

GERMAN390-1, MEDREN390, WOMENST290, ARTHIST390 (Fall 2012)
MW10:05-11:20; LINK Seminar Room 1

Rivalrous Masculinities: Building a Virtual Exhibition on Changing Images of Masculinity over Time

This seminar is sponsored by the *Humanities Writ Large* Initiative



Instructors

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Course Synopsis

A new, hands-on, interdisciplinary humanities seminar in which you will curate a virtual exhibition focusing on changing images of masculinity from the Middle Ages to the present. You will process theories of gender and masculinity, and explore humanistic modes of inquiry through case studies. You will research objects from the collections of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University and at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library. You will produce research and finding aids on these objects and publish them in a virtual exhibition of your own design. You will also work with students at the University of Bamberg (Bamberg, Germany) via video-conferencing to deepen your knowledge of the questions guiding your research throughout the semester. The work done in this seminar is an essential part of a larger project that will curate an exhibition at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University scheduled to take place from February to May 2014. You are integral members of the exhibition team. You will brainstorm framing ideas and images for the exhibition, offer design ideas, and devise other supporting projects. Your virtual exhibition will serve as an introduction to the 2014 physical exhibition.

Texts

All readings and assignments will be posted to the course Sakai website.

Content Advisory

You are advised that the evidence studied in this course may include transgressive and obscene images and materials that meet the standards of legality in the United States, but which some individuals might find offensive to their religious or cultural beliefs. This disclaimer serves as notice so that individuals are not unwittingly exposed to such materials. It will be read out loud at the first class meeting. Any student wishing to drop this course may do so without penalty. By returning to class in the second week, you agree to view and discuss this material in respectful, fair-minded ways.

Class Requirements

By enrolling in this course, you agree to:

1. Do all readings, writing exercises, and assignments, and attend class regularly.
2. Find something of interest in everything you do for class.
3. Take intellectual risks.
4. Participate, debate, and differ in fair-minded and respectful ways.
5. Read promptly all emails from your professors.

Student Roles

In this course, you will be both a **reader** and a **communicator**.

As a **reader**, you will grapple with texts and objects, seeking to understand and to interpret them. For the purposes of this course, being a researcher belongs in the category of reader, because it is aimed at increasing your understanding of a work of art. Many humanities courses focus exclusively on reading in this broad sense of the word. Such courses deepen your expertise, and your professors expect that in this course you will learn more about western art and about masculinity. When you write as a reader, you are using writing to think.

However, in this course, you will take on another role as well, that of **communicator**. As a communicator, you will design a virtual exhibition that tells a story about masculinity. As a communicator, you will produce a series of research products on works of art whose goal is to share the knowledge and insights you have gained with different audiences. As a communicator,

you will think about various media available to you and chose the ones that work best for a specific object and a specific audience. When you work and write as a communicator, you think about communicating in ways that are accurate, correct, effective, and engaging.

Your professors have structured the course around these roles. The first third of the course focuses on reading; the rest of the course focuses on communicating. Of course, in practice, the roles of reader and communicator are in constant, productive dialogue with one another. Much of your reading and research will be done with design goals in mind. The process of working as a communicator in designing a section of the virtual exhibition, or of writing a wall caption for an object, for example, will raise new questions that only a new round of reading and researching can answer.

You may use your writing exercises (WE) to exercise your writing and thinking in either role. Just note on the WE which hat you are wearing, reader or communicator!

Grading

Instead of term papers, you will write about the objects you are researching and studying. The research products you produce may include catalogue text, wall text, podcasts, or similar, authentic products you have made for the virtual exhibition.

Grade to be based on:

Class participation, including writing exercises:	15%
Writing Assignments (for ex design and assessment docs):	10%
Final Conference Presentation:	10%
Small research product:	10%
Medium research product:	15%
Large research product:	30%
Virtual Exhibition:	10%

NOTE: You will do research on three objects. The research products you produce on each one will differ in format and in depth of research. You will select two of your research products to develop further into one medium (15% of final grade) and one large (30% of final grade) project. Your decision regarding which products will be expanded must be communicated via email to the professors no later than **November 19** (If you wish, you may

use one of your research products as the basis for your conference presentation in December.)

A Note on the Virtual Exhibition

We might think about designing the virtual exhibition like this: What rooms does our virtual exhibition have? We might, for example, sort them by audience: a room for children, one for academics, one for other students, and so on. The virtual exhibition will also have a space that is not publically accessible where we can archive and share our work. We could also sort by media type: podcast, caption, research summary, and so on.

All findings, even if not in depth, will be mounted in the virtual exhibition. For example, you might spend a little time with an object and then decide that you would prefer to research a different object in depth. For the first object, you would write up a very brief, useable, and accessible summary for the virtual exhibition site (most likely for the non-public side of it) documenting your brief encounter with it. Should another student wish to research the object in more detail, he or she will be able to build on your summary.

All students will contribute in different ways to the virtual exhibition, for example, through research, design, writing conceptual articles, and research on objects. Formulating shared standards for the various products (podcast; caption; research summary; summary on masculinity; etc) will be important for the success of the virtual exhibition. We will provide samples and then the class will draw up its own standards for each kind of research product.

Syllabus Revisions

Your learning is our principal concern. As a class we may discover that we want to spend more time on certain topics and less time on others. Your professors will consider changing the schedule if such a change would benefit most students' learning in the course.

The Driving Questions

1. What is gender? What does it mean to understand masculinity as something that is plural, that takes multiple and perhaps even contradictory forms? Can placing masculinity in relationship with concepts such as

femininity, status, age, profession, race, ethnicity and religion help us better understand its plural forms? What is the relationship of these different forms of masculinity to one another? Does masculinity change over time? How can thinking historically help us understand masculinity? Is there a difference between discourses of masculinity and its lived experience? What might be the relationship between the two? How do I apply what I am learning about masculinity to understanding an image or a work of art? How do we make masculinity visible?

2. What is unique about the visual and material modes of communication that characterize works of art? What is special about the male body in art? How does the media chosen for a work of art shape what it communicates? Do ways of depicting masculinity in art change over time? What is the relationship between a work of art featuring the male body and the cultural discourses of masculinity of its time? What role is played by aesthetic discourses regarding the nature of beauty in shaping cultural notions of masculinity? Do the works of art we study uphold, modify, or contradict cultural norms of masculinity, then and now? What roles do culture, history, and the positioning of the writer play in answering these questions?

3. How can we become informed readers of images and works of art? What methods are available to us? What research questions can and should we ask? What sources are available to us as researchers that will allow us to learn more about these objects than has been known before? How can we become informed readers of images and works of art who have new, interesting and engaging things to say about them?

4. How can we communicate powerfully and effectively about and with images? How can we share what we are learning effectively? How can we become informed and articulate communicators about images, works of art, and masculinity? What design strategies can we use to make masculinity visible? What audiences do we wish to reach? Which modes of communication are the most effective for certain tasks and for certain audiences? What constitutes good web design? What constitutes the “publication-ready” standard in each medium? How can we help each other attain those standards?

Guidelines for Writing Exercises (WE)

Writing Exercises (WE) count towards participation. In order to make sure that you receive credit for the work you have done, writing exercises are marked using the following scale:

P = the assignment was fulfilled (= 8 pts). P is the default mark.

HP = the writing was outstanding (= 10 pts). Rare.

NP = totally missed the point (= 5 pts). Very rare.

0 = nothing turned in (= 0 pts). Hopefully even rarer!

The lowest three marks will be dropped automatically from the participation grade. This includes zeros, of course.

All WE will be posted to your Wordpress Course Website. For some of them, you will choose one of your blog posts to lightly revise and bring to class to share (two paper copies, please). This will be indicated on the assignment.

A writing exercise represents your engagement with the text or image. It is not a mini-paper. It is not a plot summary (assume that your professors and your classmates have read the text or the image). It doesn't need a thesis or a conclusion. You can write about what you don't understand, or half understand, on what puzzles, bewilders, troubles, or annoys you. Focus on the assignment, text, or prompt, and take intellectual risks by using this writing as a place to struggle with it. Also, please feel free to change the prompt if you think that it would benefit your thinking—please indicate all changes.

The audience for the writing exercises is not your professors. It is your classmates. At times you will write responses to a classmate's writing exercise. The purpose of response writing is to engage in intellectual conversation with your classmates. You are writing comments for them, not for your professors. Please don't peer-edit, or review. Don't correct grammar or spelling. Don't suggest how your classmate could clarify or deepen a point. Instead, tell them what really confused or interested you in what they said; how you see a point they made connecting to issues raised in class; share evidence from the reading that might answer a question they had or change their perspective. Be respectful, curious, and fair-minded, but remember, you don't have to be nice.

Semester Plan

Week One: Begin with the end in mind.

August 27: Getting Up to Speed on the Class.

Discussion:

- Introduction to the course
- What do you expect from this class? What do you expect from us? What do we expect from you?
- Group syllabus review

August 29: Getting up to speed on the objects. Meet the objects.

Meet at the Nasher Museum. Bring your notebook. We will be practicing close looking.

Discussion:

Which objects intrigue you? Which ones could you imagine working with, or not? Why? What kinds of research products can you imagine producing? Brainstorm! All ideas welcome. First we create, then we evaluate!

Write (WE) – for next Monday:

Today, you will start the “Masculinities around you” writing exercise (see separate sheet on Sakai). You will be writing for it every day starting today. You are encouraged to write one entry on one of the works of art you saw in the museum. For class on Monday, September 3, you will choose one of your blog posts from “masculinities around you” that you would like to share with the class. Lightly revise it and bring two paper copies to class.

Week Two: Getting up to Speed on Masculinity

Sept 3: Thinking about masculinity

Discussion:

Our discussion will be based on your observations from the “Masculinities around you” WE. We will be thinking about the different manifestations of masculinity you encounter in your

every day life in order to move to a more conceptual understanding of masculinity.

Write (WE) – start August 29:

Choose one of your blog posts from “masculinities around you” that you would like to share with the class. Lightly revise it and bring two paper copies to class.

Sept 5: Conceptualizing Masculinity.

Discussion:

Today, we will be further delving into linking your thinking with Brintnall’s abstract concepts. Our discussions will evolve around your WE that you will prepare for today.

Read/Write (WE):

First read Brintnall, pages 28-36. The point of this WE is to practice building connections between Brintnall's thinking and yours. Brintnall is using abstract concepts about masculinity to interpret some well-known action films. Chose one or two of his concepts and apply them to one of the objects or works of art you saw in the museum. It is fine to use the one you wrote about in your WE. Remember, the point of this writing and thinking exercise is not to critique Brintnall but to familiarize yourself with his concepts and argument by applying them to your observations.

Week Three: Historicizing Gender Relations

Sept 10: Thinking Historically

Due:

Bring to class a list of **five (5)** objects you would like to work on, ranked in order of preference.

Discussion:

Today, we will be discussing why and in what ways it is important to consider different depictions of gender in general and images of masculinity more specifically not only at one point in time but also in their historical development.

Read:

Selection from: Judith Bennett. *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*

Write (WE)—start September 5:

We will take our anthropological fieldwork from week two a little further. Every day Wednesday through Saturday (starting September 5) you will take either one of the observations from the "Masculinities around you" WE or one of the objects in the museum and continue working with it. For at least one of this week's WE, apply Bennett's notion of patriarchy to your previous WE or to your object. For at least one of this week's WE, write a commentary on your previous WE or object from a different generational point of view. For example, how would last week's WE have been different if it had been observed from the point of view of, say, your father, or your grandmother? of someone living in the year 2055? and so on.

Sept 12: Deepening Our Awareness of Historical Thinking**Discussion:**

Today we will apply our discussions of historicity to our work with your objects by discussing questions of audience for our exhibition.

Read:

Re-read your own commentaries from the Monday's WE and try to understand how your observations change when put into a different generational context.

Write (WE):

For today, take one of your three objects and imagine that you have to write a letter to a friend to describe it and tell him or her why it fascinates you. In fact, you will be writing three letters: one to your 73 year old grandmother, one to your 6 year old cousin and one to your best friend, who is 19 years old. Make sure to imagine your audience and how a change of audience may change the way you talk about your object.

Week Four: Intersections of Gender with Other Forms of Identity.
Sept 17: A Performative Category

Due:

BRING TO CLASS a list of at least THREE kinds of final products the virtual exhibition can use to communicate successfully

Discussion:

After bringing our own observations regarding different depictions of masculinity into dialogue with more abstract concepts, we will now start thinking about the broader analytical category “gender” by introducing Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity.

Read:

Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-31.

Write (WE) – start September 13:

Take your time reading this article, and use the WE to grapple with it. In one entry, choose a sentence you find especially obscure yet important, and practice paraphrasing it. In two entries, brainstorm applying Butler’s idea of performativity to two of our works of art. What happens? Does the concept of performativity help you see things you didn’t see before? Does the object ‘push back’ on Butler’s ideas? In another entry, practice “the elevator speech.” Situation: You are at a gender studies convention in NYC. As you step into the elevator to go up twenty floors, there stands a friend you haven’t seen for a while who says that he is taking a women’s studies course and that they are going to read Butler. Eureka! In the time it takes to travel twenty floors, explain performativity to your friend, making sure that you tell the gist of Butler’s thought.

Sept 19: The Limitations of “Biological Sex/Gender

Discussion:

After working with Butler’s performative approach to gender, we want to discuss the limitations that come with an understanding of gender/sex as a biological category.

Brainstorm:

Rather than assigning any reading or writing, we want you to get together with one of your classmates and talk about some of the following questions for about 30 minutes and make notes of your three most interesting thoughts that come up. Be prepared to talk about them in class:

To what degree do you feel gender is bound or not bound by biology? How does biology play a role (or not) in the depictions of masculinity we see in the art works? Do they follow or defy our notions of modern sexual biology? If we look at the Wild Man, does he follow our idea of the "natural"? How could he have represented the "natural" or "biological" in his time period?

Week Five: Intersections of Gender with Other Forms of Identity.

Sept 24: Gender, Race, and Class

Discussion:

We will be discussing how our cultural understanding of masculinity seems to emerge out of a larger context in which different forms of identity are in dialogue, and depend on each other.

Read:

Selection from: Katherine Pratt Ewing. *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin*.

Write (WE) – start September 20:

Does the image of masculinity differ in various classes and races, very generally speaking? What are the differences between the images that come to mind when you imagine a "working man" as opposed to a "businessman"? How do different cultures inside of America define the masculine

(Latino, Asian American, African American, Caucasian)? How does the concept of "man" translate into different subcultures, races, and classes you have encountered?

Rather than just answering those questions for yourself, we want you to discuss them with three of your friends (one each day Thur. through Sat.) with the requirement that all of them come from a different cultural background. Base your discussion on these questions in connections with one of your three objects. Please use a recording device (iPhone, MP3 player, laptop, etc.) to record your conversations, so that you can fully focus on the discussion. Afterwards listen to the recording and write 150 words every night about the most interesting aspects. On Sunday, look at the three short paragraphs and combine their most interesting points into one 250-word report that you want to share with you classmates.

Sept 26: Relational Masculinity

Discussion:

Introducing the work of former Duke professor Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, we will consider masculinity in a relational context in order to discuss how relationships they have define them as masculine/non-masculine.

Read:

Short selection from: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, selection from *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.

Write (WE):

How do relationships men have define them as masculine/non-masculine? How does relationship play into these works of art? What are relationships within the works and what are relationships we could create between the works, depending how we structure them in the online exhibition?

Get together with one of your classmates and look at your six objects together. How does presenting them in the same exhibition change the perception of every individual work? Write a 200-word paragraph outlining your most intriguing thoughts.

Week Six: Conceptualizing Your Research & Project Workshop 1

Oct 1: Conceptualizing Your Research

We will consider research questions, methods, and resources in light of our theoretical model and in light of the objects you will be working on.

Oct 3: Project Workshop 1

Present and Workshop (briefly) Project 1

Week Seven: Project Workshop 2

Oct 8 & Oct 10

Present and Workshop (briefly) Project 2

Week Eight: From Research to the Exhibition 1

Oct 15 NO CLASS FALL BREAK

Oct 17: Finding the Best Medium for Your Object

We will be focusing our discussion around the topic of mediality in order to address how different media formats can be employed to best present your research on the objects.

Week Nine: From Research to the Exhibition 2

Oct 22 & Oct 24

We will be continuing our conversation about how to make the best use of different media formats to transform your research into an online exhibition.

Week Ten: Project Workshop 3

Oct 29 & Oct 31

Present and Workshop (briefly) Project 3

Week Eleven: “Transatlantic Masculinities Part 1”

Nov 5:

Video-conferencing session with our overseas collaborators at the University of Bamberg, Germany.

Nov 7: Debriefing “Transatlantic Masculinities”

Week Twelve: Workshop Week (Medium Project)

Nov 12 & Nov 14

You will extensively work and workshop on your medium research project.

Week Thirteen: Workshop Week (Large Project)

Nov 19

You will extensively work and workshop on your large research project.

Nov 21 NO CLASS THANKSGIVING

Week Fourteen: “Transatlantic Masculinities Part 2”

Nov 26

Video-conferencing session with our overseas collaborators at the University of Bamberg, Germany.

Nov 28: Debriefing “Transatlantic Masculinities”

FRIDAY, November 30: FINAL RESEARCH PRODUCT DUE.

Week Fifteen: Lookin’ Good!

Dec 3

WORKING ON THE VIRTUAL EXHIBITION

Today will be dedicated to implementing your final research projects into the virtual online exhibition. Will Shaw, the Digital Humanities Technology Consultant, will be joining us again to support the creation of the online exhibition.

Dec 5

COMPLETING THE VIRTUAL EXHIBITION.

Today is the “tying up loose ends” session in which we will put the final touches to our virtual exhibition.

**Dec 15, (Saturday), 2-5 PM [This is scheduled final exam time]
FINAL CONFERENCE and INTRODUCTION of VIRTUAL
EXHIBITION**

Tentative Schedule:

2:00 Welcome and Introductions

2:10 First series of papers. Each paper is allotted 15 minutes, plus 15 minutes at the end for questions

3:40 Short Break

3:45 Final series of papers, with 15 minutes for Q & A

5:00 End of Conference

Optional Brief Reception