**Art History 509, Seminar in Contemporary Art**

Fridays 9-11:50am, Art Building 312

Professor Adair Rounthwaite, [vadair@uw.edu](mailto:vadair@uw.edu), office hours Monday 10am-12pm or by appointment, Art Building 367

**Course description**

This seminar provides students with an introduction to themes and scholarly concerns in postmodern and contemporary art practice since the 1960s. It is designed with special attention to the needs of students pursuing the MFA in Art but is open to graduate students in any related field in the arts, humanities, or social sciences. The course will help students gain familiarity with major practitioners who have moved contemporary art practice forward through a variety of tactics and media. We will also carefully study three books in recent art historical scholarship and will consider the differences and parallels between the research that gives rise to scholarship and the research that many contemporary artists employ in their practices. Connecting threads in our discussions will be questions about the blurring and encounter between disciplines or media in contemporary art practice; the fate of mid-century tendencies such as pop and abstraction in later practices; and the issue of what constitutes the “social” or “political” with which contemporary art might aim to engage.

**Evaluation criteria**

For MFA students

Oral participation: 20%

A reading response to each book, 1200 words each, Times New Roman 12-point double spaced: 20% each x 3 = 60%

15-minute presentation on a peer’s art practice. I will assign you another student on whose practice you will present, and the presentations will happen in weeks 7, 9, and 10: 10%

Written response to the presentation on your own work, 1000 words, due 72 hours after the presentation takes place: 10%

For Art History students

Oral participation: 20%

A reading response to Darby English book, 1200 words, Times New Roman double spaced: 20%

Weekly reading diary on the other class readings (entry of ~500 words per week) to be submitted together with the final paper: 10%

Research paper on a topic of your choice, 3000-4000 words, Times New Roman double spaced: 50%

**Readings**

Please aquire the following three books:

* Darby English, *1971: A Year in the Life of Color*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.
* Lisa Saltzman, *Daguerrotypes: Fugitive Subjects, Contemporary Objects*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.
* Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012. (available as an ebook on the UW Library websites)

All other required readings are available as PDFs on Canvas or as links included below.

**Weekly schedule**

Note that you must complete the weekly readings before class each week (i.e. the English before 9am on Friday, April 12th, etc.).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Theme and Artists | Readings |
| 4/5 | Introduction  Interdisciplinarity/Intermedia, Part 1 | Shannon Jackson, “Social Turns: In Theory and Across the Arts,” in Randy Martin, ed. *Routledge Companion to Art and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 104-113. |
| 4/12 | Color, Solidarity | English, *1971: A Year in the Life of Color*  **English reading response due Monday, April 15th at 8pm via Canvas** |
| 4/19 | Pop, Objects, and the Excessive Body | Cornelia Butler, “Soft Body/Soft Sculpture: The Gendered Surrealism of Alina Szapocznikow,” in Elena Filipovic and Joanna Mytkowska, eds., *Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone 1955-1972* (New York and Brussels: Museum of Modern Art and Mercatorfonds) pp. 32-45.  Doryun Chong, “When the Body Changes into New Forms: Tracing Tetsumi Kudo,” in Chong, ed. *Tetsumi Kudo: Garden of Metamorphosis* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2008) pp. 24-49.  Silvan Tomkins, “What Are Affects?” [extract] in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, ed. *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*. Durhan, NC: Duke University Press, 1995. pp. 35-61.  Optional: Branislav Dimitrijević, “Pop Art and the Socialist ‘Thing’: Dušan Otašević in the 1960s.” *Tate Papers*, no. 24 (Autumn 2015).  <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/24/pop-art-and-the-socialist-thing-dusan-otasevic-in-the-1960s> |
| 4/26 | Painting and its Effects | Isabelle Graw, *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018, pp. 9-27, 88-134, 335-347. |
| 5/3 | Interdisciplinarity/Intermedia, Part 2 | Saltzman, *Daguerrotypes*  **Salzman reading response due Monday, May 6th at 8pm via Canvas** |
| 5/10 | Conceptualism, Photography, Institutional Critique | Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1999.  Martha Rosler, “In, around and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography).” In *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, edited by Richard Bolton, 302-40. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990 [1981].  Optional: Alexander Alberro, “Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-77,” in Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999, pp. xvii-xxx. |
| 5/17 | Neoconstructivism, Networks, and Publics | Armin Medosch, *New Tendencies: Art at the Threshold of the Information Revolution (1961 - 1978)*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016, pp. 1-65.  Christine Mehring, “Public Options: Christine Mehring on the Art of Charlotte Posenenske,” *Artforum* 49 1 (September 2010): 272-281, 352. |
| 5/24 | Affect, Craft | Cvetkovich, *Depression*  **Cvetkovich reading response due Monday, May 27th at 8pm via Canvas** |
| 5/31 | Some Tendencies of the 1980s | Grant Kester, “Rhetorical Questions: The Alternative Arts Sector and the Imaginary Public.” In *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, edited by Grant Kester, 103-35. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1998.  ~~Amy Brandt,~~ *~~Interplay: Neoconceptual Art of the 1980s~~*~~. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014, pp. 1-20, 85-130.~~  ~~Richard Bolton, ed.~~ *~~Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts~~*~~. New York: New Press, 1992, 3-25.~~ |
| 6/7 | Performance, Body, Challenge | Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else*. New York and London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 1-53.  Amelia Jones, ““The Artist Is Present”: Artistic Re-Enactments and the Impossibility of Presence.” *TDR* 55, no. 1 (2011): 16-45.  Davis Getsy, “Cassils,” *Artforum* 56 6 (February 2018): <https://www.artforum.com/print/201802/cassils-73661>.  **Art History research paper and reading journal due Friday June 7th at 8pm via Canvas** |

# Participation policy

Excellent participation consists in doing the readings, being present for all class sessions and contributing thoughtfully to discussion every session. Class sessions missed without medical or mental health documentation will result in a steep decrease in the participation grade.

# Grading policy

Lateness: I will deduct 5% for every day, including weekends, that a written assignment is late.

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

Laptops are of course permitted, but thanks for avoiding extracurricular internet use, and for putting away your phones.

# Accommodation

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

official School of Art policy, see supplementary document). If you are registered with Disabled Student Services, 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.