

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS: 2016 CCL/MELLON FOUNDATION SEMINAR

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE THIRD ANNUAL CCL/MELLON FOUNDATION SEMINAR IN CURATORIAL PRACTICE

*New York City, August 8, 2016* — Over the course of two weeks in July, the Center for Curatorial Leadership (CCL) welcomed fifteen art history doctoral students to New York for the CCL/Mellon Foundation Seminar in Curatorial Practice. Now in its third year, the program exposes aspiring curators to the museum field and explores questions of collections and acquisitions, special exhibitions, institutional vision, and visitor experience. The cohort of students represented an expansive array of universities, professional backgrounds, and areas of specialization that enriched conversations and inquiries throughout the program.

With the continued generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the CCL organized an intensive program that delved into the nuances of curatorial practice. In turn, students were provided with the opportunity to consider their academic work within the context of display, connoisseurship, and public interpretation. Participants gained critical insights, tools, and opportunities in dialogue with distinguished museum leaders around the city.

Highlights from the two weeks include:

#### MUSEUM VISITS WITH DIRECTORS AND CURATORS

The Seminar schedule included trips to nearly a dozen cultural institutions for exhibition tours, curatorial conversations, and career insights. Among these visits, the students had the privilege to meet with three pioneering museum directors: Anne Pasternak (Brooklyn Museum), Thelma Golden (The Studio Museum in Harlem), and Colin B. Bailey (The Morgan Library & Museum). These encounters served to illuminate the impact of leadership styles and institutional values and offered perspectives on professional trajectories.

A selection of permanent collection and temporary exhibition walkthroughs anchored the program schedule. The curators of *Edgar Degas: A Strange New Beauty* at MoMA, *Human Interest: Portraits from the Whitney's Collection*, and *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible* at The Met Breuer introduced students to the scholarly complexity and logistical realities of carrying out a large-scale exhibition program. These visits were complemented by tours of the permanent collections at the Newark Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which showcased the innovative ways in which curators are grappling with histories of collections and reimagined

modes of storytelling.

#### **DIVING ACROSS DEPARTMENTS**

To increase awareness and appreciation for the full spectrum of activities and departments that contribute to the success of a museum, the students met with leading professionals working in conservation, education, finance, and public programming. Kathryn Potts, Associate Director, Helena Rubenstein Chair of Education at the Whitney Museum, and Nico Wheadon, Director of Public Programs & Community Engagement at The Studio Museum in Harlem, offered critical takes on the responsibility of museums to engage audiences and communities through their collections. MoMA's CFO Jan Postma traced how financial decisions influence the exhibition process in addition to the overall operations of an institution. Conservators from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA, and The Morgan Library & Museum provided an overview of restoration and preservation approaches followed by an unparalleled look at artworks currently being treated for upcoming acquisition or display.

#### **MENTORSHIP FOR THE NEXT WAVE OF CURATORS**

During the two weeks, each student was paired with a mentoring curator with whom they shared overlapping fields of interest and scholarly approaches. One-on-one sessions allowed the students to speak candidly about the pursuit of a museum career and garner advice for navigating their curatorial interests. Mentors came from institutions including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA, the Henry Luce Foundation, the Cooper Hewitt, and The Morgan Library & Museum and included several alumni of the CCL Core and MoMA International Curatorial Institute programs. As in years past, the aim is for these relationships to continually evolve following the duration of the program.

#### **COURSEWORK WITH COLUMBIA BUSINESS SCHOOL**

A signature component of the CCL, Columbia Business School (CBS) curricula provided a glimpse into the professional leadership skills that underlie the curatorial track. The students developed business acumen through two courses led by CBS professors. Paul Ingram, Kravis Professor of Business, offered a session titled "Values, Leadership, and Culture." A new course for the program, the exercise instructed the students on approaches for realizing their metrics and priorities for success and gratification. Daniel Ames, Ting Tsung and Wei Fong Chao Professor of Business, taught an exercise on negotiations and decision-making strategy.

### MINING THE MISSION: PRACTICUM ASSIGNMENT

Designed as an opportunity to apply the lessons and skills learned throughout the Seminar, this year's practicum assignment pushed the students to examine one of three New York City institutions through a group-based project and presentation. The Frick Collection, The Jewish Museum, and the International Center of Photography served as sites of inquiry for the teams to think through each institution's distinct museological approach. The students toured the collections, met with directors, and completed all-encompassing visitor experience assessments. Finally, each team gave a presentation on the alignment of mission to program to a trio of respondents. Andrea Bayer from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alison Gilchrest from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Lisa W. Schermerhorn from the Kress Foundation offered feedback on the findings and reinforced the importance of keen curatorial thinking.

It was a true pleasure to work with this remarkable cohort of students and we look forward to seeing how they apply their curatorial promise and scholarly ingenuity in their professional endeavors. Congratulations to the CCL/Mellon Foundation Seminar Class of 2016!

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