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Art and Medicine Mini-Elective Spring 2010

Course Dates: February 4, 11, 18, 25
Thursdays, 1:00 –3:00 PM

Maximum Students: 12

Class Year: MS1

Course Director: Marilyn M. Russell
Curator of Education
Carnegie Museum of Art

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Description:

It is a little known fact that a 19th century doctor, Giovanni Morelli, invented modern art connoisseurship by adapting the methods of comparative anatomy to create a “scientific” approach to art. Today, modern connoisseurship and modern medicine blend art and science in the observation and analysis of visual information, as well as in interpreting the expressive languages of the human body.

To explore these ideas, museum educators and curators will lead students through a series of observations, discussions, and exercises based on works of art in the galleries at Carnegie Museum of Art and at The Andy Warhol Museum. This 4-session course uses art to hone visual acuity skills while increasing awareness of factors that influence what we see, how we interpret it, and subsequent assessments, evaluations, and decisions. Throughout the course, implications for medical practice will be considered.

Objectives:

- To enhance participants’ abilities for careful observation, description, and interpretation of visual information;
- To gain an awareness and understanding of conscious and unconscious factors that influence observation and interpretation of visual information and the implications for decision making;
- To engage in thoughtful consideration of some implications of visual learning for medical practice;
- To deepen awareness of the arts as a vehicle for understanding the human condition.

Requirements:

- Actively participate in all four course sessions including vigorous discussion.
- Produce concluding statement (approximately 2-3 pages) indicating personal insights from or implications of the course.
- Short readings may be assigned.

Course Outline

Art and Medicine

Course Director:

Marilyn M. Russell
Curator of Education
Carnegie Museum of Art

Instructors:

Curatorial, Education and Conservation Staff at Carnegie Museum of Art and the Andy Warhol Museum.

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Location:

All sessions
Meet in the Lobby of the designated museum on each date.
Group will then proceed to the gallery in each museum.

Session 1: Looking is Only Part of Seeing

The Andy Warhol Museum, February 4, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Through the lens of Andy Warhol's life and art, the session will draw parallels between art and medicine and will examine how point of view, context, and framing affect how we see. Group discussion and a variety of interpretive activities will explore how looking is only part of interpreting what we see.

- *Point of View: How You See Depends on Who is Looking.* Personal and socio-cultural experience mediates how we process the world around us. As with a patient's medical history, an artist's biography may hold the key to understanding an artwork. Yet does biography always matter? Are there circumstances when our point of view may inhibit interpretation? Through an in-depth exploration of individual responses to a specific artwork the group will discuss the role of point of view in interpretation and whether or not neutrality, objectivity, and emotional distance are indeed possible.
- *Context.* The art gallery's white space and the doctor's white coat have been two of the classic symbols of art and science for our time. If symbols reflect our societal belief systems and values, what does our predilection for whiteness suggest? How does the context of the white coat or the white space shape a patient's or viewer's experience?
- *Framing.* How information is framed or presented is often critical to interpretation and analysis. In medicine or art the influence of critical opinion and environmental factors can shape how we see, what we notice, the questions we ask, and how we interpret what we are looking at. Students will explore and discuss how our perception and modes of analysis are shaped by how something is presented to us.

Session 2: Seeing is Believing

Carnegie Museum of Art, February 11, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Observation, hypothesis, analysis, interpretation, decision making----the processes of the scientist are also those of the artist and the art historian. But recent studies of perception and cognition have shown that our eyes and brains constantly process visual information in ways of which we are largely unaware with important implications for decision making. In a series of individual and group experiences in the galleries, participants will observe and describe a series of artworks uncovering what can be gleaned from observation, discussing and debating what conclusions can be grounded in observation, and what

factors—conscious or unconscious—influence looking, seeing, and interpreting visual information. This approach will be contrasted with a systematic process for decoding an unfamiliar work of art beginning with observations of what is represented to consideration of the composition, materials, and context that contribute to its impact and interpretation. Test your visual acuity a skill central to reading facial expression, body language, and other physical characteristics as well as image-based test results. Awareness and understanding of intuitive and analytical responses to works of art are also reinforced through hands-on activities.

Session 3: Art Doctors

Carnegie Museum of Art, February 18, 1:00 –3:00 p.m.

This session continues to explore methods for collecting and organizing visual information for the purpose of decision making. Penetrating the surface of works of art is the job of the fine art conservator. Issues such as what can be determined and how that information is ethically and productively used are the focus of this session. Two important works in the museum's collection are the subjects. Conservators lead a case study on what can be observed and understood in testing situations: examination under the microscope, with ultraviolet light, and with other equipment. The conservators will also lead a brief discussion of conservation ethics, covering key questions: when not to treat; how much to do; when to stop. Students will then borrow from both data-driven and subjective analytical processes to recommend a course of action regarding the two works of art.

Session 4: Practice: How You Work as a Key to Understanding

The Andy Warhol Museum, February 25, 1:00— 3:00 p.m. (Reception following)

Understanding process can often shed light on what is seen. Shifting the focus from the interpretation of a specific object to an artist's practice – the conceptual approach or method by which an artist goes about making art - can reveal an organizing principle which deepens our understanding of not only an artist's work but its connection to human behavior. Warhol used framing devices to make his art including cardboard boxes, tape recorders, and cameras capture and organize information around him. Students will examine Warhol's art practices and draw parallels with other professional practices. In the studio students will get first-hand knowledge of Warhol's reproduction methods as they learn the photographic silkscreen process.