

COURSE CODE: **HR4001**
COURSE TITLE: **EXHIBITION HISTORIES: MUSEUMS TO BIENNIALS**
INSTRUCTOR: Louis Ho
PREREQUISITES:
UNITS: 4AU
CONTACT HOURS: 43
YEAR/SEM: (SAMPLE SYLLABUS)
TIME/VENUE: -

DESCRIPTION:

This course is intended as an introduction to the histories and concepts of the multi-faceted practice of displaying art. It encompasses a range of material from Euro-American museological traditions to the expansion of exhibiting beyond the parameters of the white cube. (While it is not geared towards training in the practicalities of exhibition-making or curatorial work, there will be necessarily be overlaps.) This course also taps on the breadth of visual resources available in Singapore today. Theoretical ideas, texts and class discussions will be supplemented by off-campus trips to various exhibitions in both public institutions and independent spaces, orienting what is otherwise a Western-centric discourse towards the reality of localized articulations, and the socio-cultural nuances of twenty-first century Singapore. Classes are structured as upper-level seminars, with lecture components; students are expected to be familiar with the rudiments of Western art history.

OUTLINE:

The course is divided into several thematic modules, most of which are comprised of two separate sessions: a field trip, and a related discussion class. We begin with an in-class module that serves as an introduction to the world of art exhibitions and their objects, especially their interpretive modes. Here, issues of how works of art are explicated autonomously, and within the broader grouping referred to as an exhibition, are addressed. The rest of the semester features off-campus visits, and an in-class film screening. Field trip venues may change from semester to semester. Modules may include, but are not limited to: public museums and the scripting of Singapore's art history; the tensions between economic and cultural value systems in the ecology of contemporary art; the mediating work of the blockbuster biennial, interfacing between international circuits of engagement and localized forms of cultural understanding; the politics of inclusion impacting the contemporary art world; the discontents of the white cube model, in its failure to acknowledge modes of perception and memorialization beyond its limits. The last session of the semester is dedicated to final paper presentations.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- (1) Describe the fundamental histories and conceptual issues regarding the practice of exhibition-making.
- (2) Evaluate specific practices of museographic endeavours and projects as forms of knowledge production, public education and cultural memory
- (3) Critically analyse a range of curatorial and exhibition concepts and strategies.
- (4) Reflect on how exhibition histories and agendas impact and shape the development of art practice.
- (5) Contribute to discussion and assessments of the artistic and cultural relevance of an object or event based on its politics, ethics and aesthetics of public display.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

(1) **Fortnightly readings and class participation.** Readings are to be completed prior to the class meeting or module in question.

(2) **Active participation in class discussions.** All readings will be provided for you as downloadable PDFs online. Please refrain from using your devices (laptops, tablets, cell phones) during class, thank you.

(3) **Regular attendance and punctuality.** Absence from class requires official documentation of some form. Each unexplained absence results in the loss of a third of a grade, counted against your final one: an A- will become a B+, a B+ will drop to a B etc. If you are late or not around when your name is called, it is your responsibility to speak to the instructor after the end of the class. Being more than 20 mins late, or leaving without permission before class is dismissed, will be acknowledged as an absence. Please speak to me if you are unable to be at present on any field trip(s) due to scheduling issues or if you are forced to miss a trip due to unforeseen circumstances; we will discuss options for you to make up the absence with an additional assignment.

(4) **Seminars.** You are asked to participate in two class presentations – one solo, and one in a group. Please refer to the section below, “ASSIGNMENTS”, for details.

(5) A **final paper**, for which you are expected to make a short presentation on your topic of choice at our last class meeting of the semester. Please refer to the section, “ASSIGNMENTS”, for details.

(6) Passing the course means **fulfilling all graded components.** You are expected to receive passing scores in all graded components of this course – see table below – to pass it. For instance, you should receive at least 10 out of 20 points for participation, 20 out of 40 for the final essay etc. to receive an overall passing grade for the course.

Requirement/Assignment	Format	Grade	ILOs (Intended Learning Outcomes)
Participation	Solo	20%	All
Seminar (group presentation)	Group	20%	All
Seminar (solo response)	Solo	20%	All
Final Paper	Solo	40%	All
TOTAL		100%	

CONTACT

I'm contactable at ho.h.louis@gmail.com. This course is heavy on logistics, since it includes several off-campus field trips, and all communication outside of class hours will be conducted over e-mail (unless urgent). Grades for assignments will also be distributed via e-mail.

Should there be any issues that occur on days when field trips are scheduled – e.g. last-minute emergencies preventing your attendance – pls. call me or reach out on WhatsApp at (65) 90407282. Note that this option is only for emergency situations on field trips. All other matters should be addressed over e-mail, or in person.

ASSIGNMENTS

Presentations

You will participate in two class presentations, in the form of seminars, one as speaker (as part of a group) and one as a respondent (solo). Seminars will take place during discussion classes; on a first come, first served basis, you have your choice of topic for both.

(A) As speaker, you will be part of a group presentation on an assigned exhibition or film that we have seen over the course of the semester. Your presentation, which should involve visual references in the form of slides, should include an overview of the exhibition in question, incl. curatorial aims, visual display and cultural or theoretical implications. should last no more than 20 mins. This assignment is an exercise in unpacking an exhibition: its thematic framework; its physical expression; its situation within broader historical or socio-cultural contexts.

(B) As a solo respondent, you should critique the relevant exhibition or film within the framework of any one of the assigned readings for that particular week. Your response should last no more than 15 mins. No slides are required, since this is an exercise in applying the relevant theoretical or conceptual notions to the visual artefact in question.

Final Essay

This essay should take the form of an extended critique of either an exhibition, or a pair of exhibitions, that we visited over the course of the semester, or that you have personally seen or experienced. The essay is intended to be a research paper, i.e. you should approach one aspect of your exhibition(s) of choice through pertinent theoretical frameworks. For instance, if you wish to discuss “Siapa Nama Kamu?” at NGS, examples of possible areas of discussion include the emplotment of the Nanyang style to the detriment of other schools of discourse and practice; the problematics of the inclusion of Chinese ink art in a national narrative; the erasure of other-ed social groups from representation. (Pick one specific area to focus on.) You may also combine areas of discussion by comparing two exhibitions with visibly dissimilar presentation formats and/or curatorial frameworks, but, again, your discussion should focus on a single aspect of the comparison.

(A) If your topic of choice includes exhibitions included in this syllabus, you may not pick shows that you have engaged with in the seminar assignment, either in your group presentation or solo response.

(B) The essay should run between 3,000 and 3,500 words.

(C) Submissions for the assignment are staggered, with several dates to note. Missing any one of the following submissions and/or deadlines will impact your grade.

-: An abstract of 150 to 250 words regarding your topic, along with a preliminary bibliography of at least 8 unique citations, out of which no more than 3 may be online sources. Due via e-mail by **midnight**. (Feedback will be provided on your topic of choice. Topics may still be changed at this stage.)

-: You are expected to make a presentation on your topic during our last class meeting of the semester. This presentation should last no more than 15 minutes, and should include visuals. (Topics may not be changed after your presentation is delivered.)

-: Your paper is due via e-mail by **midnight**.

(D) All submissions to be made via e-mail to ho.h.louis@gmail.com. Please include all text and images within a single document. DO NOT double-space your text; pls. submit it in single-spaced format.

Ethics

Your passing of the course depends on ethical behaviour. In matters of proven plagiarism, an immediate failing grade will be awarded. As a member of the NTU community, you are bound by its Student Code of Conduct: <<https://ebook.ntu.edu.sg/student-code-of-conduct.html>>. It is important that you recognize your responsibilities in understanding and applying the principles of academic integrity in your work. **Claims of ignorance do not excuse dishonesty.** If you are uncertain of parameters and expectations here, please consult the NTU Academic Integrity handbook.

NTU has explicit guidelines on the use of generative AI tools for research purposes; those guidelines may be found at <<https://www.ntu.edu.sg/research/resources/use-of-gai-in-research>>. **For the purposes of this course, however, students are not permitted the use of generative AI programs either with research for oral presentations, or in submitted written work.** Art history, like other humanistic disciplines, is a field which still largely relies on the synthesis of a broad range of research, and ultimately premised on abstract ideas and individual insight. A program like ChatGPT, for instance, at the present stage of its development, seems unlikely to produce the sort of in-depth academic analysis and deeply engaged writing that is required of upper-level undergraduates. ChatGPT is also known to fabricate facts, from names to events to even legal case studies. For these reasons, the use of AI tools in a course of this nature is both counter-productive, and disallowed. As in the case of proven plagiarism, the use of AI in work of any sort for this course, if discovered, results in an immediate failing grade.

SCHEDULE

Introduction: Objects and Exhibitions

Week one	-	Course Intro/Objects in Space, the Space of Objects
Week two	-	Biennials

Museums and the Scripting of Art History

Week three	-	FIELD TRIP: “Siapa Nama Kamu?”, Natl. Gallery Singapore
Week four	-	Discussion

Curatorial Practices and Methods

Week five	-	FIELD TRIP: NTU ADM Gallery
Week six	-	Discussion

MIDTERM RECESS

Value Systems of Art

Week seven	-	FIELD TRIP: Gillman Barracks
Week eight	-	Discussion

Art in Public Spaces

Week nine	-	FIELD TRIP: The Everyday Museum (SAM public art trails)
Week ten	-	Discussion

(The Horrors of) The Art World

Week eleven	-	In-class screening: “Velvet Buzzsaw” (2019; dir. Dan Gilroy)
Week twelve	-	Discussion

Conclusion

Week thirteen	-	Final paper presentations
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READINGS

INTRODUCTION: OBJECTS AND EXHIBITIONS

Week 1 Course Intro/Objects in Space, the Space of Objects

Recommended (browse at will):

- Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (1998)
- Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (2009)
- James Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood: The Exhibition as a Critical Form since 1968* (2017)
- Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1976)

Week 2 Exhibitions: Biennales

- Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art* (2016), chaps. 4 and 8, “1989: Asian Biennialization” and “2014: Global Art Circuits”, pp. 111–143 and 241–271

ILOs (refer to “Intended Learning Outcomes” on p. 1 of this syllabus): All

MUSEUMS AND THE SCRIPTING OF ART HISTORY

Week 3 Field trip to the National Gallery Singapore

Week 4 Discussion

- Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (1995), chap.1, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship”, pp. 7–20
- Ong Zhen Min, “Nanyang Reverie”, *Siapa Nama Kamu?* (2015), pp. 42–53
- Charmaine Toh, “Shifting Grounds”, *Siapa Nama Kamu?* (2015), pp. 90–103
- Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (2018), preface and chap. 1, “What is Curatorial Activism?”, pp. 13–15 and 17–33

ILOs: All

CURATORIAL METHODS AND PRACTICES

Week 5 Field trip to NTU ADM Gallery

Week 6 Discussion

Readings TBC

ILOs: All

THE VALUE SYSTEMS OF ART

Week 7 Field trip to Gillman Barracks

Week 8 Discussion

- Olav Velthuis, *Talking Prices: Symbolic Meanings of Prices on the Market for Contemporary Art* (2005), chaps. 1 and 2, “The Architecture of the Art Market” and “Exchanging Meaning”, pp. 21–52 and 53–76

- Herbert Marcuse, *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse* vol. 4 (2007), chap. 2, “The Affirmative Character of Culture”, pp. 82–112

ILOs: nos. 3, 4 and 5

PUBLIC ART AND ITS CONTEXTS

Week 9 Field trip to The Everyday Museum (SAM public art program)

Week 10 Discussion

- TC Chang, “Art and soul: powerful and powerless art in Singapore”, *Environment and Planning A* 40:8 (2008)

- Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002), chap. 3, “Sittings of Public Art: Integration Versus Intervention”, pp. 56–99

ILOs: nos. 1, 2, 3 and 5

(THE HORRORS OF) THE ART WORLD

Week 11 In-class screening of “Velvet Buzzsaw”

Week 12 Discussion

- Taylor Dafoe, “Why Are So Many Contemporary Horror Flicks Set in the Art World?” (2021), *Artnet.com*. Accessible at:

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/why-are-so-many-scary-movies-set-in-art-world-2026754>

- Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (2011), chap. 5, “Glut, Overproduction, Redundancy!”, pp. 116–134

- Robin Wood, *Robin Wood on the Horror Film* (2018), “An Introduction to the American Horror Film” (1978), pp. 73–112

ILOs: nos. 3 and 5

CONCLUSION

Week 13 Final essay presentations

No readings