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Exploring Art at PS 1

Earlier this semester, Professor Lina Krasner and her students in Section 008 of COS 50 met at the PSI affiliate of the Museum of Modern Art to explore the “Between Spaces” exhibition. Concentrating on the theme of “the Concept of the Self through Art,” the students interpreted works of art and analyzed the complex relationships between the works, the gallery space and the viewers themselves within the gallery space.

Kara Liang, Cindie Luu and Ghita Elmejati were particularly struck by a work called “Untitled” by David Altmejid, which consisted of a complex display of interwoven threads and coin-like metal discs supported by acrylic. The display was enclosed in a large plastic box, and viewers

were invited to touch the ends of the threads supporting the discs.

Cindie Luu was particularly intrigued by the fact that the artist



P.S. 1 is an affiliate of the Museum of Modern Art housed in a former public school in the Long Island City neighborhood of Queens.

was creating a partial boundary, allowing viewers in on certain

portions, but closing off other parts.

The class had already read an essay in the COS Reader by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimbett called “The Museum as Catalyst,” and several in the class recognized the relationship between the artists and the viewers in spaces of the gallery that Kirshenblatt-Gimbett had theorized.

Kara Liang felt that the tendency to perceive art in accordance with one’s subjective experience illuminates part of the Idea of the Human. Consciousness and the ability to imagine are unique to humans. Artists illuminate and manipulate this aspect of the thought process by revealing and hiding different elements in their work.

COS Field Explorations

One of the unique features of the Core Seminar Program on the Brooklyn Campus is all students undertake field explorations aimed to enhance their learning and reflection on the Idea of the Human. In this issue of our newsletter, we have decided to feature a sampling of the field

activities undertaken in recent semesters.

We are especially proud to feature explorations undertaken in some of the institutions with which the Brooklyn Campus has forged Cultural Alliances in recent years. As a result of this

initiative, all members of the campus community can enter the Brooklyn Museum, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the NY Transit Museum free of charge with an LIU ID. Additionally, students in the Core Seminar Program have access to tickets to the Museum of Modern Art.

Reimagining the AMNH



Students constructed this diorama to tell a story not told in the AMNH mammal dioramas.

“Students constructed ‘alternative’ maps of neighborhoods from Fort Greene and DUMBO to Red Hook and Brighton Beach.”

A view of the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade.



This semester Core Seminar sections 11, 12 and 13 all visited the American Museum of Natural History as an exercise in exploring our thinking about the natural world and the place of human beings within it.

In the first phase of the exploration, students wrote down their initial ideas about such concepts as Science, Theory, Evolution, Creation, Biodiversity and Extinction.

Next, students were off to the museum to explore the exhib-

its in the Halls of Biodiversity, Human Origins, and North American Mammal Dioramas. In each space, they took careful notes about what they saw, analyzing the stories that each exhibit told and who the central characters were in each story.

Upon returning from the Museum, students then each wrote a “Thinking Paper,” in which they reviewed their initial definitions of the concepts they started off with. In

many cases, the students found that they had changed their minds about concepts or realized that the phenomena were more complex than they might initially have thought.

Finally, the students from all three sections met in a joint session to construct their own dioramas to tell stories that are not told in the Museum. In the diorama pictured here, the students explored the changing boundaries of bear and human habitats.

Boundaries, Borders and Barriers

By Myriam Mompoin

Professors Claire Goodman, Celia Lichtman and I explored the notions of boundaries, borders and barriers with our students last Spring in Core Seminar. What do we mean when we talk about boundaries? How are barriers characterized and represented? What are the purposes and uses of borders?

We pursued these questions through a variety of texts, films, and field activities that span core areas of human activity: perception/imagination, knowledge/science, and relationships/society.

To explore these themes, students undertook a field exploration entitled “Brooklyn Neighborhoods: Mapping the Five Senses.” Using methods

from anthropology and cultural studies, students visited areas in an attempt to understand why and how we perceive neighborhoods the way we do. Armed with cameras, notepads, maps and other recording equipment, they constructed “alternative” maps of neighborhoods from Fort Greene and DUMBO to Red Hook and Brighton Beach.

COS & the Halloween Parade

By Susan Baglieri

One of the highlights of the experience of my students in Core Seminar last semester was visiting the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade. This activity served as an interesting context for us to integrate our coursework from the semester.

Our theme within the Idea of the Human this semester was the adornment of the human body as it reflects our sense of what is “normal” and helps us to express identity for others to interpret. We read poetry by Langston Hughes, Pablo Neruda and others and considered John Berger’s perceptions

and interpretations of landscape.

After viewing the parade, some students even chose poetry as a mode through which to engage Berger’s style of observation and analysis, as well as to consider identity and the role of pretending on Halloween night.

The Brooklyn Museum



By Jennifer Tran

The theme of my Core Seminar section in the Fall was “Place and Displacement,” and by exploring art at the Brooklyn Museum, we were able to gain a better understanding of the levels of the sense of place.

After reading an essay in the COS

Reader by John Berger entitled “The Place of Painting,” we turned to artistic depictions of place at the Brooklyn Museum. Albert Bierstadt’s famous “A Storm in the Rocky Mountains,” for instance, interpreted the American West and allowed many Americans and Europeans to see it for the first time.

Paintings have a place in museums, because the act of displaying art in a particular space gives it shelter and meaning. Museums, in turn, have a place in society, because they allow us to study art today. The mu-

seum’s place in the world is as an educational institution, separated from—but also in conversation with—the outside world.

Visiting the Brooklyn Museum was one of the best ways to understand the multiple meanings of a “sense of place.” We can see something from the past, see how paintings fit within a museum, and why museums are so vital to the world of art. These senses of place help us to understand not only the art, but also its purpose within the context of today’s world.

The AMNH and “the Other”

By Sophie Bloomfield

During the Fall of 2009, my section of Core Seminar examined the idea of the human in relation to “the other” and how humans have become what they are today. To investigate the relationship between humans and other animals, we visited the Halls of Human Origins and Biodiversity at the American Museum of Natural History. We were

to answer various questions relating to each hall, as well as discuss how the halls are organized and what this might convey about our feelings toward “the Other.”

The two halls are separated by a rotunda, and I felt that the separation did a disservice to our understanding of our relationship with other species. Had the two halls been joined, a segue could have

been formed between humans and the rest of the animals, breaking down the division and superiority we feel.

The trip to the two halls helped me to think about how most people might feel in regard to humans’ relationship with the rest of the world. It also helped me and my classmates to tie all of the other readings together from the course.

“Replace blurb.”

Call for Student Submissions

The Core Seminar Newsletter invites submissions from students to report on their experiences in Core Seminar.

Did you have a unique experience or make a surprising discovery in the course of your inquiries in Core Seminar? If so, please share it with the rest of the Brooklyn Campus community!

Submissions might focus on your experience in any aspect of COS 50. This could include your field activities, joint sessions, research related to your seminar papers or even creative work you did in exploring the Idea of the Human or the sub-themes investigated by your class. How did that experience shape your education here on the Brooklyn Campus?

Your submission might be anywhere from 100 to 250 words. Including images related to your experiences is highly encouraged!

Please submit them either to your Instructor or directly to the Core Seminar office in the Pratt Building, Room 510.



Try your hand at writing for The Idea of the Human!

COS 50 The Idea of the Human

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Core Seminar is a three-credit interdisciplinary course providing a common intellectual experience for undergraduate students of all disciplines. The Seminar explores what it means to be human through shared readings, discussion in the Seminar and in Joint Sessions with other sections, field explorations, and multiple forms of writing.

The Idea of the Human: Core Seminar News is edited by Alan Grose, Administrative Coordinator for the COS Program. We welcome submissions of ideas or notes on unique COS experiences from both faculty and students from the program.

COS Assessment Spotlight

The Core Seminar Program is on track to complete an ambitious new assessment of the portfolios of work assembled by students in COS 50. Working with a random sample of the portfolios submitted over the current academic year, we will employ two rubrics to identify the direct evidence of student learning in two specific areas.

The first area is written communication. COS 50 is the second of three writing intensive classes students take on the Brooklyn Campus, and all sections aim to promote the goal of helping students to research efficiently and knowledgeably by undertaking a research paper process. We will evaluate the outcomes of this process with a rubric adapted from the rubric used in the English Department to evaluate writing in English 16.

The second area we will assess is “integrative learning.” This form of learning ranges from drawing simple, but new connections between ideas and experiences to complex synthesizing and transferring of ideas in



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The AAC&U is a national organization that advocates for the goals and practices of liberal education.

creative ways. COS 50 aims to cultivate integrative learning by drawing upon multiple sites and sources of learning and reflection on the Idea of the Human. For this assessment, we have adopted a rubric developed by the AAC&U.

Students in Core Seminar all assemble a portfolio of their written work in the course. This portfolio allows students at the end of the semester to reflect on their learning and the development of their thinking. This summer, a team of faculty evaluators will review a random sample of these portfolios to identify the evidence of skill at writing in the research papers and evidence of integrative learning.

We look forward to sharing the findings of our assessment with the Brooklyn Campus.