

Arth 314 • Contemporary Art (WID)
(an upper level writing-intensive course for art history and studio art majors
+ advanced non-majors who meet the prerequisite)

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Course description: This course addresses a period of artistic production from the 1970s to the present. It showcases key artists and works of art within a broad historical framework, highlighting major issues and the place of art in important cultural debates. Some of the themes featured in the course include the role of art as an agent of activism and social change; the ways in which art challenges and engages issues of race, gender and sexual identity, sometimes all at once; the global nature of contemporary art; the role of performance and other newer media in art today; and the place of art within galleries, museums and other art-world institutions. Assigned readings include a variety of art historical analyses; artist interviews and writings, especially from the Archives of American Art; essays by art critics and other writers with backgrounds in such areas as queer theory, postcolonial studies and critical race theory.

Students will learn to: -identify major artists, works of art and themes from the past fifty years
-think critically about art from a variety of perspectives and interpret it within a broad social, historical context, particularly with an understanding of how art engages social change
-write about contemporary art using language, contexts and formats specific to the field
-navigate and evaluate relevant print and web-based resources
-analyze and research primary source documents from the Archives of American Art

Readings: Readings are posted on Moodle and should be prepared in advance of the class for which they have been assigned. This means reading closely and carefully and making detailed markings in the text. Students should come to class each day prepared with questions and observations about what you read. Questions to consider as you read: What surprised you? What ideas did you find most engaging? Did what you read remind you of a previous topic or discussion from class? Where did you find yourself most in agreement with the author? The least? You may print out the readings or bring them to class on an electronic device but please have them available with you each class. Note that ten percent of your grade for the course depends upon your participation in class.

Course schedule: Please note the schedule is subject to change with advance notice.

Day 1: Course introduction: What is contemporary art? Introduce Archives of American Art.

Part 1: Art activism in the Civil Rights era

Day 2: Read Lucy Lippard, "Hot from Her Soul: Faith's Ringgold's Art Activism" (from *Faith Ringgold: American People*) + Gregory Sholette excerpt (pages 42-46) from "Escaping the Long Greenbergian Shadow" (pages 42-46) + students submit a response paper on a single file of Archives of American Art responses to "What is Feminist Art?" (from Series 5: Artist's Works of Art in Woman's Building papers) [See Assignment A below]

Day 3: Vietnam War. Read Thomas Crow, "Bearing Witness in American Art of the Vietnam War" (from *Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War*).

Day 4: Maya Lin, *Vietnam Memorial*. Read Marita Sturken, “The Wall and the Screen Memory: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (from *Tangled Memories*).

Day 5: Woman’s Building – concept, criticism, analysis. Read Sondra Hale, “Power and Space: Feminist Culture and the Los Angeles Woman’s Building, A Context” (from *Site to Vision: The Woman’s Building in Contemporary Culture*). In class demonstration on navigating exhibitions in the Woman’s Building Gallery Programs. Students assigned a specific exhibition to research. [See Assignment B below]

Day 6: Woman’s Building – exhibitions. Students submit worksheet on their assigned exhibition on Moodle and share their findings with peers during class. [See Assignment B below]

Part 2: Rethinking Gender, Sexuality, Race

Day 7: Introduce virtual exhibition assignment. Research demonstration on finding additional Archives of American Art sources and using Dickinson’s Library and databases to research secondary sources. [See Assignment C below] Start discussion of troubling gender: Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer. Read Susan Best, “From Representation to Affect: Beyond Postmodern Identity Politics in Feminist Art” (from *A Companion to Feminist Art*).

Day 8: Wrap up material from Day 7. Queer artists and AIDS – Serrano and Mapplethorpe. Read Linda Weintraub “Andres Serrano” (from *Art on the Edge and Over*) and Kobena Mercer, “Skin Head Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary” (from *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*).

Day 9: Queer artists and AIDS, cont’d. Read David Wojnarowicz, “Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell” (from *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*) + David Roman, “Undetectable: the presence of HIV in contemporary American art” (from *Art / AIDS / America*)

Day 10: Jean-Michel Basquiat. Read Jordana Saggese, “‘The Black Picasso’: Jean-Michel Basquiat and Questions of Race” (from *Reading Basquiat: Exploring Ambivalence*). Annotated Bibliography for virtual exhibition press release due. [See Assignment C below]

Day 11: Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum*. Read Huey Copeland, “Fred Wilson and the Rhetoric of Redress” (from *Bound to Appear*).

Day 12: Kara Walker. Read Vivien Green Fryd, “Kara Walker: Creating a Third-Wave Anti-Rape and Anti-Incest Cycle in Silhouettes, Videos, and Sculpture Since 1994” (from *Against Our Will*).

Day 13: Guest lecturer Christine Phillipone to discuss artist Betsy Damon.

Day 14 : Take-home midterm exam due.

Part 3: Recent civic action, social protest

Day 15: Read Tom Finkelpearl, “Project Row Houses” (from *What We Made*) and excerpt from “Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution.” Watch excerpt on Moodle from George Lipsitz, “The Ferguson Conjunction: Why the Humanities Matter Now.”

Day 16: Read Martha Buskirk, "Social Relations" (from *Re-Envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon*) and Masha Gessen, "Nan Goldin Leads a Protest at the Guggenheim Against the Sackler Family" (from *The New Yorker*).

Day 17: Watch and discuss *The Art of Un-War* on Krzysztof Wodiczko's art (Kanopy, 62 minutes).

Day 18: Climate change. Read Gabriella Giannachi, "Representing, Performing and Mitigating Climate Change in Contemporary Art Practice" (from *Leonardo*).

Day 19: Black Lives Matter. Watch Arthur Jafa, "Love is the Message, the Message is Death." Read Tina Campt, "The Visual Frequency of Black Life" (from *A Black Gaze*). Paper on Nan Goldin interview due. **[See Assignment D below]**

* Field trip to NYC to visit contemporary art museums and galleries.

Part 4: The Global Turn

Day 20: Shirin Neshat. Read Eleanor Heartney, "Shirin Neshat: Living Between Cultures" (from *After the Revolution*). View and discuss *Expressing the Inexpressible: Shirin Neshat* (Films on Demand) in class.

Day 21: Post-Cultural Revolution Chinese art – Ai Weiwei. Read Wendy Teo, "The Elephant in the Church: Ai Weiwei, the media circus and the global canon" (from *Re-envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon*). Draft of press release with checklist for virtual exhibition due. **[See Assignment C below]**

Day 22: 'Post-passport' Chinese artists. Read Barbara Pollack, "Anyone Can Be Chinese" – Xu Zen (from *Brand New Art from China* – Chapter 2, available as an electronic resource in library under book title).

Day 23: African Art. Read Elizabeth Harney, "El Anatsui's Abstractions: Transformations, analogies and the new global" (from *Re-envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon*) and Lilian Tone, "William Kentridge's Present Continuous" (from *William Kentridge Fortuna*).

Day 24: African Art, cont'd--Zanele Muholi. Read Karen von Veh, "Feminism as Activism in Contemporary South African Art" (from *A Companion to Feminist Art*).

Part 5: Power, money and the contemporary art market

Day 25: Discuss *The Price of Everything* documentary (watch and submit Moodle response in advance of class).

Day 26: Read Derrick Chong, "The Emergence of Powerhouse Dealers in Contemporary Art" (from *Globalization and Contemporary Art*) and John Zarobell, "The Art Fair: Cultural Tourism in a Pop-Up Free-Trade Zone" (from *Art and the Global Economy*). Virtual exhibition with press release due. **[See Assignment C below]**

Day 27: Student research presentations on virtual exhibition.

Day 28: Finish student research presentations. Distribute final take-home exam.

Archives of American Art related assignments:

Assignment A – Day 2: As a way of introducing feminist art into the topic of late 60s/ early 70s art activism, students will review a single file of responses to the question, “What is Feminist Art?” (Woman’s Building, Series 5, Artist’s Works of Art) and submit a ½-1 single-spaced page response paper summarizing what they learned about feminist art after looking through (at least) the first 25 frames of the file they have been assigned. What do the artists represented in your file understand feminist art to mean? How did reading this response add to your understanding of what feminist art is? Provide at least two specific examples from what you read. Responses must be posted on Moodle before the start of class and students should be prepared to discuss their findings with peers during class.

Responses to “What is Feminist Art?”

Box 24, folder 31 – student 1
Box 24, folder 32 – student 2
Box 24, folder 33 – student 3
Box 24, folder 34 – student 4
Box 24, folder 35 – student 5
Box 25, folder 1 – student 6
Box 25, folder 2 – student 7
Box 25, folder 3 – student 8
Box 25, folder 4 – student 9
Box 25, folder 5 – student 10
Box 25, folder 6 – student 11
Box 25, folder 7 – student 12
Box 25, folder 8 – student 13
Box 25, folder 9 – student 14

Assignment B – Day 5: Students will be assigned a specific artist (who is represented by a solo show or is part of a group show) from the Woman’s Building Gallery Programs (Series 3.2 Exhibitions). Following an in-class demonstration using one of the exhibition files not included in the assignment, students will be asked to fill out a worksheet in response to a series of questions, including:

-What kinds of documents did you find in your assigned file (Artist’s resume? A press release? Exhibition flyer? Exhibition review? Correspondence with the Woman’s Building organizers? Etc.)?
-What do you think were the main goals of the exhibition you analyzed?
-How do these goals fit with the overall agenda of the Woman’s Building as discussed previously in class?
The worksheet will be due on Moodle before the start of class, and students will share their findings during class.

Artists (and relevant exhibition if a group show):

Suzanne Lacy (Ageless) – student 1
Faith Ringgold (Artist as Shaman) – student 2
Rachel Rosenthal (Artist as Shaman) – student 3
Mary Beth Edelson (Artist as Shaman) – student 4
Judith Baca (Artist as Shaman) – student 5
Betsy Damon (Artists Contributing to the Solution) – student 6
Helen and Newton Harrison (Artists Contributing to the Solution) – student 7
Harmony Hammond (Billboard Project) – student 8

Cheri Gaulke (The Bus Poster Project) – student 9
Carolee Schneeman (Gentleman’s Choice) – student 10
Barbara Kruger – student 11
Yayoi Kusami – student 12
Bety Saar – student 13
Ruth Weisberg (Women’s Caucas Show) – student 14

Assignment C – Day 7 (and beyond): Continuing with the same exhibition students worked on above, the next step is for each student to begin planning a (virtual) exhibition of the same artist’s work focused on the artist’s development *since* her exhibition at the Woman’s Building. Research will begin with the Archives of American Art. Are there other collections in which this artist appears? Most of the student’s research will focus on using secondary scholarly sources, including monographs, journal articles, and exhibition catalogues. Class time during Day 7 will be used to demonstrate how to search for additional relevant Archives of American Art sources and how to use Dickinson’s library collection and databases to research secondary sources. Students will submit an Annotated Bibliography on Day 10 with 6-8 secondary sources on their artist. They will get a green light to continue their research once their bibliography includes a sufficient variety and quality of sources to successfully complete the assignment.

The goal is to produce a 10-12 work virtual exhibition about the artist with a 3-4 page press release that includes a focused thesis statement. Students can decide how to organize and thematize their exhibition, but it must in some way address: 1) the ways in which the artist’s work (subject matter, medium, style, etc) has or has not changed since her Woman’s Building exhibition and 2) how the work continues to connect (if it does) with civil rights and social activism. They will have a range of options for presenting their exhibition, whether through Powerpoint or a 3D design software [I need to work with my IT department on fleshing out these options].

Drafts of the press release with a checklist of works to be included will be due on Day 21. Students will meet individually with the professor to go over written comments on the draft. The final draft of the exhibition with a virtual exhibition will be due on Day 26. Students will share their exhibitions with the class the last two days of the semester.

(By building their own exhibition, students will also gain experience with this assignment that informs a non-Archives related final paper at the end of the semester when they write an exhibition review of the Senior Studio show at Dickinson.)

Assignment D – Day 19: As part of a unit on recent art activism, which includes a discussion of Nan Goldin’s P.A.I.N. protests at the Met and Guggenheim, students will listen to the 2017 AAA Oral History interview with Goldin and have access to the transcript. In a 2-3 page paper, due on Day 19, they will respond to the following:

- How does the background and context provided by the interview inform your understanding of Goldin’s P.A.I.N. project?
- How does it change how you understand Goldin’s art in relationship to social activism?
- The 2017 interview with Goldin is part of an Archives of American Art series on Visual Arts and the AIDS epidemic. How does her involvement with this epidemic reflect back on our earlier discussions of art and AIDS?
- To what extent do you understand Goldin as a feminist artist after listening to this interview?
- How did listening to the artist’ voice, using her own words, contribute to your understanding of Goldin and her career (as opposed to reading a secondary account of her career written by someone else or even relying solely on a written transcript of the interview instead of hearing her speak)?

-What limitations do you see with this source if it were to be used to do research on Goldin? Is the artist's perspective biased or limited in any way?

Other assignments:

Midterm and final take-home exams (each 6-8 pages of writing) are essay-based and will be distributed 10 days prior to the due date. Students will be asked to respond to one or two questions that synthesize readings, slides, and discussion around a particular theme. They can use any materials from the class in preparing their answers. One of the questions on the final exam will ask students to write a critical analysis of Dickinson's Studio Senior exhibition.

Four short response papers (in addition to the response paper required on "What is Feminist Art" from Day 2). These are critical responses to assigned class readings. Students can choose which readings to write on as long as they are submitted by the start of class on Moodle the day the reading is scheduled for discussion. Response papers cannot be accepted for a reading once it has been discussed in class. At least two of the four response papers should be completed in the first half of the semester. In your ½-1 page single-spaced response, reflect on what you learned from the reading. Some questions to consider include:

- What surprised you about what you learned?
- Did you see any connections to previous class discussions?
- What aspects of the reading did you find most engaging?
- Where did you find yourself most in agreement with the author? The least?

The response papers will be graded on a check plus, check, check minus basis:

✓+ **(100)** = you have exceeded the expectations of the assignment with a degree of clarity, precision and detail

✓ **(90)** = you have satisfactorily completed the assignment

✓- **(80)** = you have inadequately fulfilled the assignment with an answer that is vague, unclear or incorrect

How the parts add up:

- take-home midterm and final exams – 40% (20% each)
- draft of virtual exhibition press release with checklist – 5%
- virtual exhibition – 3-4 page press release with title, thesis, 10-12 images, bibliography, and notes – 23%
- Nan Goldin interview analysis – 10%
- 5 one-page response papers (one on "What is Feminist Art," the other 4 on any reading), best of 4 count – 12%
- participation and miscellaneous homework assignments – 10%

Final grades are computed based on the percentages above and using a standard grading scale:

A = 93-100

A- = 90-92

B+ = 87-89

B = 83-86

B- = 80-82

C+ = 77-79

C = 73-76

C- = 70-72
D+ = 67-69
D = 63-66
D- = 60-62
F = Below 60

Grading Rubric for Virtual Exhibition + Press Release	
Grade	Characteristics
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Press release is written in a lively, engaging manner pitched at an educated public audience -conveys a depth of knowledge of the artist's life and work -provides a thesis that clearly argues why this particular exhibition is significant -effectively addresses how the artist's work has changed since her exhibition at the Woman's Art Building, and how it does/does not continue to engage themes of social activism -clearly organized with a progression of thought from one paragraph to another so that it flows smoothly and is easy to follow -free from grammar, punctuation, spelling, usage and formatting errors -makes use of at least 6-8 secondary sources that are thoughtfully utilized and synthesized into a well-integrated essay -Notes and Bibliography are accurately cited using Chicago Manual of Style format -Virtual exhibition represents a well-chosen selection of 10-12 works showcasing the range and depth of the artist's work -Individual slides are correctly and completely labeled with the details of each work -Quality of the works reproduced is of the highest quality possible
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Press release is well-written, but not as well pitched to its target audience as above -conveys a solid understanding of the artist's life and work -provides a thesis that argues why this particular exhibition is significant -addresses how the artist's work has changed since her exhibition at the Woman's Art Building, and how it does/does not continue to engage themes of social activism -organized with a progression of thought from one paragraph to another -minimal grammar, punctuation, spelling, usage and formatting errors -makes use of at least 6-8 secondary sources but perhaps not as well integrated as above -Notes and Bibliography cited using Chicago Manual of Style format with minimal error -Virtual exhibition represents a selection of 10-12 works showcasing the range and depth of the artist's work -Individual slides are for the most part correctly and completely labeled with the details of each work -Quality of the works reproduced is high
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Press release lacks the necessary tone needed to engage intended audience -conveys a limited understanding of the artist's life and work -has a weak thesis, makes an ineffective case for the show -does not adequately addresses how the artist's work has changed since her exhibition at the Woman's Art Building, and how it does/does not continue to engage themes of social activism -lacks clear organization, hard to follow -significant grammar, punctuation, spelling, usage and formatting errors -lacks effective use of secondary sources and/or does not use an adequate number or range of sources -Significant citation errors in Notes and Bibliography -Virtual exhibition doesn't adequately represent the range and depth of the artist's work -Individual slides are incorrectly or incompletely labeled -Quality of the works reproduced may be low
D or F	Does not meet the basic expectations of the assignment as outlined above.