

Examen Terminal - examen écrit - Semestre 2 2021-2022

Langue : Anglais	Niveau : 5	Date : 14 MAI 2022	Durée : 1h30
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Museums Change Their Approach to Showing White Male Artists

By Robin Pogrebin, April 2022 – The New York Times (edited)

At a time when cultural institutions all over the United States are making a concerted effort to integrate more women and people of color into their collections, staffs, boards and exhibitions, shows of established white male artists continue to be featured prominently on museum calendars.

5 In part, the continued presentation of these traditional artists speaks to their enduring importance in the canon of art history. But it is also raising important questions for museums about how to make room for alternative voices and how to revisit the contributions of historical figures through a contemporary lens.

10 “It is about complicating the narrative,” Max Hollein, the Met’s director, said in a phone interview. “In this environment, looking at art history anew means we can reassess their oeuvre — diversify not only those who scrutinize it but also make sure the work is presented in a more complex way.”

In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, efforts at diversity, equity and inclusion are now top of mind for most institutions. Museums are now on notice of the need to diversify their boards and hire a greater range of curators and staff members, to ensure that multiple points of view are reflected in an institution’s decision-making.

15 Denise Murrell, who recently joined the Met as associate curator for 19th- and 20th-century art, said it was also important to look at the mix of shows at a museum at any given time — are various viewpoints represented?

20 For the Met’s 150th anniversary show, each gallery had one or more wall labels presenting, chronologically, how the collection was built. In the label titled “The Met and Black Artists in the Early Twentieth Century,” the museum acknowledged its shortcomings¹.

25 “Among the important modern-art movements the Met neglected in the early twentieth century was the Harlem Renaissance, an outpouring² of creative talent and energy in literature, music, and visual arts throughout the 1920s and 1930s,” the label said. The lack of engagement with key artists, such as Aaron Douglas, Charles Alston, and Laura Wheeler Waring, the label continued, “is especially surprising and regrettable given its close physical proximity to the neighborhood of Harlem, the foundational nexus³ of this international movement.”

30 In October, the Philadelphia Museum of Art — with the Musée de l’Orangerie in Paris and the Musée Matisse in Nice, France — plans to present “Matisse in the 1930s,” which focuses on that decade of the painter’s life. The show will in part explore how the artist dealt with his nude female models, one of whom also served as his assistant. “What we’re trying to do is explain the question of the male artist and the clothed or unclothed female model,” Matthew Affron, the Philadelphia Museum’s curator of modern art and one of the Matisse show’s curators, said by phone. “It raises questions about what he was doing and how we should think about what we did. Questions of gender are central. It’s not a neutral situation.”

35 Even as curators are approaching shows differently, so too are audiences bringing — and demanding — a more nuanced perspective to what they see in museums, art experts say.

40 Some traditionalists have been concerned that museums are in the midst of an over correction, showing a preponderance of artists of color while neglecting some of the old guard. In 2020, Gary Garrels, the longtime chief curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, caused an uproar after he was reported to have said in a Zoom meeting, “Don’t worry, we will definitely still continue to collect white artists.” Despite responding that his comments were “a little bit skewed⁴,” he resigned. But several curators say it does not have to be a zero-sum game⁵.

45 “All museums want to expand what has been the canon to have a more balanced program,” Mr. Affron said. “It’s not either or, it’s yes and. We want to have a wider variety of voices and images. When we do exhibitions about historical figures like Matisse, of course we do them in a scholarly way with a sense of historical perspective. But we also must apply points of view that are informed⁶ by the questions of today.”

50 That “yes and” approach should inform every museum’s exhibition program, some curators say, making sure to consider the artist’s cultural context, personal history and potentially controversial imagery.

55 If the balance has shifted for now, others say, so be it: The white European male art tradition has long enjoyed pre-eminence. “For centuries, western cultural institutions have had a very narrow vision of what constitutes artistic excellence — namely, art made by white men,” Anne Pasternak, the director of the Brooklyn Museum, said by email. “The fact is, the ideas that shaped our collections and exhibitions are deeply intertwined⁷ with histories of oppression, which limited opportunities for greater enrichment for artists and audiences alike.

“It matters what stories we tell and who tells them,” Ms. Pasternak continued. “At the Brooklyn Museum, we are striving to be more intentional and inclusive of artistic excellence in all of New York City’s major populations. The playing field is becoming fairer.”

60 Museums have also become much more conscious about what they acquire — filling in gaps in their collections with the work of artists they have failed to recognize over the years. In 2019, for example, the Baltimore Museum of Art pledged to acquire only work by female artists for a year. (...) Last December, the Met, together with the Studio Museum in Harlem, announced that it would acquire and conserve thousands of photographs by James Van Der Zee, the portraitist who chronicled the Harlem Renaissance.

65 “We’ll just have to see how things evolve over time,” Ms. Murrell said, “and whether museums live up to their commitment to be anti-racist in everything they do.”

1. <u>shortcomings</u> : failures, deficiencies - 2. <u>outpouring</u> : a surge, deluge - 3. <u>nexus</u> : centre, core - 4. <u>skewed</u> : distorted - 5. <u>a zero-sum game</u> : a situation in which one person or group can win something only by causing another person or group to lose it. - 6. <u>informed</u> : influenced, shaped - 7. <u>Intertwined</u> : linked
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WRITE ALL YOUR ANSWERS ON THE EXAM PAPER SHEET, THANK YOU

A/ COMPREHENSION (10 points)

Answer the TWO questions in your own words (do not cite extensive passages from the text). Use the appropriate linkers/structures to organize your answers.

- 1) What have Western museums strived to do recently? What has prompted them to do so? (5 pts)
- 2) Comment on the passage about the concerns expressed by the “traditionalists” (lines 37-41). Are the answers provided in the rest of the text likely to appease them? Why (not)? (5 pts)

B/ WRITTEN EXPRESSION - 300 words (± 10%) - (10 points)

Choose ONE of the following subjects and write a well-organised essay. Give strong, convincing arguments to support your ideas; choose relevant examples; and make sure your English is sophisticated enough.

Indicate which subject you have chosen.

- 1) As a museum visitor, do you think “a more nuanced perspective to what [you] see in museums” is needed? (line 35). Explain why (not), drawing from your experience and giving relevant examples (not already mentioned in the text).
- 2) In the context of the debate about cultural repatriation and restitution, Neil Curtis, the Head of Museums and Special Collections at Aberdeen University, argues that there has been a change in public opinion “from museums being places of certainty and facts to being places much more about relationships with people and understanding the complexity of our relationship with each other and with the material world.” To what extent does this idea reflect the issues mentioned in the text you have just read?
- 3) “There’s a strong case to be made that the museum is more relevant today than it has ever been. From addressing key social issues to transforming how we see the future, the humble museum has the power to reflect and shape our society.” Discuss this quote by art journalist, Rebecca Carlsson.