Smith College, Department of Art and Hillyer Art Library
Information Literacy Assignments: Evaluation, Critical Analysis of Texts

ARH101: Approaches to Visual Representation, Writing Art/Art Writing
Praser Ward, Fall 2004

M9/13—W9/15: Research Methods and Resources
In-class research assignment: Ed Ruscha

For this assignment, the class will be divided into small groups. Each group will be given one of the pairs of texts listed below. Once you have found and read the texts, your task is to try as best you can to situate them, in relation to one another and to the field, in order to assess their content. What this means is that you need to think about what kind of publication the texts appear in, how they address their audiences, what kind of audiences those might be, and what sorts of positions the authors take. So, you should think about how to find out about the publications and the authors, and how to find related sources on Ruscha that help to contextualize the ones you’re reading.

Each group will have approximately 45 minutes of class time to gather material and their thoughts, and each group will then make a 5 minute presentation of their findings to the class.


2) Itoi, Kay, “Japanese Corporation Buys American,” Artnews v.102, n. 3 (March 2003)
Tully, Judd, “Revisiting a Legend,” Art & Auction v.24, n.9 (October 2002)

3) Durnett, Adrian, “Titles in Dialogue,” Art Newspaper v 13, n.126 (June 2002)
McDonough, Tom, “Ed Ruscha at C+M Arts and Gagosian,” Art in America v.90, n.9 (June 2002)

Rugoff, Ralph, “The Last Word,” Artnews 88 (December 1989)

5) Plagens, Peter, “Two Pops,” Artrium v.38, n.10 (Summer 2000)
Duncan, Michael, “Painterly Pop,” Art in America 81 (July 1993)
The purpose of this exercise is to develop your ability to assess a prospective research source before devoting yourself to a close reading. This skill is essential in the early stages of any research project, and will be useful as you develop your annotated bibliography for this course. More generally, the ability to evaluate a body of material quickly and critically is an excellent skill to have in many professional situations.

I. Assessing the source. Examine the text quickly and strategically. Don’t let yourself get caught up in a close reading: go through it quickly, but with concentration. Try to determine the following:

1. Scope. What are the basic parameters of the study (subject, time period, etc.)?
2. Argument. What is the central idea?
   - Hint: Focus on the introduction and conclusion, chapter or section headings, the beginnings and ends of individual chapters or sections, and the first and last sentences of paragraphs.
3. Approach. How would you characterize the author’s interpretive approach? Does it seem to be grounded in a particular academic discipline or methodology?
   - Hint: Pay attention to the kinds of sources the author draws upon, the kinds of questions she asks, and any statements she makes about her/his approach.
4. Publication context. What do the publication conditions and production values of the text suggest about its intellectual goals and audience?
   - Hint: consider the publication date and publisher, the range of essays included in the same source (for periodicals and anthologies), the presence of advertisements (for periodicals), and design features (layout, illustrations, etc.)
5. Audience. For what kind of reader do you think the text was produced?

II. Assessing the Author. To engage a text critically, it’s important to have some sense of who the author is, and how her/his work might have been shaped by such factors as training, institutional affiliation, and personal and cultural identity.

1. Find out as much as possible about the author.
   - Hint: check the text itself for a reference to institutional affiliation (in the acknowledgments or a note at the beginning or end), then look for more information via the institution’s website. Also try a Google or other internet search.
2. Find at least one other work by the same author.
   - Hint: Try the Five College online catalog, at least one periodicals database, and/or WorldCat.
3. How does the information you found expand your understanding of the author’s choice of subject and interpretive approach in the text you are examining?

III. Making the source work for you. Critical assessment is useful only if you can bring your insights to bear on your own work.

1. If you were doing a research project on Jeff Koons, how would you use this source? Are there any ways its usefulness is limited?
2. List two potentially useful references from the text’s notes or bibliography, and explain why you think they sound promising.

THE RESEARCH PAPER

Objective: To learn the steps to production of a quality, professional research paper on a topic of your choice related to African Diaspora arts. This include the production of a thesis, selection of reference material, outline production, draft and final paper writing. This assignment is produced in conjunction with the Jacobson Writing Center.

Each phase of the paper is produced and graded independently based on the timeline for production below:

Proposal – 2 pages
This should provide your proposed topic for research, be it an artist, a style, a period, etc. You should plan to discuss original works of art and a theoretical context in which those works can be analyzed. The proposal includes questions you plan to use to formulate a thesis, areas of interest to you, and some indication of work you have already done on the topic. It should be no longer than 2 double-spaced pages.

Thesis Statement and Annotated Bibliography – To include at least 5 bibliographic sources
The thesis is a single sentence that describes the issue your paper will address, including a viewpoint on the material that is your own, and an indication of how the paper will serve to prove your point.

The bibliography (single-spaced) should include textual and internet sources in a complete standard format (only MLA or Chicago Manual of Style formats are acceptable for papers in Art History). Beneath each citation should appear a few sentences (no more than a paragraph, also single-spaced) from you as to the usefulness of this source and what parts of it help defend/define/support your thesis and topic. This is a mini-evaluation on your part of each source and its appropriateness to your work.

Questions to keep in mind as you read, and hence assemble this working annotated bibliography are: Who is the author? Is s/he a well-known or lesser known contributor to the field and to this topic? Can I understand the author’s argument, and can I summarize his/her thesis and major points in a few sentences or less? Is the source researched? Does the author provide footnotes and a bibliography? How do these authors cite their sources? – Good to keep in mind for how to use quotations and citations in your own work.
III. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL PROJECT- due in class March 4
This assignment is a compilation and reading project. It will consist of the following items:

1. A statement which tells me which house you have chosen; its approximate date and style; its address if local, or general location if not, and a photograph/photocopy if appropriate.

2. A photocopy of a page from the dictionary of art, showing bibliography on a subject which is relevant to your project. Underline any sources which look as if they are likely to be helpful. We will go over this in the library research session.

3. A photocopy of the title page and bibliography from the most recently published book which touches upon your subject (preferably within the last ten years). Again, underline sources which are relevant to your project.

4. A printout of citations from Art Abstracts and/or the Avery Index. Underline sources which are relevant to your project.

5. Identification of a primary source which relates to the subject of your paper; ie: anything written at the time your house was built and furnished which might describe, discuss, illustrate, or advise about houses, their use or their decoration; or anything directly related to a particular house or its occupants. So for instance, if you are writing about a house from Pompeii, you might look at the work of Vitruvius, a Roman who wrote about architecture. Biarritz books from the middle ages to the present are often helpful in illuminating how a house was used at a particular time. For the late 19th century and all of the 20th century there are many house and garden magazines, some of which can be found here at Smith. Meanwhile, the college archives and Historic Northampton have many records, inventories, letters and photographs relating to houses in Northampton. We will discuss primary sources further in our research session or in class. Come and see me if you are stuck on this.

6. A bibliography of ten books or articles related to the style and type of your house and its corresponding furniture. You may focus on one or the other, but you must have at least one source on furniture and one on architecture. You can also include books on social behaviour and usage. BE SURE AND LOOK THROUGH THE OPEN RESERVE BOOK LIST ON THE BACK OF YOUR SYLLABUS. It is fine to use any of these sources. Do not include internet articles unless they are online versions of published journals. Do not include articles from the Dictionary of Art (though of course you may include sources which you find in bibliographies in the Dictionary of Art).

7. Once you have your ten sources, you are to choose five of them to read and summarize. Of these five, at least one should be a book (the rest may be articles or sections of books). Summaries of articles should be about half a page, double spaced. Your book summary should be a page or more. All summaries should begin by stating the main argument of the book or article, and then trace the steps by which the author reaches his or her conclusions.

There is no specific format or page length for this assignment. It will consist of a statement identifying your house and its style; a bibliography; 5 summaries; and 4-5 photocopied pages.

Note: you will be allowed to quote from websites in your paper, but they should not be your primary mode of research, and they should be supplemental to the sources you find above. We will discuss how to evaluate a website in class.
The goal of this assignment is to come to a critical assessment of the level of information on the Etruscans available on the internet. Using your search engine of choice, do a search on the Etruscans. Peruse several sites and select the site which, in your opinion, provides the best information and the one which provides the worst and write a one page paper which argues your case. Be sure to address why you designate one the best—and the worst—and be as specific as possible about the evidence you are using in reaching your conclusions. Issues you might want to consider including:

* kinds of information available
* subjects addressed
* depth of coverage
* citation of published sources
* intended audience
* authorship

Due in class on Tuesday 17 February; 10% of your semester grade.
Smith College
Department of Art & Hillyer Art Library
Information Literacy Assignments: Evaluation of Websites

ARTS OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA
ARH 260 - 02 - Art Historical Studies Colloquium - Spring, 2005
Tuesday/Thursday 1:00-2:20 pm, Hillyer 103

Professor: Susan Kart
Office: Hillyer 112
Office Hours: Wed. 1-3, and by appointment
Phone/Email: 585-3335, skart@email.smith.edu

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS FOR GRADING OPTION A
3 Response Papers (4-6 pp each) - Self-Scheduled - 20 pts each (60% of total grade)
Final Exam - Scheduled - 25% of total grade
Class Participation - Class - 15% of total grade

INTERNET RESPONSE
This is a 4-6pp. comparison and analysis of internet information available based on a course unit of study.
Select a topic from one of the syllabus units and conduct the below internet research on that topic:

- Locate 1 professional/scholarly website with scholarly materials on your topic. Search for materials on your topic and report on the quality/quantity of materials, authorship, adequacy of support information on the topic.
- Locate 1 website of moderate scholarly/professional content on your topic. How is information on this type of website organized? Is it authored? How is the information on this site helpful to a student/researcher or not.
- Locate 1 non-professional website on your topic and discuss the presentation/format of the information contained. Is this information helpful/reliable for scholarly research?

Questions to answer for all 3 sites: How easy was each type of site to find? What types of searches did you do to find these sites? What types of information are contained on each site? How can you distinguish between "good" and "bad" websites? How do you evaluate internet information to find quality materials?
Do you find evidence of plagiarism across websites in your searching?

All sites must be fully identified and cited in the paper and a bibliography must be provided.