

CRITICAL ISSUES IN ART CONSERVATION: COURSE 389.340
SPRING 2021, FRIDAYS 1:30-4:00PM

Instructor: Sanchita Balachandran
Pref. Pronouns: She/her/hers
Email: Sanchita@jhu.edu
Office hours: Fridays, 4-5pm, and by appointment

Land Acknowledgement

We gather today on the lands of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, now known as North America. The history of the Native people of the Upper Chesapeake Bay dates back 12,000 years. Our university stands on the traditional lands of the Susquehannock people, who lived in this region until 1652 when they were forced by the Maryland colonial government to cede their homeland and resettle at a fort on the banks of the Potomac River. In 1675, they were forced north to Conestoga, Pennsylvania by militia forces. There, the remaining members of the Susquehannock people were killed by the “Paxton Mob” in 1763. Although the Susquehannock Tribe no longer exists, we acknowledge their ongoing presence here. We also acknowledge that this place is one of gathering and stewardship of many Native peoples including the Piscataway and Accohannock Tribes, the Nanticokes of the Eastern Shore, and vibrant communities of Lumbees and Cherokees, who migrated to Maryland from North Carolina.

We are grateful to Peggy Mainor of the [Multicultural Initiative for Community Advancement](#) (MICA) Group for generously crafting this statement and bringing our awareness to the long histories, ongoing presence, and futures of Indigenous people in this place.

Course Description and Learning Goals

First, let us acknowledge that we are working in the middle of a pandemic, a time of incredible distress and uncertainty. It is my priority to support your physical and mental health as well as your learning. As our online environment makes it even harder to know how people are doing, please be in touch with me to let me know if there is anything you need, even if that is just a conversation or a short break from our zoom sessions.

This course examines the most urgent concerns in the conservation of art and cultural heritage today and takes an expansive view of “conservation.” Instead of assuming that this is work that is only done by a small number of specialists in museums or laboratories, this course seeks to broaden our understanding of what cultural heritage is, and who is privileged and responsible for its preservation and futurity. Our learning goals throughout our course therefore include developing our critical thinking and analytical skills so that we can challenge our own assumptions of what “art” and “cultural heritage” might be. We will do so by interrogating why we care so much about preserving the items of the past and present, and asking how we can do so more ethically, equitably and reciprocally. We will consider the role that the preservation of cultural heritage has in restoring memory, repairing human relationships, discharging our duty to our environment, and ensuring the futures of all living beings, human and non-human. We

will also practice our abilities to remain nimble, flexible, creative, and I hope, even joyful and hopeful.

This course is a departure from the usual way we talk about conservation and preservation for several reasons, and our syllabus reflects that shift. First, there is an ongoing movement within the museum and cultural heritage fields to think about the practitioners of preservation as being not just specialists, but a much wider range of actors, most especially the people who are from the originating communities who produced and/or claim these works.

Second, in response to longstanding demands for people to be able to literally speak in their own voices, we now have an incredibly rich set of online sources to draw from that are not “traditional” texts. These resources have grown exponentially during the pandemic, and we should take them seriously as forms of scholarship. They are also (literally) freely available, and because of written transcripts, audio versions or closed captioning, are more accessible to a wider audience. I have also chosen a number of podcast episodes because I hope they will free you from the computer screen, or allow you to listen while perhaps walking or sitting somewhere or just being (safely) in the world.

We do have to acknowledge that our readings/listenings/viewings are limited to works available in English, which of course limits what and whom we can learn from. A specific intention of this course is to broaden our perspective on cultural heritage by reading and engaging with authors and artists who are outside the geographic regions of Europe and North America, and/or self-identify as women, Black, Indigenous or people of color (BIPOC) people, and LGBTQIA+ people. These practitioners are often at the forefront of the most exciting work in the art/cultural heritage sector, and we have much to learn from them.

Beyond simply engaging with writings on the theoretical, historical and technical aspects of art and sites, this course seeks to remind us that “art” was meant to move us. To that end, we will read works of poetry each week as poems relate to our topics. The use of poetry in this course owes a great debt to the work of Jennifer Clarvoe, poet and Professor Emerita of English at Kenyon College, and her 2016 course [“Poetry and the Visual Arts.”](#)

Course Requirements

We will meet synchronously on Zoom from 1:30 to 3:50 each Friday. The sessions will be captioned as well as recorded and posted so that you can access them again on Blackboard as needed. All readings that are not hyperlinked in the syllabus will be on Blackboard. We will plan to take a 15 minute stretch break in the middle of each meeting so that we can stretch our legs and take a screen break. The first part of class is a discussion of the readings. After the break, we will have a lecture. During class, we’ll experiment with Google Jamboard. More on this in class.

Your grade will be determined according to the following criteria:

Class attendance and participation	10%
Weekly writing exercises	50%

Final paper/exercise revisions	20%
Transcription project	10%
Two Zoom Lectures/summaries	10%

Given that we are in a pandemic, you have the option of being graded pass/fail or with a letter grade. An “A” is awarded for exceptional performance in class. Simply completing the assignments as required will result in a “B” grade. Please let me know if you are having any trouble completing the work, or have questions; we can come up with workable solutions together.

Please let me know if you have any problems accessing the required work for the week, or if the format of the “reading” makes it difficult to access.

Weekly Writing Exercises/Final Paper: You will receive specific instructions per class meeting. You will be writing approximately a single page in response to a prompt that relates to the readings for that week. This is the majority of your grade, and your final paper will be based on your weekly assignments, so please stay current with them. Let me know if you are having trouble doing so, and we will figure things out together. More information about the final paper (5 pages in length, plus revisions of your weekly exercises) will be shared later.

Transcription project: You will choose a [Smithsonian project](#) or a [National Archives project](#) to contribute to and spend approximately 3 hours doing this work over the course of the semester. The idea behind having you do this work is in order to put you in the position of literally contributing to the preservation of history and observing that process through a critical lens.

Zoom/Webinar sessions: There are so many amazing free zoom meetings and webinars happening at the moment. You are expected to select two that seem related to some of the questions we are exploring in this class, that take approximately a total of 3 hours all together, and to write a one-page summary of each event. You can turn these in as you view the events, or at the end of the semester.

Course Ethics and Policies

Our classroom is a space for rigorous and thoughtful discussion and debate. You are expected to respect and support the class community and its members as we delve into contentious and emotionally charged issues around the conservation of cultural heritage. We agree to communicate our ideas clearly, listen patiently and disagree respectfully and constructively.

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. See the guide on [“Academic Ethics for Undergraduates”](#) and the Ethics Board Web site for more information.

Usually, this class would be held in the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum. As we cannot do so safely, we have to do our best in this online format. Digital distractions are a real thing, I get

it. If you can, please keep your cameras on and stay engaged as possible. If you need a zoom break, please do what feels appropriate. To that end, I am teaching from home: children will scream, internet will go in and out at times, a gray cat will invade our teaching space. Let's just be patient and good humored as possible.

If you need any accommodations in order to feel supported in our class, please be in touch. Additionally, you can also ask for the assistance of Student Disability Services, at (410) 516-4720, or studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu.

COURSE SCHEDULE

1/29 Introduction

- Brooks, G. "[Chicago's Picasso](#)" (1967)

2/5 What Value(s) Do We Preserve in Art?

Content Warning (CW): Collins and Podcast include discussions of buying and selling human beings and human remains

- Collins, M. "Ota Benga, Part One" (2016)
- Henderson, J. 2020. "[Beyond Lifetimes: Who Do we Exclude When We Keep Things for the Future?](#)" *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*, 43:3, 195-212.
- Parsons, S. et al. 2008. "Myth and Medium—I'm Going to Tell You Another Story." *Preserving Aboriginal Heritage: Technology and tradition*. Minister of Public Works and Government Services: Ottawa: 41-46.
- "[The Headhunters.](#)" Stuff the British Stole (podcast). 12 Dec 2020. (29 mins)
- "[Volunteer-led LGBTQ Tours with Dan Vo.](#)" The Wonder House (podcast). 31 Dec 2020. (1 hr 6 min)
- **WORK DUE: Writing exercise #1**

2/12 What Does a Conservator Do?

- Clarvoe, J. "[Failure](#)" (2018)
- Dooijes, R. and O. P. Nieuwenhuysse. 2007. "Ancient Repairs: Techniques and social meaning." In *Konservieren oder Restaurieren: die Restaurierung griechischer Vasen von der Antike bis heute*: 15-20.
- Leonard, M. 2003. "The Artist's Voice." In *Personal Viewpoints. Thoughts About Paintings Conservation*. Getty Conservation Institute: Los Angeles: 41-58.
- "[Watching Art Conservators Work Their Magic Has Become a Hot New Museum Trend.](#)" 2018. *Artnet News*.
- "What If Something Breaks?" [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#). Metropolitan Museum of Art. (10 mins total)
- **WORK DUE: Writing exercise #2**

2/19 Making Pictures (Paintings)

- Moore, M. "When I Buy Pictures" (1924)

- Hill Stoner, J. 1997. [“Whistler’s view on the restoration and display of his paintings.”](#) *Studies in Conservation* 42, 2: 107-114.
- Gilchrist, S. et al. 2016. *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia*. Yale University Press: New Haven. 18-31.
- Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum video. [“Boston’s Apollo: Sargent and McKeller.”](#) (10:49)
- Kaphar, T. 2017. [“Can Art Amend History?”](#) (12:52)
- **WORK DUE: Writing exercise #3; also, select your transcription project by today.**

2/26: “Built” [by Whom?] Heritage (Monuments)

CW: Discussions of war and war atrocities as well as other armed conflict

- Komunyakaa, Y. [“Facing it”](#) (1988)
- Das, S. 2020. [“From De-colonial to Anti-colonial: What’s Next for Museum Interpretation?”](#)
- Monteiro, S. 2021. [“How a Trump Executive Order Aims to Set White Supremacy in Stone.”](#)
- [“On Richmond’s transformed Monument Avenue, a group of historians erect rogue historical markers.”](#) Museum Archipelago (podcast). 10 Aug 2020. (14 mins)
- Otero-Pailos, J. 2016. [“The Ethics of Dust.”](#) (4:45)
- **WORK DUE: [Monument lab “Field Trip” exercise](#)**

3/5: Embodied Things (Sculpture)

- Laurentiis, R. [“Because We Love Each Other”](#) (2021)
- Talbot, M. [“The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture.”](#) *The New Yorker*. 29 Oct 2018.
- Anderson, S. 2016. [“David’s Ankles: How Imperfections Could Bring Down the World’s Most Perfect Statue.”](#)
- Balachandran, S. [“Malignant Patina: A Love Story.”](#) *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History and Material Culture* 27, 1 (Spring-Summer 2020): 73-91.
- **WORK DUE: Writing exercise #4. If you have ideas for talks you want to attend, share some today?**

3/12: A Picture Is Worth a 1000 Words (Archival Materials)

CW: Some descriptions of war atrocities and misogynistic/racist descriptions

- Coste Lewis, R. [“The Wilde Women of Aiken”](#) (2015) responding to [this photograph](#)
- [“Seeing Truth with Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw.”](#) Portraits (podcast). 9 Jun 2020. (20 mins)
- Peruse the [John Jacob Omenhausser, Civil War sketchbook](#), Point Lookout, Maryland, 1864-1865
- Mowery, F. Book and Paper Group Annual, American Institute for Conservation, 10, 1991. [“The Conservation of the Omenhauser Sketchbook.”](#)
- [“Dominique Luster.”](#) Archives in Context (podcast). 28 Jan 2019. (25 mins)
- **WORK DUE: Writing exercise #5**

3/19: Self-Fashioning (Textiles)

- Alvarez, J. [“New Clothes”](#) (1982), there are two pages of this poem
- Te Kanawa, R., A. Tamarapa, and A. Peranteau. 2016. “Kahu Ora. Living Cloaks, Living Culture.” In *Refashioning and Redress. Conserving and Displaying Dress*: 65-78.

- Ishii, M. 2016. "Conserving an Ainu robe within the framework of Japan's Cultural Property Preservation Policy." In *Refashioning and Redress. Conserving and Displaying Dress*: 33-48.
- ["Outer Space and Underwear."](#) Sidedoor (podcast). 4 Mar 2020. (32 mins)
- Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. ["Conserving a Wearable Legacy."](#) 2019.
- Peruse the exhibition ["Neil Armstrong's Apollo 11 Spacesuit."](#)
- **WORK DUE: Writing exercise #5**

3/26: The Human Body

CW: Descriptions and some images of human remains

- Winder, T. ["Love Lessons in a Time of Settler Colonialism"](#) (2018)
- Mays, S. "Holding and Displaying Human Remains." In ["Regarding the Dead: Human Remains in the British Museum"](#). 3-8.
- Donadio, R. 2015 Apr 15. ["Preserving the Ghastly Inventory of Auschwitz"](#). *The New York Times*.
- View excerpt from ["Your Mummies, Their Ancestors?"](#) Watch from 44:22-1:31:02, comments of Ahmed Elgharably and Heba Abd el Gawad.
- Colwell, C. 2019 Apr 4. ["As Native Americans, We are in a Constant State of Mourning."](#) *The New York Times*.
- **WORK DUE: Writing exercise #6. A gentle reminder about those two additional zoom talks you're responsible for.**

4/2 The "Natural" World ("Non-human" collections)

- Wall Kimmerer, R. 2013. "Sitting in a Circle." In *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*: 223-240.
- Keeler, J. 2017. "Creating a Road map of reverence. Interview with Faith Spotted Eagle." *Edge of Morning. Native Voices Speak for the Bears Ears*: 124-139.
- Ashby, J. 2020. ["Telling the Truth About Who Really Collected the 'Hero Collections.'"](#) Natsca blog.
- Das, S. and Lowe, M., 2018. ["Nature Read in Black and White: Decolonial Approaches to Interpreting Natural History Collections."](#) *Journal of Natural Science Collections*, 6, pp.4-14.
- **WORK DUE: Writing exercise #7**

4/9 Ephemeral Lives (Electronic Media, Performed/Performance Art and Access)

- Guiñansaca, S. ["Calling Cards"](#) (2017) Begins at 44:31, ends 50:17.
- Reza. "Images and Heritage in Afghanistan." *Museum International* 55, 3-4, December 2003: 51-53.
- Lerner, B. 2016 January 11. ["The Custodians."](#) *The New Yorker*.
- Oey, M. 2006. ["Some Problems in Musical Instrument Conservation in Museum Collections."](#) Papers Presented at the Association of North American Graduate Programs In Conservation Conference, 2006: 1-13.
- Haigney, S. ["What Does History Smell Like?"](#) *New York Times*. 4 Dec 2020.
- Watlington, E. with V. Cole. 2021. ["Audio Description, Described."](#) VOCA Journal
- **WORK DUE: Writing exercise #8**

4/16 Discarded Heritage (Preserving “Trash”)

CW: Some upsetting descriptions and images of migrant crossings

- Moon, K. A. [“Taking Out the Trash”](#) (2008)
- De Leon, J. 2013. “Undocumented Migration, Use Wear, and the Material of Habitual Suffering in the Sonoran Desert.” *Journal of Material Culture* 18, 4: pp. 321-345.
- Jethro, D. 2019. “Liberated waste: heritage and materiality at Robben Island and Constitution Hill, South Africa.” *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25:3, 259-276.
- Williams, P. 2008. “Going Critical: On the Historic Preservation of the World's First Nuclear Reactor.” *Future Anterior*, 5, 2: vii-18.
- **WORK DUE: Writing exercise #9**

4/23: Futures

- Erdrich, H. E., “Guidelines for the Treatment of Sacred Objects” (2017)
- [“Chris Newell forges the snowshoe path as the first Wabanaki leader of the Abbe Museum”](#) Museum Archipelago (podcast). 6 July 2020. (14:59)
- [“Growing younger with Harriet Tubman. With Carla Hayden and Kasi Lemmons.”](#) Portraits (podcast). 28 Apr 2020. (21 mins)
- [“Shots Fired.”](#) Stuff the British Stole (podcast). 20 Dec 2020. (32 mins)
- Srinivasan, R. et. al. 2010. “Diverse Knowledges and Contact Zones within the Digital Museum.” *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, Vol. 35, No. 5: 735-768.

5/11 [Tuesday]: Final paper due (Feel free to send it in before this date). Summaries of both zoom talks are also due today, but feel free to send them in before this date.