



Center for Urban History
of East Central Europe

**Connecting (to) Histories: Engaging with the Urban Pasts and
Displaying Jewish Heritage**

**8th Summer School
July 10 – August 4, 2017**

VADIM ALTSKAN, LUDMILA GORDON

SYLLABUS

**"THE POWER OF MUSEUMS: PRESERVING HERITAGE, INTERPRETING PAST,
SHAPING IDENTITY"**

LVIV 2017

Center for Urban History of East Central Europe

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The Power of Museums: Preserving Heritage, Interpreting Past, Shaping Identity

In today's world, museums, in addition to being important repositories for collecting, preserving, and displaying cultural heritage, are also influential institutions of social, political, and economic significance.

Museums provide a physical foundation for historical narratives and can serve to validate ideas about contemporary society, interpret its past, and shape a vision for its future. Museums take on a particularly significant role in the times of a search for new national identities and have the potential to open long-overdue debates about contentious chapters in history and pressing issues of our time. While artifacts offer people the opportunity to connect with cultural heritage and the past, the interpretation of this past can be instrumental in shaping individual and national identity.

The course will examine how modern exhibitions present traditional and divergent historical narratives, how various constituencies are represented, and how cultural, ethnic, and national identities are reflected through these discourses. The course will address museums' responsibility for preserving and interpreting heritage with an open mind, and reflecting the many angles of history in their diversity.

The lectures will discuss the museum's function as an institution and examine how evolving public demand and technology affect its role in society. The lectures will also outline the critical steps required for creating effective exhibitions. Through case studies, the lectures will provide an overview of the history and structure of various international museums, including those dedicated to the Jewish heritage, and address the current challenges that museums encounter and overcome.

Instructors:

Vadim Altskan is a historian specializing in Eastern European, Balkan, and Jewish history. He serves as the Project Director for the International Archival Programs at the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. He directs archival research and acquisitions in the Balkans, Baltics, Caucasus, Central Asia, and East Europe, including Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, with the aim of developing the Museum's archival collections and fulfilling the Museum's mission to preserve evidence of the Holocaust and make historical materials available to scholars and the general public.

Ludmila Gordon is a museum exhibition developer and researcher specializing in cultural and political history, with over twenty years of experience in developing collections and exhibitions in the United States, Canada, and Russia. Most recently, she worked with New York-based Ralph Appelbaum Associates, the world's largest museum planning and design company,

developing the content and creating the visual storylines for several groundbreaking exhibitions, including the Jewish Museum & Tolerance Center in Moscow - the first interpretive history museum of its kind in the country.

Lecture I

Museums and Society: preserving common heritage and presenting divergent narratives.

by Ludmila Gordon

This lecture will look at museums as social institutions and examine their ever-evolving role in society. Through case studies of international museums, the lecture will explore how museums have evolved from what were initially secluded escapes for the privileged into influential public institutions, and will discuss the present trends in the museum world: mega-museums & micro-museums, ecomuseums & virtual museums, city streets as exhibition spaces & exhibitions in the palm of your hand. Among the characteristic shifts of the last two decades has been an increasing attention to interpretive narratives. Reacting to societal change, curators explore new approaches by creating community-minded exhibitions, presenting diverse and conflicting narratives, introducing provocative programs, and providing a platform for heated public debates, thus initiating new museum audiences.

Case studies:

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial - from a statement in the 1980s to a museum in the 2010s.

The exhibition Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews - a narrative of the 1990s.

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights - a daring controversial state project in the 2010s.

Reading:

1. Edward and Mary Alexander. Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums. Lanham, Maryland: Altamira Press, 2008. [available in the CUHECE library: call #: MHVC.05017.BK](#)

2. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1998. [available in the CUHECE library: call #: UHGE.04340.BK](#)

3. Debora Meijers, Ellinoor Bergvelt, Lieske Tibbe and Elsa van Wezel. National Museums and National Identity. The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, Wassenaar, 2012. <http://www.huizingainstituut.nl/v02/wp-content/uploads/National-Museums-and-National-Identity.pdf>

4. 21st Century Roles of National Museums: A Conversation in Progress. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2002, pp.18-20.

<https://www.si.edu/content/opanda/docs/rpts2002/02.10.21stcenturyrole.final.pdf>

5. Sharon J. Macdonald. Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities. *Museum and Society*, 2003, 1/1: 1-16.

<https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museumsociety/documents/volumes/mands1.pdf>

6. Dawn Casey. Museums as Agents for Social and Political Change. *Museums and their Communities*, ed. Sheila Watson, London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 292-299.

provided in PDF file: [LG_1_MuseumsAsAgentsForSocial&PoliticalChange_Casey.pdf](#)

7. Amy Henderson. How Museums and the Arts are Presenting Identity so That It Unites, Not Divides. *Smithsonian Magazine*, 2014.

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-museums-arts-are-presenting-identity-so-it-unites-not-divides-180951560/>

Reading for case studies:

1. Karal Ann Marling and Robert Silberman. The Statue Near the Wall: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Art of Remembering. *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, 1987, 1 (1), pp. 4-29.

provided in PDF file: [LG_1_StatueNearTheWall_TheVietnamMemorial.pdf](#)

2. Giles R. Wright. Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews. Oxford University Press, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Jun., 1995), pp. 148-153. provided in PDF file: [LG_1_Bridges&Boundaries_African_Americans&American_Jews.pdf](#)

3. Jennifer Carter. Canada at the "Crossroads": Global Citizenship, Narrative History, and The Canadian Museum for Human Rights. *National Museums in a Global World*, 2008, pp. 81-90. <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/031/ecp07031.pdf>

Lecture II

In Search of the Optimal Model: the making of museums that meet the public's demand.

by Vadim Altskan

This lecture will outline the process of creating a narrative museum in the United States. By looking into the case study of one of the most important national museums in the United States, the lecture will discuss the history of its founding and the evolution of the museum's functions and structure, its research and education programs, and continuous efforts to engage a broader audience.

Case study: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

Reading:

1. Susan A. Crane. Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum. *History and Theory*, 1997, 36 (4), pp. 44-63.

[provided in PDF file: VA_2_2_Torah and Taboo_ Baruch Stier.pdf](#)

2. Oren Baruch Stier. Torah and Taboo: Containing Jewish Relics and Jewish Identity at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *Numen*, 2010, 57 3/4, pp. 505-536.

[provided in PDF file: VA_2_1_Memory, Distortion, and History in the museum.pdf](#)

Lecture III

Modern Challenges and Solutions: social changes, new approaches, and technology in museums.

by Ludmila Gordon

In today's reality, museums face overwhelming competition from a multitude of other cultural and social venues. In order to stay relevant, museums constantly reinvent themselves.

How do museums withstand the test of modernity and stand firm as influential institutions?

Why do more people visit museums today across the globe?

What does help museums to engage new stakeholders and attract new audiences?

The lecture will answer these questions and look into various international museum initiatives as case studies. The lecture will also discuss the available tools and technology, from reconstruction and reenactment to multimedia programs, interactive installations, digital collections, and other modern approaches that enable museums to compete and thrive in the modern world.

Reading:

1. Museums in a Digital Age, ed. Ross Parry. London, New York, Routledge, 2010.

[available in the the CUHECE library: call #: MHVC.05016.BK](#)

2. Kathy Halbreich. Inventing New Models for the Museum and its Audiences. In *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice/Public Response*, 2000, pp. 67-79.

<http://www.pcah.us/media/files/652ca7ca77443f1a9e4750319ceea977.pdf>

3. Nina Simon. Why Participate? Preface In *The Participatory Museum*. Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0. 2010.

<http://www.participatorymuseum.org/preface/>

Nina Simon. Co-Creating with Visitors, Chapter 8 in *The Participatory Museum*. Museum 2.0. 2010.

<http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter8/>

4. Paul Th. van de Laar. The Contemporary City as Backbone: Museum Rotterdam Meets the Challenge, *Journal of Museum Education*, 2013, 38:1, pp. 39-49
[provided in PDF file: LG_3_RotterdamMuseumMeetsTheChallenge_Laar.pdf](#)

5. Frazer Swift. Connecting Londoners with Their City through Digital Technologies, *Journal of Museum Education*, 2013, 38:1, pp. 60-68.
[provided in PDF file: LG_3_LondonMuseumTechnology_Swift.pdf](#)

6. Judith Dobrzynski. High Culture Goes Hands-On. *The New York Times*, August 11, 2013.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/11/opinion/sunday/high-culture-goes-hands-on.html?smid=pl-share>

7. Power to the People? *Blouin ArtInfo International*, July 23, 2008.
<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/28147/power-to-the-people/>
Read five interviews.

Lecture IV

The Missing Chapter: integrating the Jewish heritage into the Ukrainian museum space.

by Vadim Altskan

The lecture will address gaps in the representation of Jewish Ukrainian history within the Ukrainian museum realm. The presentation will discuss the reasons for these "omissions" and then focus on the ways and means to integrate the Jewish history and culture into the present Ukraine's cultural and historical environment.

Reading:

1. Zenon E. Kohut. The Khmelnytsky Uprising, the Image of Jews, and the Shaping of Ukrainian Historical Memory.

Jewish History, 2003, 17 (2), pp. 141-163.

[provided in PDF file: VA_4_1_Khmelnytsky Uprising, the Image of Jews _ Zenon Kohut.pdf](#)

2. Henry Abramson. Jewish Representation in the Independent Ukrainian Governments of 1917-1920.

Slavic Review, 1991, 50 (3), pp. 542-550.

[provided in PDF file:](#)

[VA_4_2_Jewish Representation in the Independent Ukrainian Governments of 1917-1920_Henry Abramson.pdf](#)

3. Christoph Mick. Incompatible Experiences: Poles, Ukrainians and Jews in Lviv under Soviet and German Occupation, 1939-44. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2011, 46 (2), pp. 336-363.

[provided in PDF file: VA_4_3_Incompatible Experiences Pole_Christoph Mick.pdf](#)

Lecture V

Making it Work: critical steps for creating effective interpretive exhibitions.

by Ludmila Gordon

This lecture will focus on the practical processes involved in creating exhibitions: defining a key concept and mission, analyzing community needs and educational goals, evaluating resources, generating compelling content, conducting research, collecting and selecting artifacts, creating interactive media programs, writing effective exhibition texts, working with architects and designers, organizing display cases, and planning visitor engagement.

Reading:

1. Faye Sayer. *Public History: A Practical Guide*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.
2. *The Making of Exhibitions: Purpose, Structure, Roles and Process*. Smithsonian Institution, Office of Policy and Analysis. 2002.
<https://www.si.edu/Content/opanda/docs/Rpts2002/02.10.MakingExhibitions.Final.pdf>
3. Anna Karina Kjeldsen & Matilde Nisbeth Jensen, When Words of Wisdom are Not Wise: A study of accessibility in museum exhibition texts, in *Nordisk Museologi*, 2015, 1, pp. 91–111.
<http://www.nordiskmuseologi.org/English/Kjeldsen.pdf>
4. Christian Waltl. *Museums For Visitors: Audience development: a crucial role for successful museum management strategies*. INTERCOM Conference Paper. 2006.
<http://www.intercom.museum/documents/1-4waltl.pdf>
4. Elaine Heumann Gurian. What Is the Object of This Exercise? A Meandering Exploration of the Many Meanings of Objects in Museums. *Daedalus*, Summer 1999, Vol. 128, No. 3, pp. 163-183.
[provided in PDF file: LG_5_What is the object_ Elaine Gurian.pdf](#)
6. Sharon MacDonald. *Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition: An Introduction to the Politics of Display*. London: Routledge. 2010.
http://www.simuseo.net/assets/introduccion_sharon_macdonald_the_politics_of_display.pdf