

WINTER 2016 | ARTH 202: Introduction to Contemporary Art

Department of Art History and Communication Studies, McGill University

Instructor: Saelan Twerdy [saelan.twerdy@mail.mcgill.ca]

Class: Tuesdays-Thursdays-Fridays 9:35 to 10:25, Arts W-215

Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:30-12:00, Arts W-293

Teaching assistant: Kristen Millar [kristen.millar@mail.mcgill.ca]

Course description:

This course offers a critical survey of art since 1945, following a chronological timeline and primarily – but not exclusively – focused on North America and Western Europe. Students will be acquainted with major artists and artworks, movements, styles, and tendencies in art production, as well as major periodizing concepts such as modernity and late modernism, postmodernism, and the contemporary. Students will also be introduced to key theoretical frameworks and approaches that have informed the practice of art as well as the methodology of contemporary art history.

In addition to introducing major artistic figures and trends, this course will examine art as part of the wider field of visual culture and in relation to the social, political, cultural, and technological shifts of the postwar period and the early 21st century, paying attention to the ways that art and visual culture both reflect and construct the world in which they are produced and circulated. Finally, students will also be encouraged to critically reflect on the relationship of art practice to the economy of the global art market and the social constitution of the art world, with reference to international biennales, art fairs, auctions, and shifts in museum practice, art education, and the role of curators, critics, and scholars.

Objectives and expectations:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to describe and analyze works of art and discuss the relationship between visual culture and its socio-historical contexts. Students will be able to identify and compare various formal styles as well as understand and employ some of the critical methods of art history.

Students are expected to attend every class, to have completed all required readings before class, and to participate actively and respectfully in class discussions and activities. Students are also expected to independently visit an art exhibition outside of class time (see assignment #2, Exhibition Visit Project, below).

Readings:

This course uses a textbook and a course pack, both available from the McGill Bookstore. Additionally, some readings are available online or as ebooks from the McGill Library: links or PDFs for these will be accessible via the class MyCourses site. The textbook is Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin Buchloh, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Anti-Modernism, Postmodernism: 1945 to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2011). Two things about this book are important to note: first, this class uses the 2nd edition from 2011 – **do not** buy the 1st edition from 2004; second, this

book is available either as a single volume covering 1900 to the present or as two volumes, split into 1900-1945 and 1945 to the present – this class only uses Volume 2, 1945 to the present.

The textbook is a chronological survey with articles written by five authors and numerous colour photographs of artworks. The course pack includes academic and critical articles and various primary sources. In the weekly schedule below, texts in the course pack are marked with an “*”. A copy of the course pack will be available on reserve in the library, as will many of the books from which the readings are drawn.

Assessment:

1. Midterm Exam (in class **Feb. 19**, 20%)

The midterm exam will consist of two image identifications or comparisons and an essay question. Students will be tested on all course materials, including lectures, discussion, and readings. Answers must be written in full sentences and ideas separated into paragraphs.

2. Exhibition visit project (due **Mar. 11**, 10%)

Students will research and write a paper of 800-1000 words (3-4 pages) on an exhibition of contemporary art held in a museum, gallery, or artist-run center in Montreal during the period of the course. The instructor will provide suggestions. Students are strongly encouraged to consult with the instructor *before* writing on any exhibition not included in the suggestions. Students will be required to relate the artworks in the exhibitions to themes developed in the course, employing critical concepts from the course.

3. Research paper proposal (due **Mar. 18**, 5%)

Students will submit a one-page proposal for a paper topic chosen from a series of options provided earlier in the term by the instructor. This includes a few paragraphs about your main argument and choice of subject matter, and a bibliography of approx. 5 key sources. Topics outside of the given options will be permitted, but consultation with the instructor *prior* to submitting the paper proposal is highly recommended.

4. Final Exam (in Arts W-215 during formal **exam period**, 30%)

The final exam will consist of four image identifications or comparisons and an essay question. Students will be tested on all course materials, including lectures, discussion, and readings. Answers must be written in full sentences and ideas separated into paragraphs.

5. Research Paper (due **Apr. 15**, 30%)

Students will research and write a paper of 2000-2500 words (8-10 pages, bibliography not included) following the topic and outline proposed earlier. Students are expected to research widely outside of assigned course material while also addressing themes and concepts learned in the course.

6. Attendance and participation (taken at random throughout term, 5%)

Further information about all assignments and exams will be provided in class well in advance of the due dates. Students must complete all assignments and exams to pass the course. Late assignments will be penalized at 5% per day.

Weekly Schedule

Legend:

* = included in course pack

[online] = link will be provided via MyCourses

[eBook] = available as eBook from McGill library

Week 1: Jan. 8

Introduction: What is Contemporary Art? And what was modernism?

Required reading:

- Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1-10; 241-272. *

Week 2: Jan. 12-15

Abstract Expressionism and Cold War Modernism

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900: Years* 1946 (369-374), 1947b (380-386), 1949a (387-391), 1949b (392-399), 1951 (400-405), 1957b (436-441), 1959c (459-465), 1960b (477-482).

Suggested reading:

- Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon, 1959). [online]
- Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965). [online]

Week 3: Jan. 19-22

The Postwar (Neo-)avant-garde: Neo-dada, Kinetic Art, Gutai, Fluxus, Situationism, and Nouveau Réalisme

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900: Years* 1947a (375-379), 1953 (406-410), 1955a (411-416), 1955b (417-423), 1957a (429-435), 1959a (449-452), 1960a (472-476), 1962a (494-501), 1964a (524-529).

Suggested reading:

- David Hopkins, "The Artist in Crisis: From Bacon to Beuys," *After Modern Art 1945-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 66-93. [eBook]

Week 4: Jan. 26-29

British and American Pop Art, Op Art, and Happenings

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900: Years* 1956 (423-428), 1958 (442-448), 1959b (453-458), 1959d (464-469), 1960c (483-488), 1961 (488-493), 1962d (513-518), 1964b (530-535).

Suggested reading:

- Alan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” in *Alan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 1-10. [online]
- Jasia Reichardt, “Op Art,” in *Concepts of Modern Art*, 3rd ed., ed. Nikos Stangos (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994). *
- Susan Sontag, “Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition (1962),” in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), 263-274. [online]

Jan. 29: Library resource workshop

Week 5: Feb. 2-5

Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, Process Art, Earth Art, and Arte Povera

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900*: Years 1962c (508-512), 1965 (536-539), 1966b (544-548), 1967a (549-552), 1967b (553-558), 1969 (578-581).
- Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood (1967)” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). [online]

Suggested reading:

- James Meyer, “Survey,” *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000). *

Week 6: Feb. 9-12

The Rise of Conceptual Art

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900*: Years 1966a (540-543), 1967c (559-564), 1968b (571-577), 1972b (598-603).
- Lucy Lippard, “Escape Attempts,” and “Postface,” in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; reprint edition, original 1973), vii-xxii; 263-264. *

Suggested reading:

- Peter Osborne, “Survey,” *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 2011).*
- Jack Burnham, “Systems Esthetics” *Artforum* (Sept. 1968). [online]

Week 7: Feb. 16-19

From Conceptualism to Critique

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900*: Years 1970 (584-588), 1971 (589-592), 1972a (593-597).
- Miwon Kwon, “Genealogy of Site-specificity,” *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 11-34. [online]

Suggested reading:

- Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* Vol. 55 (Winter 1990), 105-143. [online]

Feb. 18 – Midterm Review

Feb. 19 – Midterm

Week 8: Feb. 23-26

The Pluralist 1970s: Body Art and Performance, Video and Photography, Feminism and the Rise of Theory

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900*: Years 1973 (604-608), 1974 (609-613), 1975 (614-619), 1976 (620-623), 1984a (634-639).

Suggested reading:

- Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists? (1971)" *Artnews.com*, May 3, 2015. [online]
- Anne M. Wagner, "Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence," *October* v. 91 (Winter 2000), 59-80. [online]

Week 9: Mar. 1-4

STUDY BREAK

Week 10: Mar. 8-11

The Divisive 1980s: Pictures, Painting, and Postmodernism; Culture Wars and Activism

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900*: Years 1977 (624-627), 1980 (630-633), 1984b (640-643), 1986 (644-648), 1987 (649-655), 1988 (656-660).
- Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 111-125. [online]

Suggested reading:

- Helen Molesworth, "This Will Have Been: Art, Love, and Politics in the 1980s," in *This Will Have Been: Art, Love, and Politics in the 1980s*, exh. cat., ed. Helen Molesworth (New Haven: Yale University Press; Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2012). *
- Gregg Bordowitz, "My Postmodernism," *Artforum* (March 2003). [online]

Mar. 11 – Exhibition visit assignment due

Week 11: Mar. 15-18

After 1989: Globalization and Identity, Abjection and Interdisciplinarity

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900*: Years 1989 (661-665), 1992 (668-673), 1993c (683-688), 1994a (689-693)
- Terry Smith, "The Postcolonial Turn," in *What is Contemporary Art ?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 151-171. *

Suggested reading:

- Miwon Kwon, "The Unhinging of Site-Specificity," *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 35-57. [online]
- Julian Stallabrass, "New World Order," in *Art incorporated: the story of contemporary art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). [eBook]
- Jerry Saltz, "Jerry Saltz on '93 in Art," *New York Magazine*, Feb. 3, 2013. [online]

Mar. 17 – Guest lecturer on contemporary Indigenous art in Canada

Mar. 18 – Research paper proposal due

Week 12: Mar. 22-25

Bigger Screens and Shocking Scenes: The YBAs, Spectacle and Celebrity, Museum Photography and Video Projection

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900*: Years 1968a (565-570), 1993b (679-682), 1998 (698-706), 2001 (707-711), 2007c (732-737).
- Julian Stallabrass, “Consuming Culture,” in *Art incorporated: the story of contemporary art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). [eBook]

Suggested reading:

- Tim Griffin, “Worlds Apart: Contemporary Art, Globalization, and the Rise of Biennials,” in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, ed. Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 7-16. [eBook]
- Sharla Sava, “Cinematic Pictures: The Legacy of the Vancouver Counter-Tradition” in *Vancouver Art and Economies*, edited by Melanie O’Brien (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007) 47-68. *

Week 13: Mar. 29 – Apr. 1

Hosting Connections: Net Art and New Media, Relational Aesthetics and Social Practice

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900*: Years 2003 (712-717), 2009a (738-743), 2009c (752-757), 2010b (764-769).
- Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.” *October* no. 110 (Fall 2004): 51–79. [online]
- Mark Tribe and Reena Jana, “Introduction,” *New Media Art* (London: Taschen, 2006). [online]

Suggested reading:

- Julian Stallabrass, “Can Art History Digest Net Art?” in *Net Pioneers 1.0 : contextualizing early net-based art*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Gunther Reisinger, (Berlin and New York; Sternberg Press, 2009). [online]
- Nicolas Bourriaud, “Introduction,” *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2002). [online]

Week 14: Apr. 5-8

Precarious Spectacles: Recent Sculpture, Painting, and Performance; Auctions, Markets, and Art Fairs

Required reading:

- *Art Since 1900*: Years 2007b (724-731), 2009b (744-751), 2010a (758-763).
- Nato Thompson, “Contractions of Time: On Social Practice from a Temporal Perspective,” *e-flux journal* no. 20 (Nov. 2010). [online]

Suggested reading:

- Andrea Fraser, “There’s No Place Like Home,” 2012. [online]

- Raphael Rubinstein, “Provisional Painting,” *Art in America*, May 4, 2009. [online]
- Jerry Saltz, “Zombies on the Walls: Why Does So Much New Abstraction Look the Same?” *Vulture.com*, June 17, 2014. [online]

Week 15: Apr. 12-15

Culture as Database: Art and Criticism After the Internet

Required reading:

- Karen Archey and Robin Peckham, “Introduction” and “Essay” in *Art Post-Internet: INFORMATION/DATA*, exh. cat. (Beijing: Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, 2014). [online]
- Lane Relyea, “After Criticism,” in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, ed. Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 357-366. [eBook]

Suggested reading:

- Hito Steyerl, “Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?” *e-flux journal* no. 49 (Nov. 2013). [online]
- David Levine and Alix Rule, “International Art English,” *Triple Canopy*, July 30, 2012. [online]
- Seth Price, *Dispersion* (Free PDF, 2008). [online]

Apr. 15– Final Exam Review, Final Paper Due

Final Exam during exam period, date TBA.

Boilerplate

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009)

According to Senate regulations, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams. Please consult the Calendar, section 4.7.2.1, General University Information and Regulations.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.