Contemporary Art and Activism
HIAA 1810
Fall 2017 Location List Art 220
Tuesdays 4-6:30pm

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Office Hours: Thursdays 12-2 and by appointment

Course Description
This seminar will trace the ways that art has been conceived as a form of political activism since 1989. We will analyze strategies such as social practice, relational aesthetics, new genre public art, tactical media, critical geography, useful art, and the interactions among artists and Occupy. Emphasis will be on these recurrent issues: the relationship between aesthetics and politics, conceptions of community and the public, and the practical aims of art, both intended and actual. Close readings, class discussion, and participation in our class blog will culminate in a final research paper interrogating the political implications of a single artist or artwork.

Course Goals
Students will acquire familiarity with the political ambitions of, as well as debates surrounding, contemporary art since 1989. By the end of the semester, students will have gained confidence in discussing and writing about these artistic trends and central key examples in depth. They will have also become fluent in the political and discursive stakes of contemporary art, contributing their own insights in the form of a final research paper on a chosen topic, artist, or artwork.

Course Requirements and Expectations
This course is a writing-designated course (WRIT): (1) you have the opportunity to write at least twice, (2) you receive substantive feedback on your writing, and (3) you have opportunities to apply feedback to future drafts of different writing assignments. Resources on campus to support your writing and research include the Writing Center and Subject Specialists in the Library.

Over 14 weeks, students will spend 2.5 hours per week in class. Required reading for the seminar meetings is expected to take up approximately 10 hours per week and writing weekly response posts will require approximately 1-2 hours a week. The final paper bibliography, presentation, and final paper are estimated at total of approximately 60 hours over the course of the term.

Each week we will collectively examine central texts and artworks pertaining to a particular trend, movement, or issue in contemporary art. Attendance and participation in class discussion is essential to success in this course, and students should complete all readings for the day prior to coming to class. Students must bring copies of all readings to class for reference and discussion.

Assignments are designed to facilitate close reading and in-depth engagement with the texts each week, as well as support students in completing a final research paper, and include:

Class Blog and Weekly Responses
Our class blog is an interactive platform to facilitate, enrich, and expand our class discussion. [https://blogs.brown.edu/hiaa-1810-s01-fall-2017/](https://blogs.brown.edu/hiaa-1810-s01-fall-2017/)
Each week, students are invited to post a short (150-250 word) response to the readings, class discussion, and/or another student’s response. You are required to respond on the blog at least seven times over the semester, and at least one of these should be a direct response to another student. All responses must be posted by the end of the day Sunday before class. These responses are not summaries of the readings; you can assume that your readers have familiarity with the
material. You are encouraged to use these written responses to experiment with their own ideas and opinions about the topic(s) and pose questions for further discussion on the blog and in class.

Everyone is responsible for viewing the blog content before class on Tuesday.

The blog is also a living document where the professor and fellow students are encouraged to share relevant material, essays, events, exhibitions, etc. In addition to expanding class content, this aspect of the blog will hopefully help direct students to possible research project topics.

**Annotated Bibliography**

To prepare for the final research project, students will complete an annotated bibliography. As listed in the syllabus, students should choose their final paper topic by **Tue Oct 17**. A proposal of 250 words is due in class that day. They should then proceed to do as much research into this topic as possible. The Annotated Bibliography is a way for students to organize and process (and receive credit and support with!) their research. The Annotated Bibliography will list, in Chicago Manual of Style bibliographic format, 8-10 sources. For each source, you will write a brief summary and analysis, in which you describe the basic contents of the book or article and how it sheds light on your topic. Details instructions will be distributed separately.

**Final Research Project: Presentation and Paper**

The final for this class comprises a research paper that makes an original argument about the political implications or effects of a contemporary artwork or artist, supported by primary and secondary sources. Students will present an early version of their argument in an in-class presentation that should run 10 minutes and be written out (rather than improvised) and include a slide presentation of images. The final paper (c. 15pgs) will expand upon this presentation and incorporate the feedback they receive from their peers, as well as more examples, sources, etc., which the longer format will allow. The two assignments are paired in the grading to reflect how intertwined they are; written presentations can and should be drafts of the paper, and students will hand in both (their written presentation and paper). Detailed instructions will be distributed separately.

No late assignments will be accepted without prior approval from the professor.

**Grading**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Blog Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Project</td>
<td>40% (includes both presentation and paper)</td>
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**Course Materials**

All course readings are pdfs or links that should be downloaded from our course webpage. The links to pdfs and articles are embedded within the course syllabus on our course webpage.

https://blogs.brown.edu/hiaa-1810-s01-fall-2017/

**Accommodations**

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me if you have a disability or other condition that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu.

**Academic Code**

https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/degree/policies/academic-code
Commitment to Respectful Dialogue, Debate, and Difference
Our class discussions will delve into some challenging and unresolved political and social issues, many of which defy a simple right/wrong judgement or straight-forward response. Art – and educational spaces like ours – give us the opportunity to open our minds to other perspectives, and, in so doing, refine and alter our own views. In our engagement with the readings, artworks, and each other, we will challenge ourselves not only to see what another person sees, but why, given the specific historical conditions, they see it. The hope is that by proceeding with openness, empathy, and respect—and debate and disagreement—we will collectively produce a class that above all functions as a space of radical experimentation, where we can all articulate new ideas, pose questions, change our minds, and at once expand, explode, and refine our ways of seeing others, ourselves, and our world.

Course Schedule

The schedule is subject to change due to identified needs of the class or unforeseen events

9/12 Week 1: Introduction: What do we mean by Activism? Historical Precedents and Problems

*Case studies: Hans Haacke, Graciela Carnevale, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Art Worker’s Coalition, AfriCOBRA, Provo

9/19 Week 2: 1980s: Art during the AIDS Crisis and Culture Wars


9/26 Week 3: Identity Politics and its Discontents: American Art and Exhibitions of the 1990s

*The Decade Show online archive at the New Museum: http://archive.newmuseum.org/index.php/Detail/Occurrence/Show/occurrence_id/195
*Homi Bhabha, “Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation,” in Sussman, et al.
10/3 Week 4: Making Space: Site-specificity and New Genre Public Art


10/10 Week 5: People as Medium: Relational Aesthetics


*Claire Bishop,* “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51-79.


10/17 Week 6: Power Tools: Social Practice, Interventionist Art, and Usefulness


RESEARCH TOPIC PROPOSAL DUE

10/24 Week 7: Post-Communisms: Post-Soviet Art, the Retro-avant-garde, and other Reckonings


*Boris Groys,* ‘Post-Communist Condition’, in Hlavajova and Winder eds., *Who if not We Should Try and Imagine the Future of All This?*, Amsterdam: Artimo, 2004, pp. 164-170.


*Pussy Riot’s Closing Statements, 2012:* [https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/pussyriot-closing-statements/](https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/pussyriot-closing-statements/)

10/31 Week 8: Globalization: Paradoxes of Identity and Economy


11/7 Week 9: Culture Jamming: Tactical Media, Contra-internet, and our Post-Truth Era


11/14 Week 10: New Natures: Critical Geography, New Cartographies, and the Anthropocene


ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

11/21 Week 11: Whose History?: Art and Cultural Appropriation

*Claire Bishop, “History Depletes Itself (on Dahn Vo),” Artforum September 2015.
*Coco Fusco, “Censorship, Not the Painting, Must Go: On Dana Schutz’s Image of Emmett Till,”

*Sam Durant, Artist Statement, 5/29/2017


*Browse online for information on Jimmie Durham Native American heritage controversy, starting here: https://hyperallergic.com/387970/jimmie-durham-retrospective-reignites-debate-over-his-claim-of-native-ancestry/

11/28 Week 12: Art, Art Institutions, and the Occupy Movement


*Online e-flux discussion with responses to Strike Art

*Tidalmag.org / mtcollective.org – scan through journal and art/activism projects


*Manifest of Occupy Museums at the 9th Berlin Biennale


*Look at Arts & Labor, artsandlabor.org

Weeks 13 and 14: Student Research Presentations