



Mickalene Thomas, [*Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe: Les trois femmes noires*](#), 2010. Rhinestones, acrylic, and enamel on wood panel, 304.8 x 731.5 cm. The Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann Collection © Mickalene Thomas / Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Gender Studies in Art, Photography, and Visual Culture

ART 212

Professor Kate Palmer Albers
Whittier College

**note: this class is about 15 undergrads with little to no background in art history; the course is cross-listed with GEN 212 and counts towards the Gender Studies minor. Please see the specific Women's Building archives assignment details at the end of the document. The material is introduced in Unit 1 and continues in Unit 3.*

Course Description:

This class focuses on the representation of gender in art and visual culture, inclusive of non-binary and transgender visibility and representation. We will look at the work of artists and activists in public spaces such as museums and galleries, protests, social media, and some popular media (graphic novels, TV, film) as well as more private spaces and hidden or unseen images and histories in homes, archives, and radical and/or alternative spaces. Readings will address foundational texts in gender visibility, performance, identity and representation as well as theoretical studies on the complexities and nuances of visibility.

All Course Materials (readings, links, videos, etc) will be posted here and/or on Moodle

Schedule overview

Weeks 1-4 // Unit 1

Key Texts, Foundations, and resources in Gender Studies & representation

Weeks 5-8 // Unit 2

Case studies in contemporary art and visual culture

Spring Break

Weeks 9- // Unit 3

The Complexities of Visibility: Archives, Domestic Spaces, and Media

Week 14-15 // Final work

Unit 1

Key Texts, Foundations, and resources

Week 1

Introduction to the class and each other

Week 2

What is gender? What is gender studies? How is gender represented in art & visual culture?

Overviews of terms and definitions, read for Tuesday's class and Discussion #1

Thursday: Discussion #1 is due for in-class discussion + artists overview, part 1

Week 3

For Tuesday:

Read Linda Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (1971) *Artforum* magazine, reposted [here](#)

Tuesday in class: Watch excerpt from *Alice Neel, People Come First* virtual opening (2021, 27 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejGERwLV2Kg>

In-class overview of further resources:

- Hammer Museum (LA) online extended exhibitions, inc [Radical Women: Latin American Art 1960-85](#) (2017)
- Barbican Gallery, London, "Masculinities"
- MoMA, New York, [Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction](#) (2017)
- Helen Molesworth's podcast, [Death of an Artist](#), on Ana Mendieta (2022)

- "[Alice Neel and Gay Liberation](#)" from *People Come First* at the Met (video)

For Thursday:

read key excerpts from [Judith Butler's 1990 Gender Trouble](#), "'Women' As the Subject of Feminism" (page 3-13) and "From Interiority to Gender Performatives" (page 171-180) for in-class discussion. *Pdf also available.*

Discussion #2 due

Week 4

For Tuesday:

For in-class Discussion, read [excerpts from Halberstam. Introduction to Female Masculinities](#) (Duke University Press, 1998; pdf also available), pages 1-43 with notes on Moodle to direct your closest attention. Discussion #3 due before class.

We will view excerpt of "[Masculinities](#)" curatorial walk-through in class.

Optional: Interview, "[Jack Halberstam on Wildness, Anarchy, and Growing Up Punk](#)" *Public Books* (March 26, 2019)

Thursday: in-class overview of artists/topics for midterm presentation choices

Unit 2

Case studies in contemporary art and visual culture

Week 5

Tuesday: Individual meetings, in-class time and outside class via zoom or in my office

Thursday: *The Female Gaze Today: Carmen Winant, Petra Collins, Legacy Russell*

Reading:

- Carmen Winant, "[Our Bodies. Online](#)" *Aperture* (January 5, 2017)
- Petra Collins, "[Why Instagram Censored My Body](#)" *Huffington Post* (October 17, 2013)
- Legacy Russell, excerpts from *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2020) – pdf on Moodle

Optional: Lizzie Whitticombe, "[The Female Gaze of Petra Collins](#)" *The New Yorker* (October 6, 2016)

Week 6

Tuesday: Presentation choices due – whether through conversation or email to me

Legacies of "Craft": from Judy Chicago to Erin Riley, Rose B. Simpson, Diedrick Brackens and April Bey – before class please look through the artist's social media profiles and personal/artist websites to familiarize yourself with their work.

Thursday:

Artist focus: Alison Bechdel, Discussion #4 due

Reading:

- Judith Thurman, "[Drawn from Life: The World of Alison Bechdel](#)" (*The New Yorker*, April 16, 2012)
- Excerpts from Alison Bechdel, [Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic](#) (2006)
- Sam McBean, "Seeing in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*" *Camera Obscura* 84 (2013), 103-123 – pdf (on Moodle)

Week 7

Orlando... in print, on the screen, in art today

Tuesday: in class screening of *Orlando*, directed by Sally Potter (1992), adapted from Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel

Read: [Interview with Sally Potter](#) (2022)

Thursday: Discussion of film + contemporary interpretations, [Mickalene Thomas](#) overview and [work on Orlando](#)

Week 8

In-class presentations (individual), see guidelines on Moodle

SPRING BREAK

Unit 3

The Complexities of Visibility: Archives, Domestic Spaces, and Media

Week 9 ** see assignment for Weeks 9-11 below**

Archival traces / Gender in the archives, part I

- José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts" *Women & Performance* 8:2 (1996), 5-16 – pdf on Moodle

Reflection/discussion prompt due

Online archives project, featuring the Los Angeles Women's Building

Week 10 // Getty field trip

Archival traces / Gender in the archives, part II

Tuesday: Online archives project, featuring the Los Angeles Women's Building

Thursday: project work continues

Saturday: Field trip to Getty Research Institute to view "Barbara T. Smith: The Way To Be" and consider archival material in exhibitions

Week 11

Gender, archives, publics

In-class Project Presentations

Week 12

Media Visibility

Materials for Tuesday review

- Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, [research page](#)
- *This Changes Everything* (2018), Documentary on gender representation and history of discrimination on screen
- optional: "[Comic Books are Still Made By Men, For Men, and About Men](#)" by Walt Hickey, *Five Thirty Eight* (October 13, 2014)

Thursday: In-class viewing of *Disclosure*, directed by Sam Feder (2020), documentary on transgender representation on screen

Unit 4: Final work

Week 13

Individual meetings with professor and individual research time

Reflection 2 discussion prompt due by end of week – posted on Moodle

Week 14

Research roundtable discussion in class, class participants will each share up to three slides in class from your work and research addressing key questions: *why this topic? What does it mean to you? What are you connecting it to from the course? What images are most significant to you?* Assignment posted on Moodle

Final papers due

Grading

- Weekly writing/reflection prompts & discussion questions — 40% (8-10 over course of semester, lowest grade will be dropped)
- Presentation 1 — 10%
- Online archives project assignment – 10%
- Research roundtable discussion, week 14 - 10%
- Final Paper — 15%
- Participation — 15%

Writing prompts and discussion questions will all be posted on Moodle to organize and prompt your thoughts for in-class discussions. They are always due **before** the class meeting time unless otherwise noted.

Paper and presentation assignments will be posted separately and will engage in more depth with specific artists, artworks, and issues.

A note on Participation: This class values meaningful dialogue and conversation around topics that may sometimes be challenging and/or sensitive. Respect for learning and for our different backgrounds and experiences are essential. If you are a person who finds it easy to speak up and tends to do so often, push yourself to make room for others to lead the conversation by stepping back. Likewise, if you are a person who finds it more challenging to contribute to class conversation, let's find strategies for sharing your voice.

• Grading policy

A = Excellent (90-100%) Student completes all course requirements and performs at an outstanding level

B = Good (80-89%) Student completes all course requirements and performs at an above-average level

C = Satisfactory (70-79%) Student completes all course requirements
D = Poor (60-69%) Student completes all course requirements but performs at a below-average level
F = Failure (below 60%) Student does not complete all course requirements, completes them inadequately, or both.

100-94 = A
93-90 = A-
89 - 87 = B+
86 - 84 = B
83 - 80 = B-
79 - 77 = C+
76 - 74 = C
73 - 70 = C-
69 - 60 = D
59 - 0 = F

Assignments/Late work

- In general, late assignments are graded down by 5 points per day late, weekends included (ie: 85 becomes 80 after one day, 75 after two days). Assignments completed more than two weeks past the due date will receive between 0 and 50% credit. It is ALWAYS BETTER to get some points than to get no points. Please talk with me if you have missing assignments.

Framework and Assignments for Los Angeles Women's Building archives project

Unit 1 (intro) and Unit 3 (Weeks 9-11)

Note:

The course meets in-person, twice a week, with about 15 students, and no pre-requisites; I would expect a handful of art majors but mostly students fulfilling the course for the gender studies minor or lib ed credit in cultural studies and/or humanities.

- Context for assignment: In **Unit 1**, students learn about the Women's Building in the context of Los Angeles art institutions, generally, but more specifically within the

context of the era's feminism in art history and practice. The framing questions are introduced during class discussion and elaborated in the weekly written prompts.

These framing questions include prompts like:

How is history written? When? How? By whom?

Have you ever thought about archives?

Visited or used an archive?

What do you think might be in an artist's or art-related archive?

The goal is to begin to introduce students to historiographic questions around gender, exhibitions, and archives in a low-stakes way.

In **Unit 3** we return directly to these questions with the specific case study of the Los Angeles Women's Building.

The learning goal for this assignment is twofold: 1) to become familiar with the type and range of materials and information they might encounter in an archive; 2) to answer the question: what values does the Women's Building demonstrate/communicate (either to the artists or to the public) through its exhibition program?

Further in class discussion prompts in Unit 3 include:

What do you think might be in an artist's or art-related archive?

How might it have gotten there?

Who would take care of it?

Who would use it, and why?

What might be some differences between reading an article or book about an artist, or art-related topic, and looking at an archive of that artist or topic?

And, I introduce some basic vocabulary, such as:

- **archive**: a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people. These are primary sources.

• **ephemera**: items of collectible memorabilia, typically written or printed ones, that were originally expected to have only short-term usefulness or popularity.
For example: theater programs, posters for events, ticket stubs, political leaflets, and bumper stickers. Also primary sources.

• **finding aid**: a document written by archivists to describe an archival collection. Used as a tool to find information in a specific record group or collection of archival materials

I will note that I can expect all of this to be brand new to the students.

We then turn to the online Women's Building records in Archives of American Art. After an overview, we focus on this material:

Woman's Building records, 1970-1992

Series 3: Gallery Programs, 1973-1991

- **3.2: Exhibitions, 1974-1991**
- **3.3: Performance Art, 1977-1990**

This is the in-class workshop prompt:

What values did the Women's Building express through its public exhibition program? (and how do you know this from the archive?)

We'll do this in steps. Today's workshop includes the first steps....

Step one: spend some time in the Gallery Programs tab, in the sections "Exhibitions" and "Performance Art". At this point, you are looking for topics and materials that pique your interest.

Step two: share your findings with a small group. Show/describe something of interest to you, focusing on fact finding and describing. *Consider: what kind of material is in the folder, materially speaking? What kind of information does it offer about/around the exhibition?*

Step three: *begin to brainstorm questions with each other. What do you have questions about in the archival material? What is unclear, or incomplete? What would you like to know more about?*

In the next class meeting...

We will begin to collectively answer the question:

*What values did the Women's Building express through its public exhibition program?
(and how do you know this from the archive?)*

Specifically, everyone will choose a different exhibition to share onto a class google slide set with your choice of archival material from a specific exhibition, and key points in the text.

Your slide, which you'll begin in class in conversation with fellow students, will answer the prompt with text and images from the archive and from your own analysis.

This prompt is completed outside of class, and we return one more time for in-class presentations of slides and a final discussion of the relationship of exhibitions, archives, and value.