Hello Course Participants,

First, welcome to the course! Art History 270: Art/Identity/Politics is an entirely online course, as I am sure you are aware. Some of you will be well acquainted with this mode of instruction, while for others this may be a relatively, or even entirely new experience. Although I have taught in this manner before, online teaching is relatively new to me, and I will need a great deal of your help, and perhaps patience throughout the quarter. As a teacher, I want to get better every time I teach, and so, please, at any point during the quarter if you have feedback that might contribute to this, I really would like to hear it. I have no ego around receiving your thoughts, criticisms, advice and such, and promise to thoughtfully consider its implementation.

Canvas LMS is the web tool by which this course will be taught. If you have never used Canvas before, spend some time getting acquainted with this platform. For those new to the UW, you just need to log in to MyUW and find the link under “quick links.” Although this course will not officially open until Monday 6/22, you can sign in and look over the general platform of Canvas before then. Once the course opens, you will be able to enter the course and see the way I have designed the layout on Canvas. (You will also find a brief video lecture introducing the course, syllabus, sequencing, assignments, and so on.) I have attached the syllabus for the course in this email. Please print it and look it over. With the introductory video mentioned above, it will help to guide you. For instance, you will see that each week’s topic is contained in a “module” (or organizational grouping) that contains one or more Panopto video lectures, reading assignments and reading guides, a discussion forum and a summary/reflective assignment concerning the readings. The course is “asynchronous,” meaning you will be working on one weekly module at a time, at your own pace. You will not be able to see future modules until they are opened by me on the Monday of the week in question, but once a module has been opened, you can always go back to review earlier material in preparation for assignments.

The first week contains 2 modules; one is an introduction, the other is the first content of the course. In the first module you will find a FAQ discussion forum. If you have any questions whose answer might be of benefit to others, post such questions here. One thing I know in advance—if you are having any problems streaming the videos, or seeing the content, try using a different browser (Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome…). These days, Adobe Flash (you may already know) can be buggy, and our Panopto videos use this platform. Often simply changing browsers can fix this, although you may need to update Flash. You may also find these videos hosted on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcMnzsjr19y209NJoGtod_Q>) if Panopto is giving you fits.

This course is organized around a central theme—identity and its visual representation. How we perceive ourselves, and others, has everything to do with this theme, even though we may not always be aware of this. And the issues that surround what I am calling “identity” are vital. Just think of a time that someone may have misunderstood who you are based upon your looks, your perceived gender, race/ethnicity, and/or sexuality, or acted towards you in a way that was based upon some preconception of who you are. What are the complexities involved in such instances? This course will be an in-depth exploration of a selection of artists who have investigated gendered, ethnic/racial and sexual identity and their intersections, as well as the stakes involved in what is termed “identity politics.” As with all courses I teach, I will do all I can to get you to honestly engage with these issues by reflecting on how they matter to and impact you. I want you to connect ideas in class to your world, whatever that is.

With this in mind, here is your first assignment. First, think about your identity or sense of self, and what the parts of this are. It may help to think about your core values, inspirations, memories of important moments of your past and your aspirations for the future. Think about those you admire, and why (or inversely, the people or traits drive you crazy). Think about the issues that move you. Think about how your sense of yourself may intersect with such things as the gender, ethnicity/race, sexuality, religion, etc. Record your ideas in any manner you want. These are your private thoughts on the subject. Keep this record because I will want you to reflect on it later. Then, decide what you would like to make public to the class. On Wednesday, when you log in to Canvas, you will be asked to post a bio of yourself for others to see. That will be your second assignment.

I look forward to an interesting quarter with you. Questions about the intersections of visual representations, identity issues and politics have interested me for a very long time. I hope you have a restful break, and I will see you, so to speak, the first day of the quarter.

Kolya Rice