Understanding Art: Curating Florence

HUM 4956, ART 5930, Summer A, 2017, M-TH, 3-5:30 pm

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COURSE DESCRIPTION*:*

Understanding Art: Curating Florence is an introductory arts appreciation/aesthetics course that builds a comfort level with responding to visual art. Visiting museums and galleries, touring public artworks, architecture, outdoor monuments and gardens, and learning about art and exhibition installations introduces the mechanics of art production, providing a deeper understanding of creative processes. The course is geared toward both non-art majors and art majors. Exploring Florence, Italy and its vast collections of art and architecture and gardens guides the content.

Aesthetic understanding is developed through learning to look at a work of visual art. Learning basic terminology used in the art world to discuss and analyze artwork is only part of this process. Looking at art in terms of how it feels emotionally, and using personal experience to make visual art interpretations is also integral. Visiting museums and galleries, and exploring creative vision and skill that go into making art, as well as the organizing, or curating of art exhibitions are related. Both are about making aesthetic choices and communicating through visual language. Art evokes responses via personal interpretation by viewers, but there are also universally shared insights in the language of art; such as composition, gesture, color and texture. More concretely, there are specific techniques involved in making art. These factors contribute to the overall art object and experience.

The goal is for *Understanding Art: Curating Florence* is to develop educated opinions and responses to art. Although taste may be subjective; ideas should be based upon critical thinking and evaluative measures, both individual and shared. One of the wonderful things about art is that it means different things to different people. Learning about aspects of planning essential to creating exhibitions, and increasing understanding of how artists and people who work in the arts conceptualize ideas before a final product is presented to an audience offer behind the scenes insights. The ultimate goal is to enhance future experiences as a museum/gallery visitor, providing cultural insights that will be of value for life.

Curating a Gallery Exhibition

The organization of an art exhibition involves curating; or conceptualizing the overall idea for a show, as well as selecting the specific artworks that will be included. The creation of an art exhibition requires attention to various components such as a theme, exhibition title and design, wall-text that describes the show and/or artists involved, labels for each individual artwork, design and placement of artworks within the gallery space. The orchestration of all of these components is similar to making a work of art. The feel, impact, and overall look are as important and carefully planned in an exhibition as in a work of art.

Class Structure

Class meets Monday-Thursday, generally with classroom planning time on Mondays, and Tuesday-Thursday touring galleries and museums, city walking tours to view art and architecture, as a class, independently or in groups. Weekly assignments include readings and recording aesthetic responses in journals about exhibitions and individual works of art. The final project, completed during the last two weeks, entails creating an imaginary art gallery show; developing a theme, selecting artworks, and writing text information such as labels and introductory panels as seen in museums, or creating a walking tour with maps and landmark sites, which may include public artworks, gardens, landscape architecture and the overall built and natural environment.

Assignments:
- Weekly readings must be completed for discussion in class on Mondays.
- Journals will be used to respond to artwork, exhibitions, architecture, gardens, etc., Tues-Thurs for the weeks 2-4. Journal assignments (one writing per week) are due Sundays at 3 pm, 10 points each (total=30) Each entry should be 500-750 words.
- Class discussion, critique, initiative, attendance; 5 points weekly (total=30)
- FUA Field Learning Experience; 5 points each preliminary, on-sight and follow up (total=15 points)
- Virtual Exhibition, concept, title, wall-text, labels, class presentation (total=25 points)

Class meeting time: Monday-Thursday, 3:00-5:30 pm
Total of fees allotted for museum entries: 122 euros
(Based upon estimates; will be adjusted within same figure range)

Required On-Line Readings:
- Course introduction
- Gallery visit journal notes worksheet
- Daniel Pink, "*A Whole New Mind,*" chapter one: *Right Brain Rising*
- Sir Ken Robinson*, "Out of Our Minds,"* chapter five: *Feeling Better*
- David Salle, *"How to See"*

Other On-Line Readings:
- Denis Dutton, "*The Art Instinct*"
- Twyla Tharp, "*The Creative Habit"*
- Bonnard images from Museo d"Orsay, Paris

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

Mondays we will meet in classroom and go over weekly itinerary, concepts and select vocabulary to be reflected upon in journal writing, as well as methodology/components for exhibition planning.

Week 1: Introduction to class structure, exhibition theme/design, curatorial role, what to look for in touring in order to complete assignments. Journaling with keyboard or sketchbook; preferably both.

- Mon, May 15; FUA Florence orientation tour, welcome dinner
- Tues, May 16; Boboli Gardens (3 day pass, Pitti Palace); 15 euros
- Wed, May 17; Field Trip Prep; Silver and Porcelain Museums, discussion of on-line research on Museo Tessuto
- Thurs, May 18; Field Trip Prep; Modern Art and Costume Galleries, discussion of on-line research on Museo Tessuto

Sunday, May 21, The Creative Heart of Tuscany: Pistoia and Prato (FUA field learning experience)

FUA Field Learning specific outcomes:
Assess the importance of textile production in specific Italian areas.
Identify the historical turning point of textile production in Italy.
Recognize the artistic styles, construction techniques and materials of the Middle Ages in Tuscany.

We will learn about artwork made for display/ornamental purposes, artwork created for utilitarian use tools and equipment associated with textile production.

Step #1 Preliminary activity (5% overall grade)
Prior to the Field Learning Experience, please research the Museo del Tessuto website in order to gain insight into the overall collection and look of the galleries, identifying three works of art and three galleries to search for and study. Because we are in class for only one week before the field learning experience, we will practice the same skills and structure for narrowing down aesthetic interests and curatorial conceptualization by visiting several small museum venues at the Boboli Gardens and Palazzo Pitti, performing the same activities.

Step #2 On-site activity (5% overall grade)
Sunday, May 21st:
During the Field Learning Experience activity each student will learn how to explore the museum with her own personal goals in mind, documenting the area highlights and the activities performed during the day with reference to their preliminary research on area highlights to be related to the class during students' follow-up activity on Monday, May 22nd. This will constitute our first journaling activity.

Step #3 Follow-up activity (5% overall grade)
Class on Monday, May 22nd will consist of presentations and conversations about the field experience. From this point we will form groups for the remainder of the semester. Each group will explore an exhibition they might curate from objects in the collection of the Museo del Tessuto.

Week 2: Mon, May 22; class conversation about Museo Tessuto field learning, divide into three groups
Tues, May 23; Galleria Academia; 25 euros?
Wed, May 24; Cathedrals: Duomo, Santa Maria Novella; 15 euros + 4 euros
Thurs, May 25; Palazzo Medici Riccardi; 10 euros?

READ: Daniel Pink, "*A Whole New Mind,*" chapter one: *Right Brain Rising*
for class discussion Mon, May 29

Week 3: Mon, May 29; class conversation, map out week
        Tues, May 30; Uffizi Gallery; 12-20 euros
        Wed, May 31; Visit Fiesole, Villa Medici; 12 + 5 euros
        Thurs, June 1; Palazzo Vecchio

        READ: Sir Ken Robinson*, "Out of Our Minds,"* chapter five: *Feeling Better*
        for class discussion Mon, June 5

Week 4: Mon, June 5; class conversation, contemporary art
        Tues, June 6; Palazzo Strozzi, Bill Viola Exhibition; 10 euros
        Wed, June 7; Contemporary Galleries: Eduardo Secci, Ottavia Sartini
        Piazza Carlo Goldoni, 2, +39 055 661356
        Thurs, June 8; Santa Croce

        Preliminary exhibition planning

        READ: David Salle, selections from *"How to See" for class discussion Mon, June 12*

Week 5: Mon, June 12; Exhibition proposals, class discussion, critique
        Tues, June 13; Final exhibition planning, return to sites with artwork selections
        Wed, June 14; Continue planning final exhibition, return to sites or design space
        Thurs, June 15; Continue planning final exhibition; (10-20 euros)

Week 6: Mon, June 19; Virtual exhibition due, class presentations/discussion (group 1)
        Tues, June 20; Virtual exhibition due, class presentations/discussion (group 2)
        Wed, June 21; Virtual exhibition due, class presentations/discussion (group 3)
        Thurs, June 22; final class art exhibition celebration

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION: The class will tour the City of Florence visiting museums and galleries. Lectures will consist of ongoing live dialogue. Participation will account for 30% of grade.

FUA FIELD LEARNING EXPERIENCE: The Creative Heart of Tuscany: Pistoia and Prato; Visit to Textile Museum. Three activities will account for 15% of grade.

PARTICIPATION: Time invested in observing art objects, architecture, exhibitions, and the Florence landscape (built and natural) and written/illustrated/drawn, photographed, filmed aesthetic responses to them in your journal will account for 30% of grade.

FINAL PROJECT: The final project is to create a virtual art exhibition and present it to the class in an electronic format or otherwise. This accounts for 25% of grade.

GRADES: The standard 100-point scale will be used and minus grades will be included.

A   100–95: exceptional work
A–   94–90: superior work
B+   89-87: very good work
B   86-83: above average work
B–   82-80: slightly above average work
C+   79-77: adequate, average work
C   76-73: average work, bordering on inadequate
C–   72-70: below average work – not meeting expectations
D+   69-67: barely meeting criteria
D   66-63: meeting criteria
D–   62-60: not meeting criteria
E   59–0: failure to meet most criteria

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