

Culture Wars: Art and Social Conflict in the Modern World

AHIS 255g, GE-A, T/Th 9:30am-10:50am SOS B2

Professor:

Suzanne Hudson / email: sphudson@usc.edu / Office: THH 338 / Office hours, Thursday 12-1:00pm and by appt.

TAs:

William J. Simmons, wjsimmon@usc.edu / Office Hours, Tuesday, 11:30am-1:30pm, room TBD

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Course description

This course examines social conflict and aesthetic controversies in the U.S., focusing largely on the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with an eye to contemporary debates, which are still ongoing. Instead of exhaustively “covering” this period, we will consider flashpoints of cultural production that gave visual form to social tensions and/or sparked aesthetic or political debates, often in the context of public exhibitions. Moving roughly chronologically, we will consider a broad range of material, including painting, sculpture, photography, new media, and installations, as well as more ephemeral forms of aesthetic and social engagement. Each case study we consider will alter our conceptions of what a socially engaged art looks like—in some cases it will be figurative, in other cases abstract; in certain cases, it will be activist in tone, in others, it will appear apolitical; it might, depending on the case, reinforce or attempt to dismantle the status quo. We will study each of these variations, developing a complex understanding of art’s politics and relationship to conflict and liberation politics.

Learning objectives

1. Analysis: Increase the student’s ability to analyze creative endeavors, including describing them with appropriate vocabulary, examining their formal elements, and engaging in research to understand their contexts.
2. Making: Expand the student’s knowledge about the creative process, as exemplified by specific works studied.
3. Connectivity: Deepen the student’s appreciation of the connections between creative endeavors and the concurrent political, religious, and social conditions; show how these endeavors fulfill cultural functions or fill cultural needs.
4. Context: Enrich the student’s discernment of creative production by increasing knowledge of its theoretical, historical, and aesthetic bases.
5. Engagement: Increase the student’s understanding of becoming a lifelong supporter or participant in the arts by exposure to creative production in the contemporary environment. They will learn about art’s capacity to engage with, animate, and activate social change.

In sum: Students will learn to evaluate interpretive approaches to visual material, to read and interpret actively and analytically; to think critically and creatively; and to write and speak persuasively. They will learn how to research the historical and social contexts of objects and learn to perceive their complex social meanings at different points in time.

Course requirements

1. Meaningful participation in sections, assessed through discussions and in-class writing assignments (10% of grade)
2. First Paper – Analysis of work of art, 3 pages (15% of grade)
3. Debate preparation and participation, with notes turned in for instructor’s review (10% of grade)
4. Take-home mid-term exam (20% of grade)
5. Second Paper – Position Paper on art and social conflict in the U.S. as represented in a current exhibition or gallery/museum/public art installation or performance art event in Los Angeles, 5 pages (25% of grade)
6. Final exam consisting of factual and interpretive questions based on course materials (20% of grade)

GRADING SCALE

We use the following scale for numerical grades and your course grade:

A	95-100
A-	90-94
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	59 and below

Recommended Texts (Background)

Erika Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (Prentice Hall, 2000)

Angela L. Miller et al., *American Encounters: Art, History, and Cultural Identity* (Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2008)

Required Texts

Article pdfs (available through the course site)

Exam and Assignment due dates

Assignments:

First Paper due: September 19

Second Paper due: December 5

Exams:

Take-home Midterm Exam: distributed October 3, due October 10

Final Exam: Thursday, December 12th, 11am-1pm

Late assignments policy

You are expected to turn in your work on time, in class (unless email submission is specified). Work handed in late will be penalized (1/3 of your grade will be lowered for each 12-hour period after the due date). No make-ups will be granted without documentation for a medical or personal emergency from your doctor or academic advisor.

Electronic devices policy

Turn off electronic devices upon entering class. Use of laptops, tablets, and phones is not permitted. Please take notes by hand. I know—this sounds painful. But it will improve your performance in the course.

Resources

You will be automatically enrolled in the Blackboard site for AHIS 255g. There you will find pdfs and links to readings, and lecture images for study and review purposes. No lecture notes are posted. If you miss a lecture, please get notes from one of your peers.

Course lectures and discussions may not be recorded, nor information related to the course (e.g. lecture notes, class handouts) posted on the Internet. Failure to comply will result strict penalties, including the possibility of failing the course. This course addresses controversial episodes in American art and cultural history. If triggered, you may step out at any time. Students will be expected to engage all course readings, images, and discussions in a spirit of serious intellectual inquiry and, above all, civility. Differences of opinion are encouraged and will be treated with mutual respect.

Selected relevant local exhibitions and installations

Check www.foryourart.com for weekly updates on gallery openings, exhibitions, and other programs; I will also draw your attention to relevant and interesting events throughout the semester.

Schedule

Readings are noted on the date by which they should be completed. You will get MUCH more out of the lectures this way.

WEEK 1

Tuesday, Aug. 27: Introduction to the Course

Read:

Meyer Schapiro, "The Social Bases of Art" (1936)

Thursday, Aug. 29: Encountering Art, Alone (no class meeting; visit museum on your own, and bring paragraph about the visit to Week 2 section)

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the requested removal of a painting by Balthus

Visit one of the following and think about not only what you see, but how the museum is framing how you encounter and come to understand what you see:

LA MoCA: <https://www.moca.org/exhibitions> ("The Foundation of the Museum" or Eliot Hundley)

Broad Museum: <https://www.thebroad.org/> ("Soul of a Nation" or Permanent Collection)

Hammer Museum: <https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/on-view/> (Sarah Lucas or Andrea Fraser)

One Archives: <https://www.onearchives.org/exhibitions/> ("Liberate the Bar! Queer Nightlife, Activism, and Spacemaking")

No sections. These start Week 2.

WEEK 2

Tuesday, September 3: Pictures and the End of Painting

Read:

Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," *October* 16, Art World Follies (Spring, 1981), pp. 69-86

Thursday, September 5: Appropriation Art and the Politics of Representation

Read:

"The Art of Public Address," Interview with Barbara Kruger by Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, *Art in America*, November 1997.

Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism" in *Beyond Representation: Representation, Power, Culture* (University of California Press, 1992).

Sections commence. Bring paragraph reflection on museum visit to turn in.

WEEK 3

Tuesday, September 10: AIDS Activism in and as Art

Read:

Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," *October* 43, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism (Winter, 1987), pp. 237- 271

On your own, visit "Through Positive Eyes" at the UCLA Fowler Museum, opening September 15

(https://www.fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/through-positive-eyes/?utm_source=Press+List&utm_campaign=97a795a6cf-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_fe9de71d1c-97a795a6cf-118616945)

Thursday, September 12: Robert Mapplethorpe's Perfect Moment

Read:

Carol S. Vance, "The Pleasures of Looking: The Attorney General's Commission on Pornography Verses Visual Images," in Carol Squiers, ed., *Overexposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (New Press, 1999): 305-326.

Richard Meyer, "The Jesse Helms Theory of Art," *October* 104 (Spring, 2003), pp. 131-148

WEEK 4

Tuesday, September 17: Withholding the Image, or the Uses of Abstraction

Read:

Darby English, "Introduction," *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (MIT, 2007).

Elizabeth Hess, "An Interview with Maya Lin (1983)

Thursday, September 19: First paper Due; The NEA and the NEA 4

Read:

Hilton Kramer, "Is Art Above the Laws of Decency?" (1989)

Carole S. Vance, "The War on Culture" (1989); Martha Rosler, "Theses on Defunding" (1982); and George Yúdice, "The Privatization of Culture" (1997), in Brian Wallis, Marianne Weems, and Philip Yenawine, eds., *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America* (NYU Press, 1999).

WEEK 5

Tuesday, September 24: The Guerilla Girls and Feminist Performance (Guest Lecturer: William J. Simmons)

Read:

Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Woman Artists?" (1971)

Guerrilla Girls, "The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist," and "Do Women Have to be Naked to Get Into the Met. Museum"

Thursday, September 26: Mining the Museum

Read:

Martha Buskirk, "Interview with Fred Wilson," (1994)

James Luna, "The Artifact Piece" (1988)

WEEK 6

Tuesday, October 1: "Whitney Biennial 1993" and "Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art"

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about the shows

Susan E. Cahan, "Harlem on My Mind at the Metropolitan Museum of Art," in *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Duke University Press, 2016).

Thursday, October 3: Midterm Exam Review

WEEK 7

Tuesday, October 8: Whither Beauty?

Read:

Dave Hickey, "Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty," and "Nothing like the Son: On Robert Mapplethorpe's *X Portfolio*," in *The Invisible Dragon: Essays on Beauty* (U Chicago, 1993).

Thursday, October 10: Midterm Exam Due; Making and Marketing "Sensation"

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about the show and Mayor Giuliani

WEEK 8

Tuesday, October 15: Participatory Art on the International Circuit

Read:

Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall, 2004), pp.51-79.

Liam Gillick, "Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop," *October* 115 (Winter, 2006), pp. 96-107.

Thursday, October 17: No Class for Fall Recess

WEEK 9

Tuesday, October 22: Institutional Critique

Read:

Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique" *Artforum* (September 2005), pp. 100-106.

Thursday, October 24: The Sight of Death, or a Politics of Resistance that Does not Look Like a Politics At All

Read:

TJ Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (Yale University Press, 2006) (selections)

TJ Clark and Kathryn Tuma, *Brooklyn Rail* Interview (2006)

October 25, Special Section: ONE Archive Visit

WEEK 10

Tuesday, October 29: Art and its Markets

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about the 2008 Hirst auction, W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy), Miami Basel, and Whitney Museum Trustees

"Art and its Markets: A Roundtable Discussion," *Artforum* (April 2008)

Thursday, October 31: In Class Debate on NEA/Arts Funding

WEEK 11

Tuesday, November 5: Outsider Art

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about the 2013 Venice Biennale and the institutionalization of the Outsider Art Fair

Thursday, November 7: Kara Walker's Domino Sugar Factory Project, or Claims for History and Public Space

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about the show

Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)" *New German Critique* 3 (Fall 1974): 49-55.

WEEK 12

Tuesday, November 12: J-20 Art Strike

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about the action and its consequences

Thursday, November 14: Contemporary Case Study: Civil War and other Monuments (Guest Lecturer: Isabel Wade)

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about the removal of statues across the country and Great Wall in Los Angeles

Judith F. Baca, "Whose Monument Where? Public Art in a Many-Culture Society," in Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1994.

WEEK 13

Tuesday, November 19: Contemporary Case Studies: Kelley Walker and Dana Schutz

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about the shows and continued resonance in 2019 Whitney Biennial

Thursday, November 21: Contemporary Case Study: Sam Durant

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about the show

Nov. 22 Special Section: Stacy R. Williams, MLS, Head, Architecture & Fine Arts Library

WEEK 14

Tuesday, November 26: In Class Debate About Censorship

Thursday, November 28: No Class for Thanksgiving

WEEK 15

Tuesday, December 3: Contemporary Case Study: The Chinatown Art Brigade and Defend Boyle Heights

Read:

Dossier of news articles and statements about James Cohan exhibition of Omer Fast and 356 S. Mission Road and Laura Owens

Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," *October* 31 (Winter, 1984), pp. 94-111.

Thursday, December 5: Final Paper Due; Review and Conclusion

End of Instruction

Study days: December 7-10

Final Exam: Thursday, December 12th, 11am-1pm

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic conduct

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A <https://scampus.usc.edu>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other resources.

Support systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

Emergency preparedness

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness <http://preparedness.usc.edu/>.

Statement for students with disabilities

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. Any student requesting accommodations based on a disability is required to register with DSP each semester. Please be sure the certification is delivered to your professor or TA within the first two weeks of the semester.