“Art on the Edge”

The headline of a recent article in the New York Times asked “Is Donald Trump, Wall-Builder-in-Chief, a Conceptual Artist?” Although the answer clearly seems to be “No,” the NYT was not the first to take seriously the idea that the US-Mexico border wall might be considered some kind of art: land art, perhaps, or Minimalist sculpture. The proposed wall (and its already extant segments) has also inspired a number of responses from contemporary artists; this is likewise true of precedents such as the Berlin Wall and the Israeli-Palestinian barrier.

In a time when “transnational art” and “the global contemporary” have become popular buzzwords in the art world, this class looks at the diverse ways that artists and others have thought about borders and boundaries, both physical and imagined. How are borders visualized and made material? How do they help to shape our understandings of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and nationality? Conversely, how might they be crossed—through travel and tourism, migration and diaspora, exile and deportation? Looking at both historical and contemporary examples, we will examine subjects as diverse as maps, travel books, landscape painting, surveillance culture, and the work of artists like Banksy and Ai Wei Wei.