Art History 209 A W: Art Now

Spring 2019

Lecture M/W 1-2:20pm in Anderson Hall 223, compulsory writing sections on Thursday

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# Course description

Contemporary art today confronts viewers with a bewildering array of images, objects,

and processes. This can leave viewers thinking: can anything count as “art?” And what’s

the point of it all? In this class, we explore how contemporary art connects artists and

viewers in forms of creative engagement with pressing social and political issues. We

will see how artists use diverse strategies to help us consider who we are, how our world

is changing, and how we can best inhabit it together. Across a set of themes that address

the state of contemporary global culture, students will analyze how today’s art speaks to

both individual and collective lives and identities. The artwork we examine was made mostly from 1980 to the present, but we will also discuss some earlier artists whose work provided essential precedents for art practice in the contemporary period.

The course trains students how to express ideas about art in clear, structured pieces of

writing. In particular, contemporary art—which places heavy emphasis on the viewer’s

subjective experience—provides an ideal case study for considering how to develop a

convincing thesis statement based on one’s own experience or opinion, and how to

support it using visual evidence.

# Learning goals

In this class, students will:

* Become familiar with a wide range of contemporary art practices of the past

thirty years, and with important milestones in the modern art from which they

evolved.

* Build skills in the visual analysis of artworks.
* Practice writing and revising clear, well-structured texts that express ideas about

artworks, supported by visual evidence.

* Make connections between contemporary artistic production and questions of

pressing social and political importance, and explain these connections in writing.

# Readings

You are required to purchase Gilda Williams’ book *How to Write About*

*Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014), which is available online and at the

bookstore. For each theme I also list recommended readings, available as links or as PDFs on Canvas. Those readings are not compulsory and you won’t be tested on them, but they will enrich your knowledge of each topic and also provide strong examples of art writing across different venues including scholarly journals, edited volumes of scholarly essays, art magazines, and news journalism.

# Evaluation

Short paper #1 (5 pages, double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font; in response to

prompt available on Canvas) = 25%

Revision of short paper #1 = 20%

Short paper #2 (5 pages) = 25%

Weekly online content quizzes (ten points per quiz; lowest two grades dropped; all due at 11:59pm on Sundays) = 8%

Weekly writing diary (graded twice during the quarter) = 7%

Participation in class and section, orally and via Poll Everywhere = 15%

# Writing section

The Thursday writing section is compulsory for everyone enrolled in the course. It is not

possible to take the course without a W credit. Like the lecture, sections will employ

Poll Everywhere to facilitate participation, and so you must come to class with your

device to join the session. Because of the participation component via Poll Everywhere, and because of the occupancy limitations of our classrooms, it is not possible for you to attend a different section than the one for which you signed up.

# Class lecture schedule

Please note that you need to read the required reading from Gilda Willaims **before** your weekly Thursday section in the week for which it’s listed. So for example you must read pages 9-17 before section in the first week of class.

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| **Date** | **Topic** | **Work due** |
| M 4/1 | Introduction  Syllabus review |  |
| W 4/3 | The Visual Vocabulary of Contemporary Art | Read Williams: pages 9-17  Canvas quiz due Sunday by 11:59pm |
| M 4/8 | Art and the Environment, Part 1 | Recommended reading: Ann Reynolds, “Without Words  [review of Joan Jonas’s performance for the 2015 U.S. Pavilion at the Venice  Biennale],” *Artforum* (Sept. 2015) 330-33, 408. |
| W 4/10 | Art and the Environment, Part 2 | Read Williams: 18-41  Canvas quiz due Sunday by 11:59pm |
| M 4/15 | Art and Protest, Part 1 | Required viewing: *The Yes Men Are Revolting*, dir. Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, U.S.A., 2015. Available for purchase on platforms including Amazon, iTunes, and Vimeo (https://vimeo.com/ondemand/  theyesmenarerevolting) |
| W 4/17 | Art and Protest, Part 2 | Paper #1 due on Friday April 19th at 11am via Canvas  Canvas quiz due Sunday by 11:59pm |
| M 4/22 | Gender and Sexuality, Part 1: Feminist Art and Feminist Politics | Recommended reading: Jasmina Tumbas, “Yugonostalgia,” *Art Monthly* 425(April 2019): 6-10.  Amelia Jones, “Carolee Schneeman: The Artist Who Taught Us How to Live [obituary],” *The Guardian* (Friday, March 8, 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/08/carolee-schneeman-performance-artist-taught-us-how-to-live>. |
| W 4/24 | **Visiting Artist: Granite Calimpong** | Read Williams: pp. 41-68  Canvas quiz due Sunday by 11:59pm |
| M 4/29 | Gender and Sexuality, Part 2: Queer Desire and Creativity |  |
| W 5/1 | **Visiting Artist: Barbara Earl Thomas** | Read Williams: 68-105  Canvas quiz due Sunday by 11:59pm  Writing diary first submission due Friday, May 3rd at 11am via Canvas |
| M 5/6 | Race and Ethnicity, Part 1 | Recommended reading:  Mostafa Heddaya, “Artist Collective Withdraws from Whitney Biennial,” *Hyperallergic* (May 14, 2014),  <http://hyperallergic.com/126420/artistcollective-withdraws-from-whitneybiennial/>.  Ryan Wong, “I am Joe Scanlan,” *Hyperallergic* (June 17, 2014), <http://hyperallergic.com/131687/i-amjoe-scanlan/> . |
| W 5/8 | Race and Ethnicity, Part 2 | Read Williams: 106-25  Canvas quiz due Sunday by 11:59pm |
| M 5/13 | Art and War, Part 1 | Paper #1 revision due on Tuesday May 8th at 11:00am via Canvas  Recommended reading: Emily Wroczynski, “Walid Raad and the Atlas Group: Mapping Catastrophe and the Architecture of Destruction,” *Third Text* 25:6 (October 2015): 763-773. |
| W 5/15 | **Visiting Artist: Ben Gale-Shrek** | Canvas quiz due Sunday by 11:59pm |
| M 5/20 | Art and War, Part 2: Monuments and Counter-Monuments |  |
| W 5/22 | Art and Public Space | Williams: 126-62  Canvas quiz due Sunday by 11:59pm |
| M 5/27 | **Memorial Day – No class** |  |
| W 5/29 | Art and Religion | Williams: 163-209 (last section of Williams, 220-35, is optional)  Canvas quiz due Sunday by 11:59pm  Writing diary second submission due Friday, May 31st at 11am via Canvas  Recommended reading: Introduction to Richard Bolton, ed. *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts*. New York: New Press, 1992, pp. 3-25. |
| M 6/3 | Art and Technology |  |
| W 6/5 | Art and Migration | Paper #2 due on Monday, June 10th at 11am via Canvas  Canvas quiz due Sunday by 11:59pm  Recommended reading: Alex Kershaw, “An interview with Tania Bruguera,” *FIELD* (Spring 2015) (<http://field-journal.com/issue-1/bruguera>). |

# TLC at the Writing Center

I encourage students to participate in a TLC group at the Odegaard Writing Center, which will provide group writing support for English Language Learners that is specific to this course. Students who participate will likely see their grades go up organically, because of the improvement it brings to their writing skills.

# Participation policy

Participation in this class involves oral contributions in lecture in section, as well as responses via Poll Everywhere. Of the 15% for participation, 3% is allotted to oral contributions (for which we have a high standard for regular, constructive, considerate participation). The other 12% you will earn by providing relevant answers to questions asked in class via Poll Everywhere. Though we do not use Poll Everywhere to confirm your attendance, the polls will include questions that are difficult to answer if you are not present in class. The 12% is calculated out of a total of points, in which a student who provides relevant answers for every Poll Everywhere question will receive 100%. It is not possible to make up this participation should you for some reason be unable to answer questions (i.e. absent, missing your device in class, etc.). We start counting participation points from the second day of class (April 3) except for students who demonstrate they didn’t register until later in the quarter.

# Grading policy

Extra credit: There are no opportunities for extra credit.

Lateness: We will deduct 5% for every day, including weekends, that a written assignment is late, counting from the time of the original submission (usually 11am).

Rescheduling: We cannot reschedule the online quizzes or provide extensions. But we will drop your lowest two grades from the quarter, which provides a cushion if you need to miss a quiz because of illness or travel.

Grade revision: You are welcome to come and discuss with me a grade that you think to

be unfair. However, should you choose to reopen consideration of the grade, I reserve the

right to lower as well as to raise it if I believe that the initial evaluation was inaccurate.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism and cheating carry a heavy grade penalty decided at my discretion, which can range from receiving a 0 on the assignment in question to failing the course. If you are tempted to cheat, I recommend that you consider a visit to the University’s Counseling Center to get support concerning stress and emotional coping.

# Technology policy

You are permitted to use your devices in class to take notes and to access Poll Everywhere. Texting, talking on your phone, or distracting yourself, other students and me through

extracurricular internet use will lead to a reduced participation grade. These policies hold

for both the lecture and the section meetings.

# Accommodation

I look forward to working with students who may need learning accommodations (for the

official School of Art policy see the accompanying PDF). If you are registered with Disabled Student Services, or documentation concerning travel for varsity sports, please make sure I

receive it within one week of the start of class.

# Anti-discrimination

As your instructor I am committed to making our classroom a space without discrimination, where each one of you feels comfortable expressing yourself, and equally, is willing to listen to your peers express themselves. If discrimination does arise, I invite you to discuss it with me and we can make a plan for how to rectify it. Being committed to anti-discrimination doesn’t mean that you need to be nervous about saying the “wrong” thing. Rather, it’s a commitment to process, in which all of us agree to remain generous and self-reflexive, and to help each other out in the collective work of establishing a positive group dynamic. See below for the School of Art’s official Equal Opportunity policy.