During the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama told an adoring crowd of more than 250,000 gathered in Berlin’s Tiergarten that he was speaking to them as a citizen of the United States and as a citizen of the world. But what does it really mean to be a global citizen? Where do the values which global citizens embrace come from? To what extent do national artistic and cultural institutions—in part established to create national citizens—now see themselves as creating cosmopolitans too?

Museums might seem like unlikely places to look for answers to public policy conundrums. But ever since the leaders of the new French Republic opened the doors of the Louvre, artistic and cultural institutions have helped define the cultural packages people use to imagine the nation. In fact, in the late nineteenth century, the creation of many of the world’s premier museums coincided with the birth of the nation-state. To be a bona fide “people”, countries had to have culture and it took a great deal of imagination to create a unified “family” or “team” out of millions of people who would never meet. Strong emerging nations needed to be able to perform themselves to their prospective members using knowledge, rituals and practices which complete strangers could understand. Museums played an important role in projecting that connection and belonging, although they stopped definitively at the nation-state door. So, in this increasingly global world, in which so many people belong to several communities at one time, do museums create global citizens too?

The book I am writing will explore how countries use their artistic and cultural institutions to position themselves globally and locally by comparing art and ethnographic museums in the United States, Europe, and Asia. It uses museums as a window through which to understand how and why countries represent nationalism and its relationship to cosmopolitanism differently. What it is about the history and culture of particular cities and regions that make them more outward-looking than others? Do museums in the same cities working together through an implicit division of labor, which makes some institutions more global than others? In Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Taipei, I ask whether museums articulate an Asian and Muslim versions of global citizenship. In Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, I analyze how nationalism and
globalism are represented and promoted by strong, newly-diverse Social Democracies. In the United States, I compare how museums in Detroit, Houston, Kansas City, and Boston represent America and its changing status. Each of these institutions recently reinstalled its American collection in ways that reflect their city’s particular position in America and the world.

In this class, we will focus on the Boston piece of my project which includes the MFA, the Peabody Essex Museum, the Peabody Museum at Harvard, the Gardner Museum and the Institute for Contemporary Art. Together, we will research each of these institutions and the urban and regional cultural field in which they are embedded. What is it about the history of these institutions and about the history of the city and region in general that affects their approach to citizenship creation. What is it about their collections and donor base? We will design a collective research strategy for answering these questions. Each student will write a 10-15 page paper on the museum she is studying.

In addition, we will all ask these questions about Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts. The MFA is reinstalling its American collection this November when it opens its new wing. This gives us a great natural experiment. How and where did the museum portray Americanness and globalism before its new wing opens and how is it depicted in the new building. Answering this not only requires locating the MFA historically and culturally in the city (as you will do in your first project), but also analyzing the actual exhibits, and the interviews I have conducted with curators there that I will share with you and teach you how to analyze. Each student will also write a 10-15 page paper about the MFA.

President Obama used aspirational language when he addressed that crowd in Berlin. He wasn’t predicting that someday we’d all carry global passports. He was saying that we live on the same planet and face similar problems which we need to do something about. But we still define problems and their solutions nationally. When we create international institutions, like the United Nations or the World Court, national interests tend to interfere. The failure in Copenhagen to reach any meaningful agreement on climate change is the most recent example of our collective failure to think outside the nation-state box. But how do we begin to imagine and put into place a social contract that extends beyond national borders? What do museums have to do with it?

REQUIRED BOOKS

The following books are available for purchase at the WC bookstore and are on reserve at the library:


WEEK ONE – SEPTEMBER 13TH

Introduction and discussion of chapter drafts

WEEK TWO – SEPTEMBER 20TH  A BROAD OVERVIEW

Discussion of Conn book and assignment of individual projects

WEEK THREE - NO CLASS

OCTOBER 2ND (SATURDAY) VISIT TO MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS 10-12.
MEET THERE AT 9:45.

WEEK FOUR – OCTOBER 4TH

Updates on progress

Library Visit with Laura Reiner

Discussion of Museum visit

Defining questions

WEEK FIVE – OCTOBER 12TH NO CLASS

WEEK SIX – OCTOBER 18TH –

Discussion of my interviews and coding. Read Calhoun and MacDonald.

Talking to the literature

WEEK SEVEN – OCTOBER 25TH

What do we know about Boston? What do we still need to know? What do we know about each of our individual museums? Read Bennett and Steiner.

Methodology

WEEK EIGHT - NOVEMBER 1ST

Discussion with Elizabeth Wyckoff at the Davis Museum

Interviewing, analysis, and coding.

WEEK NINE – NOVEMBER 8TH
Preliminary Presentation of Student Projects. Each student will give feedback to a partner.

**WEEK TEN – NOVEMBER 15TH**

Individual or group meetings with me.

**WEEK ELEVEN – NOVEMBER 22ND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES**

Preliminary discussion about MFA projects

**WEEK TWELVE – NOVEMBER 29TH TRAFFICKING**

Individual or group meetings with me

**WEEK THIRTEEN – DECEMBER 6TH**

Final individual projects presented. Both papers due December 13th via e-mail (if you need more time, let me know).

CLASS DINNER at my house on December 8th. Details to follow.