Museums and Indigenous Communities: 
Changing Relationships, Changing Practice

Instructor: Cara Krmpotich

Winter Term 2010
Seminar Tuesday 11:45 – 1:45

Purpose: This course explores the changing relationships between aboriginal source communities and museums holding their material heritage. We begin with a historical overview of collecting practices, the role of indigenous material culture in the development of museums, and the relationship between museums and colonialism. Contemporary case studies primarily drawn from post-colonial and settler contexts during the last three decades are investigated as a response to earlier practices. Students are challenged to use these case studies in order to interrogate ideas of the museum as a ‘contact zone’, the shifting meaning of objects, contemporary curatorial challenges, the potential of new museum practices, and source community expectations. Actual exhibitions, repatriation requests and museological dilemmas are used to engage critically with theoretical developments in material culture studies, material anthropology, art history, and indigenous studies.

Objectives:
- To explore the historic and contemporary relationships between museums and indigenous communities.
- To understand the influence of Canadian museum practice within the international dynamic of museums and indigenous communities.
- To generate creative, thoughtful and practical suggestions and solutions for the exhibition, interpretation and care of aboriginal material heritage.

Structure: Each week the class will meet for a two-hour seminar to discuss the practical and theoretical challenges discussed (or glaringly absent!) from the readings. Students are expected to have done the readings and to contribute thoughtfully to the conversations.

During the first class, each student will choose one week to present a synthesis of the week’s readings to the class. This is not a summary of the content, but rather a presentation and analysis of recurring themes. The presentations will start each class and should be no longer than 15 minutes. During the same class, students are expected to submit an essay of approximately 10 pages on the subject. Students may wish to give their paper orally as their presentation. If so, you are encouraged to pay close attention to timing and clarity. ** If enrolment requires it, students may work in pairs to present the readings. However, each student is responsible for submitting their own essay of approximately 10 pages on the subject. You must demonstrate your own grasp of the themes and an ability to engage with them.

The class will make a visit to a Toronto-based museum or gallery exhibition that focuses on indigenous material culture in Week 4. Students will prepare a report, drawing upon the examples and theory encountered in the readings, to critique the exhibition and provide constructive alternatives or solutions to any problems identified. ** If desired, students may choose a different exhibition or public programme to critique, however they should discuss this with the instructor and receive approval ahead of time. Reports are due at the start of class in Week 5.
Each student will produce a final research essay of approximately 20 pages, exploring any of the course’s themes in further detail. The length and quality of this paper is modelled after common expectations for peer-reviewed journals. Students are expected to show critical and original thought, the ability to research a topic, and an awareness of the broader context in which their work fits. Research essays are due at the start of class in Week 13. Students should expect to submit a one- to two-page description of their paper in Week 9, including a proposed title, thesis statement and main areas of interest or particular concerns. This will NOT be graded. It is intended to ensure students are on an appropriate path to complete their final essay.

**Evaluation:**
Class Presentation: 5%
Essay Accompanying Presentation: 20%
Exhibit or Programme Critique: 25%
Research Essay: 40%
Participation: 10%

**Grading:** Please consult the iSchool’s official interpretation of letter grades and the University’s policy on Graduate Grading and Evaluation Practices. These will form the basis for grading in the course.

**Writing support:** The SGS Office of English Language and Writing Support provides writing support for graduate students. The services are designed to target the needs of both native and non-native speakers of English and include non-credit courses, single-session workshops, individual writing consultations, and website resources. These programs are free. Please avail yourself of these services, if necessary.

**Academic integrity:** Please consult the University’s site on Academic Integrity. The iSchool has a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism as defined in section B.I. 1. (d) of the University’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. You should acquaint yourself with the Code and Appendix “A” Section 2. Please review the material you covered in Cite it Right and, if necessary, consult the site How Not to Plagiarize.

**Accommodation of students with disabilities:** Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Accessibility Services Office as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let them and me know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

**Course Outline and Reading List**

Week 1: Definitions and Debates, Identities and Icons
Definitions of the following used by UNESCO, museum associations, Indigenous organizations, etc.:
Source Communities
Indigenous
Status and Recognition
Cultural property, heritage; intangible cultural property

No assigned readings.
Week 2: Collecting Histories


Week 3: Colonial and National Identities in the Museum

- Empire vs Natural History
- Progress vs Static
- Art vs Artifact


Appadurai, A and Breckenridge, C. 1999. ‘Museums are Good to Think: Heritage on View in India’ in Evans, Jessica and Boswell, David. Eds. Representing the Nation: A Reader (Histories, Heritage, Museums). London: Routledge, 404-421. (also in Karp and Lavine 1992)


Week 4: FIELD TRIP TO EXHIBITION

Week 5: Why Objects Matter: identity, memory, healing

- Kinship and Ancestry
- Reconciliation
- Physical engagement, embodied memory
- Nostalgia

** EXHIBITION REVIEWS DUE IN CLASS, WEEK 5


** Especially Te Aweketoku and Classen and Howes


Week 6: Why Objects Matter: history, economy, politics
Cultural property
Historical documentation
Trade histories, Tourist Art, the Art Market


Week 7: Challenges to Museums


**Spirit Sings dossier: a collection of articles and news media discussing the exhibition and boycott. To be placed on reserve in Inforum.


Week 8: READING BREAK. NO CLASS.

Week 9: Histories of Repatriation
Artifacts and Human Remains
Treaties, Laws and Moral Agreements
Emotions behind Politics

Bray, Tamara L. and Thomas W. Killion, (eds.) 1994. Reckoning with the Dead: The Larsen Bay Repatriation and the Smithsonian Institution. Washington and
London: Smithsonian Institution Press. ** especially Ladd and Pullar

Week 10: Contemporary Faces of Repatriation
Visual, Virtual, Knowledge and Figurative Repatriation

Bell, Joshua A. ‘Looking to see: reflections on visual repatriation in the Purari Delta, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea’ in Museums and Source Communities, L Peers and A Brown (eds), London: Routledge. Pg 111-121.


Week 11: Changing Practice
Conservation and handling
Exhibition Collaboration and Curation – Nitsitapiisinnii the Blackfoot Gallery; Reservation X

Conaty, Gerry. ‘Glenbow’s Blackfoot Gallery: working towards co-existence’, in Museums and Source Communities, L Peers and A Brown (eds), London:


**Week 12: Changing Practice**

- Equality in Research
- Collections Management
- Access

**FILM: ‘Everything Was Carved’**


**Week 13: Technology and Access**

- On-line catalogues and exhibitions
- Meanings of Virtual Objects
- Web 2.0, Technology of Enchantment, Enchantment of Technology
- Access vs Communication


Srinivasan, R, R. Boast, K Becvar and J Furner. 2009."Blobgects: Digital Museum Catalogs and Diverse User Communities" in Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology 60(4):666-678. And see also Cambridge’s Museum of Arch and Anth site about the research project "Reconceptualizing Digital Objects", lead by Srinivasan and Boast:
**As an experiment, please try to find the names of three curators of indigenous material from museum websites. Also, survey three on-line collections-based projects (research, exhibition, educational, etc.) focused on indigenous material in light of this week’s readings. In comparison, follow blogs or on-line discussions amongst museum professionals about the use of new media/technologies.

Week 14: Indigenous Museums and Heritage Centres
Separation vs Integration


