

Doug Ashford, Instructor
Syllabus for Antioch

The function and habits of the contemporary museum are today under great critical and social pressure. No longer accepted as pristine containers, their galleries and catalogues are increasingly understood as repositories for ideological and emotional directives. To further a critical understanding of these events, this course will examine the visual forms and functions of collections from both individual and institutional standpoints. How collections and collecting practices create shifting definitions and organizations of what is valued by society will be our tangible history. The act of wonder that we invest certain objects will be our artistic topic. This course will examine the role artists and audiences have had in shifting definitions of the art exhibition through the actual production by students of a series of exhibitions and visual commentaries.

Students will be expected to help produce some aspect of a museum exhibition in collaboration with the instructor. Many of the approaches used in this class will be experimental applications of artistic theory and method. We will have the archives of Antioch and other self-made collections to use as raw material. Class time will be taken up with different preparatory activities from technical workshops oriented around the ideas of art making and collecting to discussions of contemporary artworks. There will be periodic slide discussions of contemporary art practices that have been inspired by the museum and the collection. There will also be a series of assigned readings from fiction, art history, sociology and cultural studies from a distributed course pack of copied essays and articles. The unfinished novel *Brouvard and Pecuchet* by Gustave Flaubert will be our guide.

This class will meet Monday through Friday 1:00 to 4:00 PM. I will announce additional office hours at the first meeting.

Students will be evaluated through the degree of involvement with production of exhibition(s), discussion and participation in class, level of effort on models, video tapes and drawings, and through the interpretive work contained in three short pieces of writing.

Example of one week's course work activities:

nature (how to think about objects as part of collections)

day 1. Collect twenty objects on a walk that we take together from the mall to the nature preserve. Discuss reading from Borges, Ficciones and Breton, Mad Love.

day 2. Make an 8 1/2 x 11" drawing of each of them that you feel disclose something about each and would serve as a way to categorize each of them. View and discuss slides of nature guides and diagrams of natural orders.

day 3. Invent a categorizing or listing system for these objects obtained from visual characteristics. (size, color, texture and shape are simple examples - you can choose more complicated ones). Name them and decide on their function in relation to other things you know about nature and culture. This can be a fictional system but must make some sense to a viewer or reader.

day 4. Design a case or other display system for these things that will organize them in a way that will make sense to others. Include the display a didactic rendition of your system of organization. This is your own diorama, so be open to invention.

day 5. Compare and discuss our experiments and apply to a critical tour of the Antioch archives.

Mieke Bal, *Telling Objects: A Narrative perspective on Collecting*. a discussion of commodity-nature as determining the characteristic of collections. (from Elsner and Cardinal)

Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*. the definitive text on the changed nature of art production since authorship can be held in suspicion.

Roland Barthes, *Myth Today*. an introduction to the use of semiotics to decode contemporary culture.

Judith Barry, *Casual Imagination*. an artist's investigation into the history of shopping.

Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Collecting*. an examination of the collection as a force effecting our conceptions of identity in time. (from Elsner and Cardinal)

Russell W. Belk, *A Brief History of Collecting*. he writes this as a parallel history to that of consumption.

Russell W. Belk, *Individual Collectors*. a series of testimonials by collectors and a journalistic analysis of them.

Andre Breton, *Mad Love*. an important text on the impossible presence of objects told by the master of surrealism.

Douglas Crimp, *On the Museums' Ruins*. a history of the museum as an arbiter of power and ideology.

Stuart Ewen, *The Marriage Between Art and Commerce*. a brief discussion of the engineering of desire through advertising.

Brian O'Dererty, *Inside the White Cube*. a discussion of the social implications of gallery and museum space.

Gustave Flaubert, *Brouvard and Pecuchet*. a novel about two flaneurs to be read through whole course and discussed informally.

Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, entry on Formalist. a history of the concept in western thought.

Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, entry on Sensibility. a history of the concept in western thought.

Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, entry on Structural. a history of the concept in western thought.