

W&M in Washington

Fall 2011

The Future of Art in Modern Culture

Taught by Professor Alan Wallach

This semester's theme focuses on the challenges that art and art institutions face to change and adapt to a dynamic modern culture. The two courses that comprise the semester afford students unparalleled opportunities to study art museums and contemporary art first hand. Washington possesses extraordinary riches in both areas. During the course of the semester, we will visit leading art museums (The National Gallery, The Hirshhorn Museum, The Phillips Collection), and private collections of contemporary art, meet museum professionals (director, curator, registrar, etc.), dealers, and artists. By the end of the semester, students will have acquired a deeper understanding of the art world and its future.

Washington Program Internship

- 6 credit hours: INTR 499

This course will give students an opportunity to witness first hand the formation and administration of art through an internship in some of the world's great art institutions like the National Gallery of Art or the Corcoran Gallery of Art; other museums like the Air and Space Museum or the Dumbarton House; governmental organizations like the National Endowment for the Arts or the Supreme Court Curator's Office; or a performance setting like the Kennedy Center or the Arena Stage. Students will maintain a portfolio reflecting upon their internship experience.

Contemporary Art and Criticism

- 3 credit hours: ARTH 460 (Tentatively cross-listed in AMST and LCST)

This class has as its subject contemporary art. Its aim is an understanding of the conditions under which artistic production takes place and the ways in which contemporary art is received and understood. The class focuses on a number of questions: what distinguishes the art of today from earlier art? In what terms can we understand it? What meanings does it communicate? What role(s) does it play in the contemporary world? We will attempt to find answers to these questions by studying works of art and critical texts, by writing criticism, by visiting museums and galleries, and by talking with curators, dealers, artists, and collectors.

The Art Museum: Theory, History, Practice

- 3 credit hours: ARTH 460 (Tentatively cross-listed in AMST and LCST)

An interest in the history of museums is inseparable from an engagement with present day museological concerns. Consequently, this course will approach the history of art museums with an eye to the way museums operate today. We will be interested in every important aspect of museum history: the function of the art museum as a modernizing institution; the roles elites have played in the formation and operation of museums; the semiotics of museum architecture and display; the ways museums represent the history of art; the viewpoints they inscribe in their exhibitions; their impact on (as well as the ways they construct) the public; the role of various publics as well as particular constituencies in forming museum policies; blockbusters and corporatization; museum ethics. We will also be concerned with the hold of the past on the present: the ways in which past practices and beliefs shape today's art museums.

In addition, we will ask what museums have done and can do to accommodate and perhaps even promote change. Are art museums inherently conservative institutions? Or are they capable of transcending, or at least modifying, the impact of their own histories? To gain first hand understanding of these issues, meetings with museum professionals and visits to art museums will be part of the course.