

Teaching with Primary Sources  
Samuel H. Kress Foundation Teaching Fellowship  
Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

### **Course Syllabus and Assignments**

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**Course Title:** ARTH 451W: American Art

**Course Type:** Upper division, majors and non-majors, no prerequisites, writing intensive.

### **Course Description:**

An investigation of the history of American art from the colonial period to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This course examines a range of media and critically analyzes the representation of race, gender, class, and power in the history of American art.

### **Course Format and Goals:**

This course combines lecture, discussion, and in-class project work. The textbook provides a survey of American art history. Each section of the textbook is paired with a scholarly article, often referenced in the book. The classes begin with lectures followed by student-led discussions of the assigned articles that consider the author's arguments and use of primary sources. Students write weekly responses or answer questions about those readings in preparation for discussion and to develop their analytical skills.

The final project for the course, a "visual biography" of an artist created using the collections of the Archives of American Art, is scaffolded through the semester. The details of this project follow the syllabus and course outline below. Through this project, students learn how to use the archives for research and gain insight into how histories of art are constructed. It allows students to focus considerable time on lesser-known artists who may not be included in survey books (in this case, I chose women artists) and fosters their creative and critical thinking skills.

### **Student Learning Objectives:**

- Gaining factual knowledge of artists and key artworks in the history of American art.
- Learning to analyze and critically evaluate arguments and different points of view in art history texts.
- Developing skills of visual analysis and writing.
- Recognizing different types of primary sources and methods of their interpretation.
- Learning how to find and use primary and secondary resources for a research presentation.

**Course Textbook(s):** Frances K. Pohl, *Framing America: A Social History of American Art*, 4th Edition, Vol. 1 & 2 (Thames & Hudson, 2017)

[An alternative is the open access online textbook Miller, Angela L.; Berlo, Janet Catherine; Wolf, Bryan J.; and Roberts, Jennifer L., "American Encounters: Art, History, and Cultural

Identity" (2018). *Books and Monographs*. 39.  
<https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/books/39>]

**Course Readings:** Readings listed on the syllabus are posted on Blackboard or available on reserve in the library. Many of the articles are anthologized in *Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings*, Mary Ann Calo, ed. (Routledge, 1997) and *Reading American Art*, Marianne Doezema and Elizabeth Milroy, eds. (Yale, 1998), on reserve at the library.

**Grading**

Components	Points
Weekly Assignments: Reading Questions/Responses and Library Worksheet (50 points each)	500
Group Discussion Leading: Groups will present the assigned article readings to the class, providing summary of the author’s argument, visual materials, and leading/monitoring discussion. Discussion should include consideration of how the authors use primary sources.	100
Archives of American Art Research Topic: Presentation (5 min. See assignment description.)	100
Research Bibliography: Annotated bibliography of at least 5 sources	50
Class Participation (attendance, participation in class discussions, contribution to an open exchange of ideas and respectful learning environment)	50
Final Research Presentation (10 min. See assignment description.)	200
Total	1000

**Scale**

A	93-100%	C	73-76%
A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%
B	83-86%	D	60-66%
B-	80-82%	F	59%
C+	77-79%		

## Weekly Schedule

Week	Date/Time Due	Topics and Assignments
1		Introduction to American Art History and Current Issues in the Field
2		<b>Topic:</b> Art of Mission and Colonization in America Introduction to Archives of American Art <b>Reading:</b> “Art and Conquest” in <i>Framing America</i>
3		<b>Topic:</b> Introduction to the Final Project Archives of American Art: Oral Histories, Photographs, Archives <b>Readings:</b> 1. Oral history interview with Wendy Red Star, 2021, June 10-11, Archives of American Art (responses to questions due)
4		<b>Topic:</b> Neoclassical Style, the Museum, the Academy, and American History Painting <b>Readings:</b> “Defining America” in <i>Framing America</i> 2. Paul Staiti, “Character and Class: The Portraits of John Singleton Copley” in <i>Reading American Art</i> (response due)
5		<b>Topics:</b> Library Instruction Archives of American Art: Introduction to Archives of American Art Collections – Women (digitized collections) (Worksheet in class)
6		<b>Topics:</b> Representations of the American Landscapes and Native Peoples <b>Readings:</b> “Nature and Nation” in <i>Framing America</i> 3. Kathryn S. Hight, “‘Doomed to Perish’: George Catlin’s Depictions of the Mandan” in <i>Reading American Art</i> (response due)
7	Mar 7	<b>Topics:</b> The Civil War: Representations of Slavery, Pictures of War <b>Readings:</b> “A Nation at War” in <i>Framing America</i> 4. Alan Trachtenberg, “Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs” in <i>Critical Issues in American Art</i> (response due) 5. Kirsten P. Buick, “The Ideal Works of Edmonia Lewis: Invoking and Inverting Autobiography” in <i>Reading American Art</i> (response due)
8		<b>Assignment: Research topic selection</b> Presented with analysis of a photograph of the artist
9		<b>Topics:</b> Gender Ideals in 19 <sup>th</sup> Century America <b>Reading:</b>

Week	Date/Time Due	Topics and Assignments
		<p>“Art, Labor, and The Gilded Age” in <i>Framing America</i>          6. Griselda Pollock, “Mary Cassatt: Painter of Women and Children” in <i>Reading American Art</i> (response due)</p>
10		<p><b>Topics:</b>          Pictures of American Life: The Ashcan School  <b>Reading:</b>          The Machine, the Primitive, and the Modern          7. Robert Haywood, “George Bellows’s Stag at Sharkey’s” in <i>Critical Issues in American Art</i> (response due)  <b>Check in on research project status</b></p>
11		<p><b>Topics:</b>          What Was American Modernism?  <b>Readings:</b>          8. Anne Monahan, Introduction to <i>Horace Pippin, American Modern</i> (response due)          9. Anna C. Chave, “O’Keeffe and the Masculine Gaze” in <i>Reading American Art</i> (response due)</p>
12		<p><b>Topics:</b>          Realism and Abstraction: Picturing Urban and Rural America          Spirituality in American Art  <b>Reading:</b>          Art for the People, Art against Fascism in <i>Framing America</i>          10. Robert Cozzolino, “Introduction: America is Haunted,” in <i>Supernatural America</i> (response due)</p>
13		<b>Student presentations of Archives of American Art research</b>
14		<b>Student presentations of Archives of American Art research</b>
15		<b>Student presentations of Archives of American Art research</b>

## **Final Project: Visual Biography – Four Parts**

This project is designed to replace the traditional art history research paper. The final project for this course is a visual presentation of an artist's biography using materials found in their papers at the Archives of American Art. Research of secondary sources is required to contextualize and interpret the archival materials.

### **The learning goals of this assignment are:**

- Students will be able to navigate the Archives of American Art (AAA) website.
- Students will be able to recognize different types of documents and objects in the archives and understand how they might be used for research.
- Students will be able to find sources (published and online) outside of the archive to help contextualize and interpret the archive.
- Students will be able to discern and select archival documents that can be used to support a narrative biography of an artist's life and professional career.
- Students will gain deeper understanding of how history is constructed through archival materials and how they can contribute to expanding and diversifying the history of American art. [I imagine choosing a different theme each time: women artists, California artists, Black American artists, etc.]

### **1. Introduction to the Project**

A session early in the semester introduces students to the Archives of American Art website and collections in a number of ways.

First, their homework assignment is to read an oral history interview with Wendy Red Star in the Archives of American Art and respond on a worksheet. [see attached]

Second, students lead an in-class discussion of the interview and responses to these questions. This should prompt discussion about oral histories as a type of archival document, what kinds of information artist interviews can provide, and how they might be used as evidence and interpreted.

Third, I provide a demonstration on how to navigate through the collection on the Archives of American Art website. This includes walking them through the finding aid, the structure of the archive, and categorization of different types of materials. We discuss how different types of materials might be understood and interpreted as evidence in a research project.

After the demonstration, we review a list of the roughly 30 digitized collections from women artists with the class, each student selected an artist based on the student's interests (time period, medium, etc.). The students are then asked to spend time exploring their chosen collection and report back on their initial findings and impressions. We have discussions about what is and is not in the archive and how to proceed with their research.

## **2. Library Workshop Day (computer lab)**

During this session the class receives library instruction on finding resources on art and art history, and this requires use a computer lab. The students' in-class assignment is to identify published sources for their research project. A worksheet is provided to record the secondary sources found and located during this session. [See attached.] There is also space to note what types of materials they have found exploring their artist's papers. [I work with each student during the class, reviewing their progress and helping them find sources. This is also an opportunity to discuss what the students have and have not found in the archives. Every collection is different, and so the students will need mentorship on how use the available material and supplement it with outside resources.]

## **3. Informal Presentation of Research Topic and Annotated Bibliography**

During this class, students give an informal (no more than 3-5 min) presentation on their chosen artist using one photograph from their archives and one image of the artist's work to show the class. They should provide brief introductions to the artists and short analysis of the photograph and artwork. An annotated bibliography of at least 5 published sources is due.

## **4. Final Research Presentations (10 min.):**

### **Instructions to students:**

The final presentation will be a visual biography of your artist that focuses on important aspects of their career and contributions to their fields. Include questions for future research at the conclusion of your presentation.

### **Format:**

- Your presentation should include about 10 slides with carefully chosen images of documents, photos, and other material from the artist's papers in the Archives of American Art.
- The slides should be labeled and annotated.
- You must include images of at least four different types of materials from the archive.
- You may include images from outside the archive if necessary.
- The presentation should be no longer than 10 minutes.
- You may prerecord the presentation to play in class or give the presentation live in class.

**Content:** You can be creative with your presentation. It should include these elements, illustrated with items from the archives, if possible.

- A timeline of the artist's life
- Information about their education
- Career highlights and essential artworks framed with contextual information from the archives and secondary sources
- Your thoughts on the artist's contribution and legacy

## Questions for “Oral history interview with Wendy Red Star, 2021 June 10-11”

### Instructions:

- Type your answers to the following questions.
- Please do not answer *only* with quotes from the reading. You may use quotations, but those quotations should be explained in your own words.
- Feel free to include additional notes for discussion.

Based on your reading of the transcript of this interview:

1. What are some of the childhood memories and experiences that relate to the artwork Wendy Red Star later made?
2. How did the artist’s educational experiences shape the progress of her work and/or career?
3. How would you describe the importance of nature and animals to her work?
4. What are three things you learned from this interview that you might help you to understand and interpret the series *Four Seasons* (2006)?
5. Was there something in this oral history that surprised you or that you related to personally?

Library Worksheet for Archives of American Art Project

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Artist/Collection Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Find 5 published sources for your research on this artist's biography and artwork.

Citation: Location (shelves, Jstor, ILL):

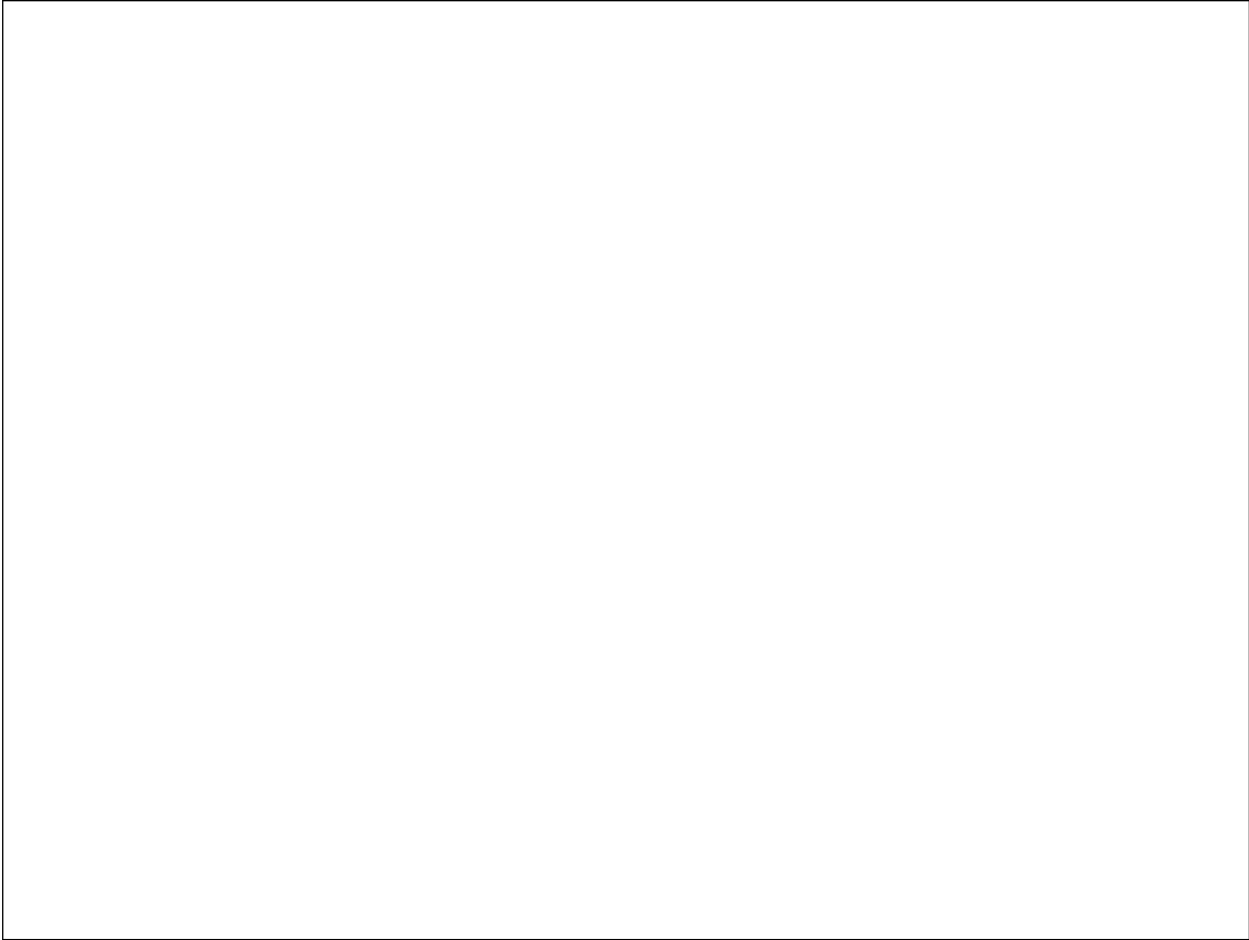
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Other sources such as websites that you would like to use:


List the types of documents you have found in your collection at the Archives of American Art:

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Visual Biography - Grading Rubric

Criteria	Developing (C range)	Accomplished (B range)	Exemplary (A range)
Biography	Identifies artist with minimal information.	Provides a clear narrative of the artist's life and career	Demonstrates deep knowledge of the artist's life and career
Evidence/Analysis	Demonstrates understanding of different types of documents in the archives and an understanding of the artist's timeline.	Uses at least four different types of primary sources to construct a visual presentation of the artist's life through documents in the archives.	Synthesizes analysis of more than four different types of primary sources into construct an artist's biography using documents in the archives. Identifies compelling questions for future research.
Organization/Format	Visual presentation includes interesting items from the archive and is organized.	Visual presentation is well organized, includes interesting and relevant items from the archive, and follows the arch of the oral presentation. Slides are labeled correctly.	Visual presentation is carefully organized to support the oral presentation, includes interesting and relevant items from the archive, and follows all directions. Slides are labeled correctly and annotated.