this course will follow a feed forward method and students are actively encouraged to submit (within date and time specified) one working draft/ draft in progress to the course instructor for comments and feedback. The end semester assessment will carry forty percent (40%) of the total course grades.
5. All submissions including field reports, mid semester and end semester papers have to be made electronically.
6. Plagiarism (intended or unintended) constitutes the most serious academic offence. Any act of plagiarism will be reported to the Academic Integrity Committee of the University and will attract punitive measures from grade cuts to failing the course. Please go through the Academic Integrity document of Ashoka University to check what constitutes plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Specific citation styles for texts and images will be addressed by specific course instructors.