

CULS5309: Museum and Archives Studies

MA Cultural Management AY 2025-26

Department of Cultural and Religious Studies

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Course Instructor: Ashley Lee Wong (ashleyleewong@cuhk.edu.hk)

Term B: Wed, 2:30pm-5:15pm, Venue: MMW LT1

Course Description:

This course will reflect on museums and archives as social constructs and as mediums for artistic intervention. Beginning with the origins of museums as elite institutions that have evolved with modernity, the course sets the stage in the early role of museums in acquisition of knowledge as a colonial enterprise. Looking at historical forms of collecting, students will learn to critically question what is included and excluded from collections and the role of curator and researcher in interpreting and presenting materials as acts of care. Through the course, we will look at how artists have challenged the construct of museums through institutional critique, New Institutionalism, and decolonisation with aims of better understanding the role and definition of museums today. The course will expand the definition of museums and archives by shifting beyond the preservation of material objects and moving beyond the museum walls. We will also look at how artists have approached archiving as a creative and collective practice, beyond an institutional and authoritative lens. We will look also at the impact of digital technologies on musicological and preservation practices. Through the course, we will examine issues and challenges in the preservation of contemporary art forms, including digital, conceptual and performance art. The course will include discussions of selected readings and projects, invited guest speakers and workshops on applications of interactive technologies in museums.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs):

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Critically reflect upon the role of museums and archives historically and within society;
2. Reflect on and develop artistic strategies in relation to archiving through an understanding of critical and alternative archiving practices;
3. Analyse materials and evaluate acquisition strategies and management of museum archives and collections and their political implications;
4. Reflect on how conceptual artworks, time-based media, and moving image works and digital media are preserved and understand the impact of digital media on archiving practices;
5. Develop a perspective on current developments in museum practices and on the future of museums and archives.

Assessment:

Assignments	Percentage	Description
Attendance and participation	10%	Attendance and in-class participation (individual) including participating in weekly reading summaries.
Assignment 1	20%	Study journal (individual) - a weekly journal entry of reflections from class and readings as a form of archive.

Assignment 2	30%	Group presentation (group) – a study of an archive or museum collection, online or internationally.
Assignment 3	40%	3,000-word essay (individual) on a case study or on a topic related to museums and archives.

Course Syllabus and Schedule: (Tentative)

* Note: the readings listed below are for reference only. Specific articles and pages for readings will be assigned in class each week. The course contents and schedule are provisional and are subject to change according to workshop and guest speaker planning.

Week 1 (7 Jan): Intro to Museums and Archives

This class will set the stage for understanding museums and archives as set out in this course and introduce elements of the course including the study journal assignment as a form of archive. In the class we will review the ICON Code of Ethics.

ICON Code of Ethics: <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf>

Week 2 (14 Jan): From Curiosities to Categorised Knowledge

This class will discuss the history behind museum collections from Wunderkammers as private collections of curiosities by elite merchants to its evolution in the Enlightenment to acquire and categorise knowledge as part of colonial projects. We will raise questions around how collections are built and the purposes they serve and for who through a discussion of how museums have evolved.

Readings:

Pomian, Krzysztof. *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice 1500-1800*, trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Porter. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990. (Chapter 2: The Age of Curiosity)

Zytaruk, Maria. "Cabinets of Curiosities and the Organization of Knowledge." University of Toronto Quarterly 80, no. 1 (2011): 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1353/utq.2011.0003>.

Week 3 (21 Jan): Decolonisation and Museums

Black Lives Matters has brought back debates about representation within museum collections and exhibitions by also challenging the collection practices of the past and making efforts to re-write history. This class will look at some efforts of museums to correct the wrongs of the past and discuss whether these strategies are effective and the challenges that are faced.

Readings:

Hetherington, Kevin. "Foucault and the Museum." In *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*, 21–40. Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2015.

Bruno Brulon Soares, "The myths of museology: on deconstructing, reconstructing, and redistributing", ICOFOM Study Series, 49-2, 2021, 243-260.

Janes, Robert R., and Richard Sandell, eds. *Museum Activism*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019. Chapter 2: Detoxing and Decolonising Museums by Sara Wajid and Rachel Minott

Week 4 (4 Feb): Institutional Critique and New Institutionalism

This class looks at how artists have questioned the structures of museums through art. We will look at several examples of artists who belong to the movement of institutional critique to understand the issues raised through their artworks, as well as the issues of the eventual “institutionalisation of critique”.

Introduction to Assignment 2: Group Presentation

Readings:

Fraser, Andrea. "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique." *Artforum*, 2005, 100-06.

Kolb, Lucie and Gabriel Flückiger, eds. "New Institutionalism Revisited". *On Curating*, Issue 21, December 2013.

Ciric, Biljana. "The Construct of the (Art) Institution in China and Artist's Strategies of Active Withdrawal." In *Active Withdrawals: Life and Death of Institutional Critique*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016.

Supplementary reading:

Alberro, Alexander. "Institutions, Critique and Institutional Critique." In *Institutional Critique: An anthology of artist's writings.* eds. Alberro, Alexander and Blake Stimson. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

See: <https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/institutional-critique>

Week 5 (11 Feb): The Archival Turn in Contemporary Art

This class will discuss the “archival turn” in contemporary art and how artists have explored archiving as part of their artistic practices. We will compare institutional archiving with artistic methods to open up to critical and creative perspectives to archiving.

Reading:

Enwezor, Okwui. *Archive Fever : Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*. 1st. ed. New York ; International Center of Photography, 2008.

Zielinski, Siegfried, and Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. "Anarcheology for Anarchives: Why Do We Need—Especially for the Arts—a Complementary Concept to the Archive?". *Journal of contemporary archaeology (Online)* 2, no. 1 (2015): 116-25.
<https://doi.org/10.1558/jca.v2i1.27144>.

Supplementary Reading:

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever : A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Pbk. ed. Chicago [Ill]: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Benjamin, Walter. *Walter Benjamin's Archive : Images, Texts, Signs*. Edited by Ursula Marx. Translated by Esther Leslie. First paperback edition. London ; Verso, 2015. Chapter 1 & 2.

Tambling, Jeremy. "Arcades Project of Walter Benjamin." In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*, 46–55. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022.

Murray, Noëleen, and Jill Weintraub. "Urban Archives and Walter Benjamin's The Arcades Project." *Critical African studies* 12, no. 2 (2020): 135–139.

-- No Class -- (18 Feb) Chinese New Year

Week 6 (25 Feb): Artist Archives

Field Trip: Asia Art Archive

Readings:

Lu Pan (ed.), *The (Im)possibility of Art Archives, Contemporary East Asian Visual Cultures, Societies and Politics*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-5898-6_2.

Vennes Cheng, Sau Wai. *Archive as Detour: Historical Re-Enactment in Artist Archive and Archival Art Practices of Contemporary Hong Kong*. 1st ed. 2024. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024. doi:10.1007/978-981-97-2488-8.

Week 7 (4 Mar): Ecomuseums and Museums without Walls

In this class, we will discuss the idea of museum without walls through ecomuseums, cultural heritage and community engagement, and use of technology in learning in museums. Through different understandings of the concept of "museum without walls" we can consider an expanded scope for museum practices today, and how it may connect to the museum context in China.

Readings:

Meng Li & Gehan Selim (2024) Cultivating ecomuseum practices in China: shifting from objects to users-centred approaches, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 30:10, 1211-1234, DOI: 10.1080/13527258.2024.2386696

Vermeeren, Arnold, Licia Calvi, and Amalia Sabiescu. "The Museum as Ecosystem and Museums in Learning Ecosystems." In *Museum Experience Design*, 325–345. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018.

Rosalind E. Krauss. "POSTMODERNISM'S MUSEUM WITHOUT WALLS." In *Thinking About Exhibitions*, 254–258. Routledge, 1996.

Week 8 (11 Mar): Queer Archives

This class will look at the role of archives within marginalised communities through a discussion of queer archives. Archives become a placemaking platform for communities to come together and share experiences and struggles with exclusion and discrimination. This class will look at archives in ways that contribute to community-building and collective healing process that gives visibility to marginalised experiences of the LGBTIQ+ communities.

Readings:

Cvetkovich, Ann. "Introduction," *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 1-14.

Orr, Bek J. 2021. "Introduction: Feminist Engagements With the Queer Archive." *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 19 (Fall): 1-6. 10.23860/jfs.2021.19.01.

Flavelle, Genevieve. "Erotic Fever in The ArQuives: Imagining a Queer Porn Paradise in Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer's Exhibition Tape Condition: Degraded." *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 19, no. 19 (2021). doi:10.23860/jfs.2021.19.04.

Supplementary reading:

Cvetkovich, Ann, Ana Dragojlovic, and CL Quinan. "An Archive of Feelings @ 20: An Interview with Ann Cvetkovich." *Memory Studies* 16, no. 1 (2023): 140–45. doi:10.1177/17506980221141997.

Week 9 (18 Mar): Group Presentations

Week 10 (25 Mar): Moving Image Archives

This class will look at moving image archives and the practices of preservation of moving image film and video artworks. We will look at aspects of media licensing and censorship reviews for moving image works.

GRAY, FRANK, and ELAINE SHEPPARD. "Moving History: Promoting Moving Image Archive Collections in an Emerging Digital Age." *Moving image* (Minneapolis, Minn.) 4, no. 2 (2004): 110–118.

CAVE, DYLAN. "'BORN DIGITAL'—RAISED AN ORPHAN? Acquiring Digital Media through an Analog Paradigm." *Moving image* (Minneapolis, Minn.) 8, no. 1 (2008): 1–13.

L. Pan and Chen Tong. "'Accumulation' and 'Reward': An Interview with Chen Tong on Video Bureau." In L. Pan (ed.), *The (Im)possibility of Art Archives, Contemporary East Asian Visual Cultures, Societies and Politics*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-5898-6_2

Becerra-Licha, Sofia. "Participatory and Post-Custodial Archives as Community Practice." *EDUCAUSE review* 52, no. 6 (2017): 90-.

Introduction to Assignment 3: Independent Essay

Week 11 (1 Apr): Documentation and the Preservation of Contemporary Art

In this class, we will look at some of the challenges of collecting and preserving forms of contemporary art including conceptual artworks, where artworks lack a fixed materiality. Documentation serves as a means to preserve ephemeral forms of art including conceptual, performance and digital art.

Readings:

Wielocha, Aga. "Collections of (An)archives: Towards a New Perspective on Institutional Collecting of Contemporary Art and the Object of Conservation". In R. van de Vall, V. van Saaze (eds.), *Conservation of Contemporary Art, Studies in Art, Heritage, Law and the Market* 9, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42357-4_14

Sloggett, Robyn. "Beyond the Material: Idea, Concept, Process, and Their Function in the Conservation of the Conceptual Art of Mike Parr." *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 37, no. 3 (1998): 316–333.

Hölling, Hanna B. "Caring For Performance: Recent Debates: A Review of the Colloquium Performance: The Ethics and the Politics of Care, Bern University of the Arts, May 29-30, 2021." *CeROArt*, no. 12 (2020).

Supplementary Reading:

Hölling, Hanna B. "The Archival Turn: Toward New Ways of Conceptualising Changeable Artworks". In Manovich, L., Smite, R., Smits, R., eds., *Data Drift: Archiving Media And Data Art In The 21st Century*, pp. 73-81. Riga: RIXC and Liepaja's University Art Research Lab.

Week 12 (8 Apr): Digital Preservation and Interactive Technologies in Museums

This class will look at issues and challenges of digital preservation. We will look at digitization and techniques for preservation including 3D scanning and applications using AR and VR technologies within the museum context. The class will include a talk and workshop on developing interactive experiences within museums and design and development workflows.

Reading:

Dekker, Annet and Gabriella Giannachi, eds. *Documentation as Art Expanded Digital Practices*. Expanded Digital Practices. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2023. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003130963>.

Hui, Yuk. "Archivist Manifesto". *Mute Magazine*, 22 May 2013. <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/lab/archivist-manifesto>

Guggenheim's The Variable Media Initiative:

<https://www.guggenheim.org/conservation/the-variable-media-initiative>

Week 13 (15 Apr): Individual presentations on essay topics.

If there is time, there will be a brief course review with a discussion on the future of museums today.

Supplementary viewing:

Film: *Museum Futures: Distributed*, Marisia Lewandowska and Niel Cummings, 2008

ICOM IMREC Seminar on Decolonisation - Panel 1- *Reimagining the museum Reshaping the Collectible: Learning Through Change*, Tate, 2022

Final assignment due two weeks after the last day of class. **Deadline: 29 Apr 2026.**

Use of generative AI tools

Use of AI tools is allowed with explicit acknowledgement and proper citation.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:

Please refer to the University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work at:
<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, you will be required to submit a signed declaration.

- In the case of group projects, all members of the group should sign the declaration.
- For text-based document assignments submit via VeriGuide:
https://veriguide1.cse.cuhk.edu.hk/portal/plagiarism_detection/login.jsp and submit the receipt the statement, in the form of a copy of the receipt along with your assignment.

The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

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Assessment Criteria:

Grade A / A-: Well-structured essay or presentation with clear framework for discussion.

Clear evidence of sophisticated analysis or innovative thinking with depth and complexity of argument beyond course readings and lectures. Evidence of creative thought and articulation of own ideas.

Grade B+ / B: Mostly well-structured essay or presentation with a well-developed framework for discussion. Logical development of ideas with some complexity of argument expressed. Some evidence of creative thought and use of own ideas.

Grade B- / C+: Essay or presentation has a satisfactory structure with mostly accurate material. Logical presentation attempted and successful in a limited way. Limited evidence of creative thought and use of own ideas.

Grade D: Poor and unclear essay or presentation structure. Weak development of argument. Little support from the literature. General appearance of resources lacks clarity.

Grade F: No submission or incoherent framework with little relevant material selected and poor use of examples. No development of argument and absence of own ideas.