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 – “Formal Analysis,” 2 pages (15% of grade), due September 16

3. Debate and Case Study preparation and participation, with notes turned in for instructor’s review (15% of grade)

4. Take-home midterm exam (20% of grade), due October 6

5. Second Paper – “Art in Action”: Identify an issue of great social (and hopefully also personal) significance (climate change, racism, sexism, income inequality, immigration, public health) and design an art event (an exhibition, performance, publication) that addresses this issue, ideally creating meaningful change. Your paper should be informed by significant research, both on your chosen issue as well as prior cultural initiatives that have addressed it, including identifying and arguing for key artworks or artists working today. 5 pages (20% of grade), due December 2

6. Final exam consisting of factual and interpretive questions based on course materials (20% of grade), December 13

*Meaningful Participation: The seriousness with which each member of the class comes prepared impacts the whole group. Phones must be on silent and out of sight.

Things to consider:

- Are you prepared for today’s class?
- Are you taking notes of the day’s discussion?
- Are you vocal in class in a way that moves the discussion/class forward and enhances our overall exchange?
- Are you respectful of the material, your classmates, and the professor?
- Are you synthesizing previous discussions and material into each new meeting?
- Are you physically as well as verbally “present”: focused on the material, responding productively to professor and classmates, engaged and alert?

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)


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 (you will need to email to get permission to access this, using your USC email address): https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UakwD_QAmS0cE50srF8hF04_aHaIqS0?usp=sharing

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.

Academic Honesty and Online Recordings
If you sell notes/class materials, plagiarize your writing, or cheat on exams you will receive a failing grade in the class, and you will be reported to the College. Passing off a text that you did not write as your own is plagiarized writing; this includes text on museum websites and other online websites about art history. Your writing will be checked against such sources. If you have further questions about what qualifies as plagiarism or cheating, consult with the professor prior to completing any assignment.

Class lectures are the intellectual property of the professor. You may not record any of our course meetings yourself. You may not share, sell, or distribute recorded lectures or sections. Doing so is a violation of USC campus policies and will be met with disciplinary sanctions. Students should review their responsibilities towards the appropriate use and handling of these recordings under existing USC campus policies regarding class notes: https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-c/

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. 23: Introduction to the Course, or: What is a Culture War?
Read:
*The syllabus!
* Andrew Anthony, “Everything you wanted to know about the culture wars—but were afraid to ask,” Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/13/everything-you-wanted-to-know-about-the-culture-wars-but-were-afraid-to-ask

Thursday, Aug. 25: Encountering Art, Alone

No class meeting; visit museum on your own, and bring 2 pages of observations and analysis to Week 2 section).
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:

CAAM: https://caamuseum.org/exhibitions
ICA: https://www.theicala.org/en/exhibitions
LA MoCA: https://www.moca.org/exhibitions
Broad Museum: https://www.thebroad.org/
Hammer Museum: https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/on-view/
LACMA: https://www.lacma.org/art/exhibitions/current

No sections. These start Week 2.

WEEK 2

Tuesday, August 30: c.1980: The End of Painting(?) and the Rise of Pictures
Read:
Watch:
*Style Wars (Alexander Street: https://video-alexanderstreet-com.libproxy2.usc.edu/watch/style-wars?context=channel:academic-video-online)

Thursday, September 1: Appropriation Art and the Politics of Representation
Read:

Sections commence. Bring your 2 page reflection on your museum visit to turn in. Be prepared to discuss!

WEEK 3

Tuesday, September 6: AIDS Activism in and as Art
Read:

Thursday, September 8: Robert Mapplethorpe’s Perfect Moment
Read:

Turn in 1 page response to your TA in class on September 13.

WEEK 4

Tuesday, September 13: Withholding the Image, or the Uses of Abstraction
Read:

4 of 9
*Elizabeth Hess, "An Interview with Maya Lin (1983)
*Look at Felix Gonzalez-Torres site: https://www.felixgonzalez-torresfoundation.org/

**Thursday, September 15:** First paper Due; The NEA and the NEA 4
Read:

**September 16:** First Paper Due in Section

**WEEK 5**

**Tuesday, September 20:** Guerrilla Girls and the Legacies of Feminism
Read:
*Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Woman Artists?" (1971)
*Guerrilla Girls, "The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist" (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/guerrilla-girls-the-advantages-of-being-a-woman-artist-p78796) and "Do Women Have to be Naked to Get Into the Met. Museum" (see first page of syllabus)
*Guerrilla Girls Website, https://www.guerrillagirls.com/

**Thursday, September 22:** Performance Art and Institutional Critique
Read:
*Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique" Artforum (September 2005): 100-106.

**Extra Credit Participation:** Screen Paris is Burning, Jennie Livingston, 1990 (Kanopy: https://www.kanopy.com/en/usclib/video/10910624)
*Turn in 1 page response to your TA in class on September 27.

**WEEK 6**

**Tuesday, September 27:** "Whitney Biennial 1993" and "Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art"
Read:

**Extra Credit Participation:** Screen Looking Back at Black Male: Thelma Golden, Hilton Als, and Huey Copeland | Live from the Whitney, 2015 (YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9gQdRlKuhw)
*Turn in 1 page response to your TA in class on October 4.

**Thursday, September 29:** Making and Marketing "Sensation"
Read:
*Brooklyn Museum site archive: https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/683

5 of 9

**WEEK 7**

**Tuesday, October 4:** Midterm Exam Prep.

**Thursday, October 6:** Midterm Exam Due; Participatory Art on the International Circuit
Read:
* Museum of Ice Cream: [https://www.museumoficecream.com/](https://www.museumoficecream.com/)

**WEEK 8**

**Tuesday, October 11:** Art and its Markets
Read:
* Suzanne Hudson, “It was a Small World, After All,” forthcoming 2023 publication in Amelia Jones and Jane Chin Davidson, *Companion to Contemporary Art in a Global Framework* (not for circulation)

**Thursday, October 13:** No Class; Fall Recess

**WEEK 9**

**Tuesday, October 18:** “Outsider” Art, Guest Lecture with Courtney Carter
Read:
* Outsider Art Fair site: [https://www.outsiderartfair.com/](https://www.outsiderartfair.com/)

**Thursday, October 20:** Debate Prep.

**WEEK 10**

**Tuesday, October 25:** In Class Debate on NEA/Arts Funding

**Thursday, October 27:** Encountering Art, Alone #2

_No class meeting; visit museum on your own, and bring 2 pages of observations and analysis to Week 11 section._

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. This time, think about how the experience differs from your first encounter with a gallery or museum showing recent and possibly difficult art:

USC Fisher: [https://fisher.usc.edu/exhibitions/](https://fisher.usc.edu/exhibitions/)
CAAM: [https://caamuseum.org/exhibitions](https://caamuseum.org/exhibitions)
ICA: https://www.theicala.org/en/exhibitions
LA MoCA: https://www.moca.org/exhibitions
Broad Museum: https://www.thebroad.org/
Hammer Museum: https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/on-view/
LACMA: https://www.lacma.org/art/exhibitions/current

WEEK 11

**Tuesday, November 1:** Kara Walker’s Domino Sugar Factory Project, or Claims for History and Public Space, Guest Lecture with Audrey Storm
Read:
Dossier of news articles and statements about the show

**Thursday, November 3:** Civil War and other Monuments
Read:
Dossier of news articles and statements about the removal of statues across the country and Great Wall in Los Angeles

WEEK 12

**Tuesday, November 8:** Who Speaks for Whom
Read:

**Thursday, November 10:** Contemporary Case Study: Cancel ____?
*Nikki Columbus, “Guston Can Wait,” n+1, https://www.nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/guston-can-wait/

WEEK 13

**Tuesday, November 15:** Debate Prep.

**Thursday, November 17:** In Class Debate on Role of Art in Society

WEEK 14

**Tuesday, November 22:** No class; independent work
Turn in 1 page response to TA by 12:20pm November 22.

**Thursday, November 24:** No class; Thanksgiving

WEEK 15

**Tuesday, November 29:** Money Troubles
Thursday, December 1: Provisional Conclusion, or a New Start: Museums/World in Crisis

Read:

December 2: Second Paper due in Section

December 13: Final Exam, 8-10am

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:
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. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:
Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086 eeotix.usc.edu
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298 usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776 osas.usc.edu
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710 campussupport.usc.edu
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101 diversity.usc.edu
Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu
Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call dps.usc.edu
Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC) ombuds.usc.edu
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-3340 or otfp@med.usc.edu chan.usc.edu/otfp
Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.