

ART THEORY AND CRITICISM

Art 206, Fall 2019
Wednesday 4-6:50 pm
Kadema 170
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Kadema 190
Office Hours: Tuesday 3-5 pm (and by appointment)
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Art 109 Course Content: <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/>

Description and Objectives:

This seminar in critical art theory is designed specifically for Sac State graduate students in art practice. The seminar consists of readings, discussions, and writing projects. Readings are classic texts by art critics and theorists. We will also read and discuss artist interviews in *Being an Artist* (2019) to help you situate your art practice in the current discourse. Because this seminar satisfies Graduate Writing Intensive requirements, an important goal is to help you bring your writing and critical thinking to the professional level. Overall, you will become familiar with a small sample of the best that has been thought and written about art from various perspectives: most of it recent, all of it relevant to what you are setting out to do. You can expect your ability to articulate concepts of form, content, and practice to strengthen, depending on how well you exercise your mental muscles. Another central aim of the seminar is for you to see with greater clarity the already existing uniqueness of your own mind and spirit. The hope is that you will apply that awareness to your work and begin to see how your intentions are (and are not yet) conveyed in your work.

This seminar satisfies the Sac State Graduate Writing Intensive requirements described by the University as follows:

GWI General learning goals:

By the end of the semester, students will

1. *Understand the major research and/or professional conventions, practices, and methods of inquiry of the discipline;*
2. *Understand the major formats, genres, and styles of writing used in the discipline;*
3. *Practice reading and writing within the discipline;*
4. *Practice reading and writing as a learning process that involves peer and instructor feedback, revision, critical reflection, and self-editing.*

GWI Guidelines:

1. *The course should immerse graduate students in the discourse of their disciplines: genres, literacies, stylistic conventions, etc.*
2. *The course curriculum must include the four general learning goals listed above; also, it may require readings about discipline-based writing.*
3. *Students must write a minimum of 5000 words or 20 double-spaced pages of discourse. At least one assignment must be a minimum of 5 pages or 1250 words.*
4. *Writing assignments must be spread out over the entire semester.*
5. *At least 60% of the course grade will come from instructors' assessment of student writing.*
6. *Assessment of student writing should focus primarily on critical thinking, synthesis, and organization.*

7. *The course must consist of a minimum of 3 upper-division units or a minimum of 2 graduate-level units and must be designed primarily to meet the needs of graduate students.*
8. *Each section should have no more than 30 students.*
9. *The course should include a range of assignments in the types of genres typical in the discipline: for example, research paper, reading response, proposal, learning log, critical response, journal entry, annotated bibliography, blog, abstract, case study, cover letter, laboratory report, etc.*
10. *Formal assignments should include multiple drafts with revision based on feedback from peers and the instructor.*

NOTE: Schedule at least 10 hours per week *outside* of class to prepare for this seminar. If your English is poor, or if you have not studied modern and contemporary art in college or independently, you will need more time than that.

Required Texts:

Being an Artist: Artist Interviews with Art21, 2018. Purchase your copy through your preferred vendor. One copy is on reserve in the University Library for 24-hour loan.

Required readings in downloadable PDFs available on the course website under Art 206 “Readings.”

Subscription to at least one good contemporary art blog for well-written and informed art news. I recommend *Hyperallergic* e-newsletter (free): <http://hyperallergic.com/about/?ref=nav> *Artforum* and *Art in America* host excellent blogs that you can subscribe to free. *SquareCylinder* (<https://www.squarecylinder.com/>) is a good Northern California art news blog

- NOTE: Always bring a hard copy of the assigned reading to the seminar, marked for discussion.
 - *Save all your writings for end-of-semester discussion and course review.*

Requirements and Grade Basis:

20%: *Participation:*

The success of the seminar depends on teamwork. We are co-teachers and co-learners. You must be there every time (attendance), on time, prepared to practice engaged listening and responding to everyone. *Do not form exclusive cliques. Respect the opinions of fellow students and ask them questions that might help all of us clarify, deepen, and complicate our thinking. You are expected to ask challenging questions and show an effort to understand and learn from the views of others. *Do not waste class time complaining about the difficulty of the readings. Do not monopolize the discussion but contribute as often as you can. *Make eye contact with *everyone* when you speak. Good participation will raise your course grade by a whole letter; poor participation will lower it as much.

Attendance policy:

- Each *unexcused* absence will reduce your grade by half a letter grade. Three *unexcused* absences result in course failure.
- Work, transportation problems, and any *scheduled* appointment, no matter how important, are *not* excused. Repeatedly arriving late or leaving early can reduce your grade by as much as a whole letter.
- Illness (including mental illness) and family emergencies are excused if you tell me *in person* what happened within a week of your return to class, not later.

- No matter how valid your reasons for missing class, however, after *four* absences (four weeks) you will be asked to withdraw from the course.

45%: *Response papers*

- **Reading Response papers:** (typed, 12 font, double space with normal 1" margins) Readings that you are to respond to in writing are marked "RR" on the syllabus. The response papers are meant to prepare you for active participation in class discussion.
 - A. Directions for 250-word Reading Response papers **before October 30** when we begin *Being an Artist*:
 1. Write your name, course title, and the date on top.
 2. Write the author's *full name, nationality, birth and death dates, title*, and the *date* the text was *written* or *first published*. If that information is not available in the document, do an online search for it.
 3. Find and write down (quote with quotation marks) the author's thesis statement: 1-3 sentences from the reading that state the author's thesis (argument). Put the page number in parenthesis after the quotation. You may select sentences and fragments from several paragraphs and connect them with ellipses (...) if necessary.
 4. Paraphrase (formulate in your own words) the *author's thesis* (argument).
 5. Find and quote three supporting points the author makes (from the beginning, middle, and end of the reading) to establish his or her thesis. Put the page number in parenthesis after each *quotation* and *paraphrase* each one.
 6. Conclude with a short paragraph (2-3 sentences) on the relevance of the ideas to your art practice.

NOTE: For excused absences only, Reading Response papers are accepted up to two weeks late. (See attendance policy above. Never hesitate to tell me about anything that keeps you from attending.)

- **Seminar Response papers** (handwritten in class during and following every class)
 1. Presentation responses: Take notes during the student collaborative presentations of readings (see below). Write one question or comment for the presenters and be ready to contribute it to the discussion.
 2. Reading/discussion ungraded quiz: At the *end* of each class write a 10-15-minute paper on 1) *what impressed you the most* from the week's readings, 2) *why*, 3) *what ideas might be relevant* to your work

Turn in *Seminar and Reading Response papers* at the end of the class. I will check off the seminar response papers (plus, check, and minus) and mark the Reading Response paper on a scale of 1-10 (based on evidence of effort, engagement, and quality of thinking and writing) and return them to you the next week. A=9&10; B=8; C=7; D=6; F=5

- **500-word reading response reflection paper due *December 7*:** At the end of the semester, collect and review all the papers you have written. Select the three readings in the course that were most valuable for your thinking as an artist. In 500 words (as close as possible) explain what the value of each was for you. Copy sentences (give page numbers) from the three readings to prove that the author said what you say he or she said.

20%: Two collaborative presentations of readings

Reading Partners will be selected on the first day of class. Meet with your partner outside of class, discuss the readings you are to present prepare (together) a written text and PowerPoint presentation.

*Quality of collaboration on the presentations is part of your participation grade. **Do NOT divide readings and work on them separately as individuals. All interpretations of texts for presentation must be the result of discussion and *equal* collaboration. I will ask you how you worked together – how you met (telephone or in-person) and how much time you spent talking, etc.)

The format for your collaborative presentation text:

For each of the week's readings put:

- 1) The author's *expertise* in a sentence (why we should trust their authority on the topic)
- 2) The thesis question and the thesis
- 3) Three supporting points of the argument from the beginning, middle, and end of the essay
- 4) Conclude with slides of two artworks in any medium, not necessarily objects that the reading helps us see differently. The choices can be any art that is relevant to the reading, including installation, performance, and conceptual works.

PowerPoint presentation: practice it until it's about 20 minutes long. Show at least two examples of art that can be interpreted from the theoretical perspective under consideration. On the slide, put a full identification of the artwork (artist's name, date, medium, dimensions, and location if it's not a portable object).

15%: *Artist's Statement*

- **Second-year grad students:** Write a statement for your Advancement exhibition *to have printed large enough to post on the Else gallery wall or *as handouts to gallery visitors.
- **First-year grad students:** Write a statement for an imagined exhibition of your current work.

NOTE: Follow "Artist's Statement Guidelines" from School of the Art Institute Chicago (SAIC): <https://www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/art206/Readings/SAIC%20Artist%20Statement%20Guidelines.pdf> (available as a PDF on Art 206 "Readings" web page)

- **Final draft due November 13**

Format: 12 font, double space, 250 words

Grading is based on how well you address the points on the SAIC Artist's Statement Guidelines (50%), how evident the relationship is between *written* claims and *visual* evidence of your artwork (35%), quality of writing (15%).

Schedule of assignments (subject to changes announced in class)

General notes:

- *Unless otherwise indicated, assignments are due the following week for discussion.*
- *Schedule is subject to changes announced in class*

August 28: Introductory

- Read (no written response required): “Artist’s Statement Guidelines” from School of the Art Institute Chicago (SAIC). Start thinking about what you will write.
<https://www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/art206/Readings/SAIC%20Artist%20Statement%20Guidelines.pdf> (available as a PDF on Art 206 “Readings” web page)
- **RR** (write a reading response following guidelines above): “Introduction: Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary” Arthur Danto
**Download the PDF from the Art 206 “Readings” web page, mark for discussion and bring to class with your RR. Do this for all readings marked “RR.”)
- **RR**: Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting” (1961) (PDF on the Art 206 “Readings” web page)

September 4: Presenters: Holly & Ricardo

- **RR**: “Painting and the Pale of History: The Passing of the Pure,” Arthur Danto (PDF is on the Art 206 “Readings” web page)
- **RR**: Hal Foster, “Re: Post” from *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (1982 Brian Wallis, ed.) (PDF is on the Art 206 “Readings” web page)

Exhibition opening reception: Thursday, September 12, 5:30-7:30 pm. JayJay Gallery
Ian Harvey: *New Work / Where Hallucinations are Important Questions*

September 11: Presenters: Alex and Liliana

First draft of artist’s statement due

RR:

- Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” (1936) (PDF on the Art 206 “Readings” web page)
- Roland Barthes, “Death of the Author” (1967) (in *Image-Music-Text*) (PDF is on the Art 206 “Readings” web page)

September 18: ~~Peer-review draft of artist’s statement due.~~ I will check it off in class as on time; then you give it to your peer-review partner.

Meet Ian Harvey at JayJay Gallery at 4 pm.

***Be prepared with questions that focus on Professor Harvey’s art theory and how it relates to his painting practice.**

September 25: Presenters (Benjamin & Barthes readings): Jose & Min

Final draft of artist’s statement due

RR: PDF on 206 “Readings” web page

- Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976)

➤ **Sept 30-Oct 4 Matthew Pugh Advancement Exhibition**

October 2: Presenters: Kat & Stephanie

First draft of Artist Statement due

Presenters:

RR: PDFs are on the Art 206 “Readings” web page

- Nicolas Bourriaud, “Relational Form,” from *Relational Aesthetics* (1998)
- Nicolas Bourriaud, “Space-Time Exchange Factors,” from *Relational Aesthetics*

- Landi Raubenheimer, “Secret/Wish: The Problem of the Object in Relational Aesthetics,” 2015

October 7-11: Bliss Morton Advancement Exhibition

October 9: Presenters: Matthew & Dan

RR: Due October 23

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Letter to a Young Poet" (1903-8) (Ricardo)
2. Selections from *Color* (Stephanie and Kat)
3. Excerpts from Wassily Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911) (Dan)

➤ **October 14-18: Aleksandra Avramova Advancement Exhibition**

October 16: SHREM Museum visit 12 -3 pm

➤ **October 21-25: Ricardo Lopez Advancement Exhibition**

October 23: Presenters: Kat & Stephanie / Peer-Review (2nd) draft of Artist Statement due. Return the peer-review draft to the author. Make sure you have signed and dated it as the reviewer. The quality of your suggestions will be evaluated and marked on the roster as part of your participation grade

RR: *Being an Artist*

- “Foreword,” pp. 10-13, Tina Kukielski
- After reading the foreword to *Being an Artist*, write one short paragraph (c. 100 words) about how you decided to be an artist.
 - NOTE: I will look for evidence that your paragraph is informed by Kukielski's foreword.
- Select 3 three artists from the list in the section, “Becoming an Artist” pp. 16-97. (**Refer to artist bios in the back to help you make your selections.)
 - Watch the Art21 videos on each of the 3 artists you selected.
- RR: For the 3 three interviews:
 - Briefly describe (300 words inclusive) the most important thing to know about each of the artists from their Art21 film
 - From the book, *Being an Artist*, copy TWO artist response quotations that struck you as most worth discussing in seminar.

➤ **October 28-Nov 1: Liliana Karavay Advancement Exhibition**

October 30: Presenters: Jose & Min

RR: *Being an Artist*

- Select 6 six artists from the list in the section, “The Power of the Public” pp.100-129.
 - Watch the Art21 clips on the six artists you selected.
- RR: For each of the six interviews:
 - Briefly describe (150-200 words) what is most important to know about the artist from their Art21 film
 - From the book, copy TWO artist responses that struck you as the most interesting and worth discussing in seminar.

➤ **November 4-8: Kat Rios Advancement Exhibition**

November 6: Presenters: Dan & Matt

RR: *Being an Artist*

- Select 6 six artists from the list in the section, “The Role of the Artist” pp.132-199.
 - Watch the Art21 clips on the six artists you selected.
- **RR:** For each of the six interviews:
 - Briefly describe (150-200 words) what is most important to know about the artist from their Art21 film
 - From the book, copy TWO artist responses that struck you as the most interesting and worth discussing in seminar.

➤ **November 11-15: Stephanie Mainwaring Advancement Exhibition**

November 13: Presenters: Alex & Liliana

Artist statement due (final draft) *with* the peer-review draft attached, marked and signed by your peer-review partner

RR: *Being an Artist*

- Select 6 six artists from the list in the section, “On Process” pp. 194-261
 - Watch the Art21 clips on the six artists you selected.
- **RR:** For each of the six interviews:
 - Briefly describe (150-200 words) what is most important to know about the artist from their Art21 film
 - From the book, copy TWO artist responses that struck you as the most interesting and worth discussing in seminar.

➤ **November 18-22: Holly Smith Advancement Exhibition**

November 20: No Presenters (Elaine)

November 27: Presenters: Ricardo & Holly

Assignment: Write your 500-word course reading reflection paper: Collect and re-read all the papers you have written. Select the three readings in the course that were most valuable to you. In 500 words (max 550) explain what their value was. Include key quotes from the three readings to show how you interpret the authors’ meanings. Note: our interpretations and appropriations of the art and ideas of others are always “correct” when we use them to make our unique work and expand our thinking.

December 4: 500-word reading response reflection paper due

Final discussion. Bring everything you have written for the class: all RR papers, all course readings (PDFs and book), and the 500-word summary reflection paper. We will discuss your artist statements and review the course readings for what we got out of them.

NO Seminar session during final exam week. I will let you know when and where to pick up your artist statement and course response paper.