Hello Course Participants,

First, welcome to the course! *Art History 273: History and Theory of Photography* 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 (or topics) is contained in one or two discreet “modules” (or organizational groupings) that contain one or two Panopto video lectures, supplemental videos, reading assignments and reading guides, a discussion forum and/or a summary/reflective assignment concerning the lectures and readings. The course is “asynchronous,” meaning you will be working on one module at a time, at your own pace, during the week. You will not be able to see future weeks until they are opened by me on the Monday of the week in question, but once the week’s modules have been opened, they will remain opened, so you can always go back to review earlier material in preparation for assignments or quizzes.

The first week contains 2 modules; one is an introduction to the course, and 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 (Edge, 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.

This course is a survey of photography from its beginnings in the early 19th century to the digital imaging of today. Online video lectures, course readings and discussion forums will address photography’s multiple histories and theorizations: as an artistic medium, as a social text, as a technological adventure, and as a cultural practice. Key photographers, cultural movements and recurring themes will be explored with close attention to the social and cultural contexts in which photographs were produced, circulated and consumed. Further, we will explore critical approaches to, and complex theories concerning the operations and impact of photography, emphasizing a consideration of how photographic media impacts each of us, today.

To get us started, I would like for you to choose a photograph of yourself that you believe represents an important aspect of who you are. Be prepared to post it as part of your first “discussion forum.” You will also be asked to write a brief post about why you think your chosen photograph is a good representation of you, and what it can NOT represent about you.

I look forward to an interesting quarter with you. The impact of photography on our lives, the complex ways it has been theorized, and the incredible diversity of images and their uses has always fascinated me. I hope you have a restful break, and I will see you, so to speak, the first day of the quarter.

Kolya Rice