

Museum Curating Now: Behind the Scenes at Tate

Module Description

What does the practice of contemporary curating mean in an international arts institution like Tate? What is the role of a curator, and how do curators negotiate between the wide range of social, political, and economic factors that shape the context within which they operate? What are the decisions, strategies, and approaches that inform and shape the work of curators today?

This module considers the ways in which curators at Tate develop, manage, and engage with the Collection, temporary exhibitions, events, and arts projects within the current global climate, while responding to diverse institutional and non-institutional contexts, histories, as well as geo-political and social conditions.

Course participants develop a critical understanding of contemporary curating practices through a behind-the-scenes look at the 'management' role of curators across a diverse range of the museum's activity.

Across the eleven weeks, participants learn about the different curatorial models in place at the Tate in relation to the permanent collection, exhibition organisation, event management, and audience development. Tate serves as the main case study for this course; however, references and examples of other curatorial models from various private and public arts organisations in the UK and internationally will be brought in for comparative discussion by the tutor.

Teaching and Module Structure

The course takes place in the spring term and consists of ten sessions plus a reading week.

Across the eleven weeks, each session offers a balance of theoretical context introduced by the tutor, more practice-focused presentations from Tate staff on their specific roles and specialisms, class readings, group discussions and visits to the galleries.

An opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the museum professionals who devise, implement, and deliver Tate's exhibitions, displays, and events offers participants a unique and rounded understanding of the skills and expertise required to successfully manage and deliver a diverse curatorial programme, both now and in the future.

The course is organised and led by Victoria Miguel in collaboration with the Public Programmes team at Tate Modern.

Location and Visits

The weekly sessions are based in the Level 1 Seminar Room at Tate Modern.

Visits to temporary exhibitions and collection displays at Tate are integrated into the structure of the course. Participants are also expected to make independent visits to galleries and special exhibitions at both Tate London sites, and other galleries and museums in London during the course.

Week 1: Tuesday January 13th: 13.30 – 16.30, Level 1 Seminar Room Tate Modern – Introduction to Museum Curating Now

This introductory session outlines the structure of the module and its weekly sessions. We begin to investigate what is understood by the term 'curating' in an art museum like Tate by considering key terms and beginning to examine the various curatorial models in place.

Essential Reading

- O'Neill, Paul, *The Emergence of Curatorial Discourse from the late 1960's to the Present*, The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s), MIT Press, 2012. PP9 – 50
- Tate: Our Priorities: <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/our-work/our-priorities>
- Morgan, Jessica, *What is a Curator?*, in Hoffmann, Jens ed., 10 Fundamental Questions of Curating, Mousse Publishing, 2013. PP21 - 29

Week 2: Tuesday January 20th: 13.30 – 16.30, Level 1 Seminar Room Tate Modern – The Collection: Part 1 (Behind the Scenes)

The session explores the role of the collection in an art museum; examining how the aims and intentions of the museum are reflected within the collection and the institution's responsibility to the public. Focusing on Tate's acquisitions policy and acquisitions committees, we examine how Tate ensures and maintains an international scope.

Essential Reading

- Altshuler, Bruce, *A Historical Introduction*, Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art, Princeton University Press, 2005. PP1 – 14
- Fox, Howard N., *The Right to be Wrong*, in Altshuler, Bruce, ed. Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art, Princeton University Press, 2005. PP15– 27
- Tate Acquisition and Disposal Policy: <http://www.tate.org.uk/file/acquisitions-and-disposal-policy>

Week 3: Tuesday January 27th: 13.30 – 16.30, Level 1 Seminar Room Tate Modern – The Collection Part 2 (What's on Display)

Tate's 2015 Vision is to be more open, diverse, international, sustainable, and entrepreneurial. In this session we explore how these aims are met in the acquisition, care, and display of Tate's collection. This class addresses the management of the collection display, the strategic decisions made about what is shown and the role of the curator in this process.

Essential Reading

- Blazwick, I., and Morris, F., 'Showing the Twentieth Century,' Tate Modern: the Handbook, Tate, London, 2006. PP 29 – 39
- Morris, Frances *From Then to Now and Back Again: Tate Modern Collection Displays*, Tate Modern: The Handbook, Tate Publishing, 2006.

Week 4: Tuesday February 3rd: 13.30 – 16.30, Level 1 Seminar Room Tate Modern – Learning & Audiences

At Tate the term 'curator' describes not just those who look after the collection and stage exhibitions but also those responsible for interpretation and learning programmes. This class examines learning and audiences at Tate; it considers how Tate's interpretation and learning curators work with art, artists and audiences to deepen the public's knowledge, understanding, and enjoyment of art.

Essential Reading

- Cutler, Anna, *Tate Learning Strategy*, 2011.
- Graham, Beryl & Cook, Sarah, *On Interpretation, Display, and Audience*, Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media, MIT Press, 2010. PP 161 – 187
- Allen, Felicity, *Situating Gallery Education*, London: Tate, February 2008: http://felicityallen.co.uk/sites/default/files/Situating%20gallery%20education_0.pdf

Week 5: Tuesday February 10th: 13.30 – 16.30, Level 1 Seminar Room Tate Modern – Planning and Sustainability

What are the financial and economic constraints and enablers of curation? This session examines how Tate has adapted to the current financial climate, focusing on how it finances exhibitions through sponsorship, partnerships, ticket prices, membership, loans and travelling exhibitions, and partner venues.

Essential Reading

- Tate Funding: <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/who-we-are/funding>
- Prior, Nick, *Having One's Tate and Eating It: Transformations of the Museum in a Hypermodern Era*, in Mclellan, Andrew ed., Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium, Blackwell, 2003. PP51 - 74
- Demos, T.J., *The Tate Effect*, in Belting, H, Buddensieg, A., & Weibel, P eds., Where is Art Contemporary? The Global Art World, Vol. 2 Karlsruhe: ZKM, Center for Art and Media, 2009. PP78 – 87

Week 6: Tuesday February 17th: 13.30 – 16.30 – Reading Week: No Session

Week 7: Tuesday February 24th: 13.30 – 16.30, Level 1 Seminar Room Tate Modern – Curating Exhibitions: Concept & Research

Examining exhibition making after 'the curatorial turn', this class considers recent changes in curatorial thought. Charting the development of Tate exhibitions, we scrutinize how an exhibition concept and curatorial approach is developed, how exhibitions are shaped by the institution, and how curators must balance the needs and expectations of the curatorial department, the institution, artists, and the public.

Essential Reading

- O'Neill, Paul, *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse*, in Judith Rugg, ed., Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance, Intellect, 2008. PP13 – 28
- Blazwick, Iwona, *Temple/White Cube/Laboratory*, What Makes a Great Exhibition?, University of the Arts Philadelphia Initiative, 2007. PP118 – 133

Week 8: Tuesday March 3rd: 13.30 – 16.30, Level 1 Seminar Room Tate Modern – Curating Exhibitions: The Practical Side

This week we consider the practical aspects of the role of the curator, addressing some of the social, political, and economic factors that shape the context within which curators work and mapping the practical aspects of mounting an exhibition by examining the exhibition timeline and considering how curators at Tate work with members of other key museum departments including, registrars, art handlers, conservation, marketing, learning, audiences, and press.

Essential Reading

- O'Neill, Paul, *Biennial Culture and the Emergence of a Globalized Curatorial Discourse: Curating in the Context of Biennials and Large-Scale Exhibitions since 1989*, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, MIT Press, 2012. PP51 – 85
- Enwezor, Okwui, *The Black Box*, *Documenta 11: Platform 5 Exhibition Catalogue*, Hatje Cantz, 2002. PP42 – 55

Week 9: Tuesday March 10th: 13.30 – 16.30, Level 1 Seminar Room Tate Modern – Working with Artists

This session examines how curators work with artists and looks at the recent convergence of curatorial and artistic practices. We consider how curators at Tate approach working with artists, and whether different types of exhibitions, solo exhibitions, monographic hangs, retrospective exhibitions (mid/end-career or posthumous), group exhibitions, thematic hangs, Artist Rooms, Project Space exhibitions, and Turbine Hall commissions, require different approaches.

Essential Reading

- Smith, Terry, *Artists as Curators/Curators as Artists*, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, Independent Curators International, 2012. PP101 – 138
- Richter, Dorothee, *Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team-Workers?* OnCurating.org Issue 19: On Artistic and Curatorial Authorship. June 2013. PP43 - 57

Week 10: Tuesday March 17th: 13.30 – 16.30, Level 1 Seminar Room Tate Modern – The Future of Museum Curating

In 2016, Tate Modern's long anticipated extension is due to open, creating more spaces for the display of the collection, performance, installation art and learning, inviting visitors to engage more deeply with art and ideas. The new building will transform Tate Modern, offering more social spaces for the public to interact with the building as well as unwind and relax. This session explores the potential possibilities and challenges that these new spaces offer Tate's approach to curatorial practice by focusing on recent developments in live, film and learning programmes. Building on ideas and examples covered across the nine weeks, what are the future trajectories for the broad curatorial practice in an institution like the Tate?

Essential Reading

- Smith, Terry, *Curatorial Practice Now (ICI Perspectives in Curating)*, Independent Curators Inc., U.S., 2012. PP 177 – 246
- Higgie, Jennifer & Thorne, Sam, *Dercorn, Chris, Interview*, *Frieze Issue 144*, January-February 2012. <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/chris-dercon-interview/>
- BMW: Tate Live: Liveness: On Publicness: <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/bmw-tate-live-on-publicness>

Week 11: Tuesday March 24th: 13.30 – 16.30, Level 1 Seminar Room Tate Modern – Conclusion and Evaluation

This final session offers participants a chance to review and reflect on the course and discuss key issues arising from the ten weeks. The emphasis is on developing further critical insights and perspectives that together lead an informed understanding of what constitutes contemporary curatorial practice. We also consider to what extent contemporary curation, in practice and in theory, offers new insights concerning the management of art and culture.