MUSEUM CONSERVATION & CONTEMPORARY CULTURE
Museum Studies: MSMS-GA 2222

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Description: As an introduction to museum conservation, this seminar combines classroom discussion with museum laboratory visits to provide an understanding of how conservation of cultural heritage functions in the context of contemporary culture. The seminar covers all aspects of museum conservation, from artifact interaction with the museum environment to hands-on practice and technical research to date and authenticate museum objects. It provides an understanding of the historical and philosophical drive to preserve cultural objects for the future, and conflicts that arise between professionals and non-professionals with stakes in how culture is exhibited. The seminar addresses concerns of living artists as well as indigenous groups and others with claims to the disposition and care of cultural materials. It considers relationships between conservation and the visiting public, and conservation’s role in shaping cultural memory. While enrollment is open to all NYU graduate students, priority is given to Museum Studies students.

Course Requirements

• Attendance and participation in every class, including visits to museum conservation laboratories. Following university policy, students will be allowed only two absences for legitimate religious reasons and/or family/medical emergencies before formal grade reduction. Students must notify me in advance of any anticipated absences.

• **October 1** Short writing assignment: (minimum 1,000 words). Submit by turn-in on NYU Classes. Requirements will be specified on assignment handout.

• **October 8** Condition reports: (minimum 750 words). Submit hard copy and/or by turn-in on NYU Classes. Photographs or drawings may be added to supplement the text. Design a condition report form, and fill it in with information on fabrication materials and technology, condition, and recommendations for conservation intervention, technical research, exhibition, storage, and handling.

• **December 10** Seminar Research Paper due at the end of the semester on a conservation topic: (minimum 4,000 words + notes & references). Submit by turn-in on NYU Classes. **Confirm topic with professor by November 12.**

The paper should use double-line spacing and page numbers should be indicated. All quotes, references, and sources must be properly cited – plagiarism will result in a failing grade. Please use footnotes or endnotes for citations. A full reference list must be included at the end of the paper, using a standard bibliographic style.

The topic must be related to conservation issues addressed in the seminar. It should reflect the theme of the seminar – moving from the material and technical to a larger conceptual issue, with a critical stance. It may build on existing publications, but it should express your own point of view. Grades will in part be based on how well the course readings are used and cited.
Grading

Grades are based on seminar participation (30%), short writing assignment (20%), condition report (10%), and seminar research paper (40%).

Plagiarism—employing ideas or phrases that are not your own without explicitly and sufficiently crediting their creator—will not be tolerated. If you plagiarize, the Program Chair and the University will be notified of your actions, and appropriate steps will be taken. I urge you to err on the side of caution: take careful notes, cite your sources carefully and consistently, and do not leave assignments to the last minute. For this and other University policies, see the Graduate School of Arts and Science Policies and Procedures Manual.

NYU Classes

The class website contains the syllabus, assignments, announcements, references, and handouts. Students will be advised when new postings are mounted on the site, including any changes in weekly readings on the syllabus. Student posting of PowerPoint files and other materials prepared for class presentation is encouraged. Please submit writing assignments through turn-it-in on the class website.

University Statement for Students with Disabilities

New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. It is the University’s policy that no qualified student with a disability be excluded from participating in any University program or activity, denied the benefits of any University program or activity, or otherwise subjected to discrimination with regard to any University program or activity. The Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) determines qualified disability status and assists students in obtaining appropriate accommodations and services. Any student who needs a reasonable accommodation based on a qualified disability is required to register with the CSD for assistance.

Sources for Required and Recommended Texts

There are no required texts to purchase for this course. Most readings are on the course website, available online, or on reserve at Bobst Library. Handouts will be provided with additional resources for seminar presentations and research papers. The following books are on reserve in Bobst Library:


## COURSE SCHEDULE

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WEEKLY READINGS

September 3  Introduction to Museum Conservation
Location: Museum Studies

September 10 Collections Management
Location: Museum Studies

Weekly Readings:
Collections Management
http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/collections/management/ (Skim through this museum’s collection management policies).
MoMA. Collections Management Policies.

Conservation Surveys
http://www.slideshare.net/SandraHaro/benchmarks-in-collections-care-resource (Skim this website)
Heritage Preservation Web Site: http://www.heritagepreservation.org/ Check out this entire website – (it is a valuable resource). Then click on “Conservation Assessment Program” and read FAQs / The CAP Assessment, and “Spotlight.”

Additional reading:
Collections Management
Heritage Emergency National Task Force:
http://www.heritagepreservation.org/PROGRAMS/TASKFER.HTM
Review entire site.

http://www.heritagepreservation.org/HHI/index.html. Read Heritage health Index
Results and skim the Summary Report by downloading the PDF.

Hunter, J. E. “Museum Disaster Preparedness Planning.” In S. Knell (ed.) Care of
Bobst).

Institute of Museum and Library Services http://www.imls.gov/about/default.aspx
Skim the site for available collections management and conservation grants.

Knell, S. “Introduction.” In S. Knell (ed.) Care of Collections. London and New York:
Routledge. 1994. 1-10. (on reserve at Bobst)

http://www.museumpests.net/


196.

Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections. http://www.spnhc.org/
There are a lot of good resources on this site for natural history and general
collections.

Conservation and Armed Conflict

Sease, C. The Role of Archaeological Conservation in Armed Conflict. In Williams, E.
and C. Peachey (eds.) The Conservation of Archaeological Materials: Current

Stanley Price, N. “War and the Conservator. 1. Preventive Measures and Recovery.”

Roberts, B. “War and the Conservator. 2. Coordination and Preparedness do Pay Off– An
160–163.

Spirydowicz, K. "Archives Under Attack: The Preservation of European Documentary
Heritage in World War II." Preprints of ICOM Committee for Conservation 14th

September 17 Preventive Conservation / Objects Conservation
Guest Lecturer: Paolo Dionisi Vici, Associate Research Scientist
Guest Lecturer: Jack Soulitian, Objects Conservator
Location: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Weekly Readings

Chapter 8. Preventive Conservation and Light. 61-77.

2011. 225-238.

Metropolitan Museum of Art Conservation & Scientific Research: http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/museum-departments/conservation-and-scientific-research (Read the short entries on Scientific Research and Objects Conservation.)

Additional reading:


September 24 Conservation Intervention
Location: Museum Studies

Weekly Readings:


Additional reading:
Conservation Ethics
Muñoz Viñas, S. “Minimal Intervention.” In A. Richmond & A. Bracker (eds.)

Cleaning Controversies
Beck, J. and Daley, M. “The Sistine Chapel.” In *Art Restoration: The Culture, the Business and the Scandal.* London: John Murray. 63-102. (Available at Bobst – let me know if it is checked out)

Reconstructing Classical Sculpture
October 1  
Condition Assessments / Conservation Center tour / Paintings Conservation  
Location: Conservation Center, Institute of Fine Arts, 14 E. 78th St. Seminar Room

Weekly Readings:  
Condition Assessments  
Registrars Committee / American Alliance for Museums (See “Condition Reporting Forms”) [http://www.rcaam.org/resources/sample_documents/](http://www.rcaam.org/resources/sample_documents/)  

Paintings Conservation  

Additional reading:  
Condition Assessments  

Paintings Conservation  

October 8  
Ethnographic & Archaeological Conservation  
Guest Lecturers: Judy Levinson, Director of Conservation; Samantha Alderson, Objects Conservator  
Location: American Museum of Natural History

Weekly Readings:  
Additional reading:

Archaeological Artifacts

Archaeological Sites

Ethnographic Conservation:

October 15 Fall Recess – no class

October 22 Conservation Values and Cultural Conflict / Architectural Conservation
Location: Museum Studies

Weekly Readings:
Additional reading:
Conservation Values


Restoration vs. Anti-Restoration


The Modern Cult of Monuments


The World Heritage Convention

Architectural Conservation


Chapter 1: The Language of Preservation. 15 - 24
Chapter 6: The Historic Room and House Museum. 78 - 89
Appendix C: The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. 184-186.

Cultural Authenticity


Cultural Conflict in Conservation


October 29 Paper and Photograph Conservation

Guest Lecturers: Valerie Faivre, Assistant Paper Conservator; Katie Sanderson, Assistant Photography Conservator

Location: Metropolitan Museum of Art

Weekly Readings:


Additional reading:


November 5 Technical Art History / Authenticity Studies / Illicit Trade
Location: Museum Studies

Weekly Readings:


Tubb, K. W. and Sease, C. "Sacrificing the Wood for the Trees: Should Conservation Have a Role in the Antiquities Trade?" In Archaeological Conservation and its

Additional reading:
Technical Art History

Authenticity Studies

Illicit Trade

November 12 Research and Conservation at MoMA
Guest Lecturer: Chris McGlinchey, Conservation Scientist; Ellen Moody, Sculpture Conservation Fellow + MoMA paintings and sculpture conservators
Location: Museum of Modern Art, 25 W. 53rd St.
Weekly Readings:
Museum of Modern Art / The Collection / Conservation
http://www.moma.org/explore/collection/conservation/index
Click “About” and watch the Video: Behind the Scenes Conservation.
Click “Tours” and watch the Media, Paintings, Science, and Sculpture videos. Skim through case studies under “Projects” tab and “Related Resources” section on the left section of the screen.


November 19

Conservation of Modern & Contemporary Art
Location: Museum Studies

Weekly Readings:


Additional reading:
Modern and contemporary art


Buskirk, M. “Planning for Impermanence.” *Art in America*. April 2000. 113-120.


Digital Art and Time-Based Media


Inside Installations.


Familiarize yourself with this project and its website. Information is deeply buried. Some case studies are published in T. Scholte & G. Wharton (eds.) *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 2011.

Guggenheim


Tate. “Inside Installations: The Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art. Mapping the Studio II.”

[http://www2.tate.org.uk/nauman/home_1.htm](http://www2.tate.org.uk/nauman/home_1.htm). Explore this presentation of preserving Bruce Nauman’s work. Read about the Inside Installations project, then work through all sections of the site.

“Variable Media Approach.” Guggenheim Museums

[http://www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pub_index.html](http://www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pub_index.html)
Depocas, A. “Goals of the Variable Media Network.”
Hanhardt, J. G. “Nam June Paik, TV Garden.”
“Matters in Media Art.” New Art Trust, MoMA, SFMOMA, Tate.
http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/matters-media-art. Read the general introduction and the introductory texts for Acquisitions and Loans. Familiarize yourself with the process diagrams for each section.

November 26  Conservation and the Community / Public Art
Location: Museum Studies

Weekly Readings:

Additional reading:
Public Art

Working with Artists

Conservation and the Public

Communicating Conservation to the Public
American Institute for Conservation PR Toolkit
http://www.conservation-wiki.com/w/?title=Public_Relations_and_Outreach_Resources

Conservation Projects
Smithsonian Institution. “Star-Spangled Banner”
http://amhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/preservation-project.aspx

Museum Conservation Department sites
MoMA http://www.moma.org/explore/collection/conservation/index#about
National Museum of the American Indian
http://nmai.si.edu/explore/collections/conservation/
Tate http://www.tate.org.uk/conservation/
V&A http://www.vam.ac.uk/res_cons/conservation/index.html

Exhibitions
SFMOMA “Art in Technological Times”
http://www.sfmoma.org/exhib_events/exhibitions/2
Yale University Art Gallery. “The Art of Conservation”
http://www.artistsforconservation.org/virtual-exhibit

Conservation Blogs
Art 21 conservation column: http://blog.art21.org/?s=conservation
Critical Issues in Art Conservation:
http://www.criticalissuesinartconservation.blogspot.com/
Museum of Modern Art
http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/category/conservation
University of Delaware Art Conservation:
http://www.artcons.udel.edu/public-outreach/student-blogs
Individual Blogs:
Ellen Carrlee: http://ellencarrlee.wordpress.com/
Rose Cull: http://dalyconservation.com/
Scott Haskins: http://www.saveyourstuff.com/blog/tag/art-conservation/
Beth Heller: http://bethhellerconservation.wordpress.com/

December 3 & 10 Student Presentations