

THE MUSEUM LIFE OF CONTEMPORARY ART
PROGRAM IN MUSEUM STUDIES
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
SPRING 2016

Course Description:

The topic of this seminar is the life of contemporary artworks within museums. Sessions are organized around the trajectory of complex artworks from the process of acquisition, to documentation, storage, exhibition, and conservation intervention. Installation, media, and performance works serve as case studies to analyze social, legal, and material dynamics as they move through this life cycle. Synthetic materials, obsolescent technologies, object contingency, and human interactivity embedded in contemporary art forces museum staff to develop new collections management processes. These practices include digital technologies to document, store, and exhibit variable media. Examining these emerging practices engages various contemporary debates about intellectual property, authorship, and authenticity. The seminar covers new strategies as artists and museum professionals collaborate to define artwork identity while replacing deteriorating materials, migrating obsolescent media, and re-activating performance works.

Students conduct primary research projects such as interviews with artists about the disposition of their works in museums, or archival investigation to build digital tools for curatorial and conservation research on how works may be exhibited and conserved. Students also write seminar papers addressing a fundamental issue in the museum life of contemporary art.

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