

# **Art 315: Issues in Contemporary Art**

Spring 2021

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office hrs: TTh 12-1pm and online by  
appt

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This course surveys contemporary art from the 1980s to the present: its artists, trends, genres, and major ideas. The main question under consideration is how art functions and is created in a social and cultural context. More specifically, we examine how this social and cultural context influences artists.

This course explores theoretical and art historical resources for the critical and constructive interrogation of contemporary art and the art-making process. Throughout the semester, you will ask *why* artists are making what they make, and where their ideas about art come from.

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## **Course Requirements**

Grades will be based on the following:

Paper #1: 25%

Paper #2: 35%

Paper #3: 40%

Readings are as PDFs below (where necessary, password is 5767), or at provided links.

Attendance is mandatory. Three unexcused absences will result in a deduction of your final grade by one third (i.e., you are allowed two unexcused absences). For example, if your final grade is a 'C', three unexcused absences will reduce it to a 'C-'. Each subsequent absence will reduce it further by another third: C- to D+ and so on. Three latenesses or leaving early will count as one unexcused absence. To avoid unexcused absences, please consult with me before you miss class.

### **Second writing requirement**

Second-writing courses adopt in-depth processes toward the improvement of writing skills. Rough drafts will be required of papers in advance, followed by optional, individual meetings with the instructor. Following rigorous critique of the initial draft, the paper will be re-written and a final version submitted. NOTE: a re-write of the final version may be required!

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## **Schedule of Topics/Readings:**

Feb.  
17

**Introduction to the course**

24 **Where do the ideas of our society and culture come from?**

Video: Hannah Gadsby, *Nanette* (Netflix, 2018)

David Brooks, "The Four American Narratives," *The New York Times*, May 26, 2017.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/26/opinion/the-four-american-narratives.html>

Henry Steele [Commager](#), "America and the Enlightenment," *Jefferson, Nationalism, and the Enlightenment* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1975), pp.3-30.

Dushko Petrovich, "The New Face of Portrait Painting," *The New York Times Style Magazine*, February 12, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/12/t-magazine/portrait-art-painting.html>

[Paper 1](#) assigned

[Lecture slides](#)

March **Does 'modern' mean contemporary?**

3 "The Top 20 Artist Stereotypes You Can't Avoid," *Endpaper, the Paperblanks Blog*, April 11, 2016. <http://blog.paperblanks.com/2016/04/the-top-20-artist-stereotypes-you-cant-avoid/>

Peter Nowogradki, "'The title of artist needs to be earned...!' an interview with David Hickey," *theguardian.com*, June 14, 2016.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jun/14/dave-hickey-art-critic-interview-title-artist-earned>

Clement [Greenberg](#), "Avant-garde and Kitsch" reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory: 1900-2000, 2nd ed.* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 539-553.

Recommended: [Paterson](#) (2016), directed by Jim Jarmusch

- 10 **Are our society and culture still modernist?**  
Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. [Adorno](#), "The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception." In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York: Continuum, 1993.  
(Originally published as *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 1944)

Thomas [Crow](#), "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp.3-37.

Modernist project

- 15 ***Paper 1 draft DUE***

- 17 **How is postmodernism a response to modernism?**  
Stuart [Hall](#), ed., "Representation, meaning, and language," *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), pp.15-29.

Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," from *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1988), pp.166-184.

Available online at:

[https://web.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Baudrillard/Baudrillard\\_Simulacra.html](https://web.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Baudrillard/Baudrillard_Simulacra.html)

François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) publ. Manchester University Press, 1984. Chapters 1-5, available online:

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/lyotard.htm>

- 24 **What is "quality" in contemporary art?**

Michael [Brenson](#), "Is 'Quality' an idea whose time has gone?," *The New York Times*, July 22, 1990, pp.H1, H27.

Elizabeth [Sussman](#), "Coming Together in Parts: Positive Power in the Art of the Nineties" in *1993 Biennial Exhibition*, exhibition catalog (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), pp. 12-25.

Eleanor [Heartney](#), "Identity Politics at the Whitney," *Art in America*, May 1993, pp.43-47.

Film: *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005) by Miranda July  
[website](#)

29 **Paper 1 FINAL DUE**  
Paper 2 assigned

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Video: *Loving Vincent*

April 7 **Does pluralism translate into a loss of standards?**

Lowery Stokes [Sims](#), "The Mirror, the Other: the Politics of Esthetics," *Artforum*, March 1990, pp.111-115.

Cornel [West](#), "The New Politics of Cultural Difference," in Russell Ferguson, et al., eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), pp.19-37.

K. Sue Park, "The ACLU Needs to Rethink Free Speech," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2017.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/17/opinion/aclu-first-amendment-trump-charlottesville.html>

Roxanne Gay, "The *Roseanne* reboot is funny. I'm not going to keep watching," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/29/opinion/roseanne-reboot-trump.html>

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**Isn't all art relational and socially engaged?**

Liam Gillick, "Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three... Part 1 of 2: the Discursive," *E-flux*, Journal 02, January 2009. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68497/maybe-it-would-be-better-if-we-worked-in-groups-of-three-part-1-of-2-the-discursive/>

Nicolas [Bourriaud](#), "Relational Form" in *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Presses du réel, 2002), pp.11-24.

19 **Paper 2 draft DUE**

21 **What relationships exist between technology and social media and contemporary art?**

John Harris, [Guy Debord predicted our distracted society](#)

Tim Rayner, *Foucault and social media: [a life in a virtual panopticon](#)(part 1); [I tweet therefore I become](#) (part 2); [the call of the crowd](#) (part 3)*

Caroline A. [Jones](#), "The Mediated Sensorium" in *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones, (MIT, List Visual Arts Center, 2006), pp.5-49.

28 **Postcolonialism: who speaks for whom?**

Kwame Anthony [Appiah](#), "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonialism?", *Critical Inquiry*, vol.17, no.2 (Winter 1991), pp. 336-357.

Laurel Wamsley, " 'National Geographic' Reckons with Its Past: 'For Decades, Our Coverage was Racist'," NPR.org, March 12, 2018  
<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/03/12/592982327/national-geographic-reckons-with-its-past-for-decades-our-coverage-was-racist>

Roger [Cardinal](#), "The self in self-taught art," *Art Papers*, v.18, Sept./Oct. 1994, pp. 28-33.

Growing Coalition Calls Brooklyn Museum Out of Touch and Demands Decolonization Commission  
[https://hyperallergic.com/437542/growing-coalition-calls-brooklyn-museum-out-of-touch-and-demands-decolonization-commission/?utm\\_source=email&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=sw](https://hyperallergic.com/437542/growing-coalition-calls-brooklyn-museum-out-of-touch-and-demands-decolonization-commission/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=sw)

[Decolonize This Place](#) (organization)

May 3 **Paper 2 FINAL DUE**  
Paper 3 assigned

5 **Posthumanism, part 1: What does it mean to be "human"?**  
Natasha Lennard and Cary Wolfe, "Is Humanism Really Humane?," *The New York Times*, Jan.9, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/09/opinion/is-humanism-really-humane.html>

Martha Nussbaum, "What Does it Mean to be Human? Don't Ask," *The New York Times*, Aug.20, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/20/opinion/what-does-it-mean-to-be-human-dont-ask.html>

Donna [Haraway](#), "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), pp.149-181.

Rossi [Braidotti](#), "Cyborg, Companion Species, and Nomadic Subjects," *Theory, Culture & Society* 2006 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 23(7–8), pp.197–208

12 **Posthumanism, part 2: What does it mean to be "animal"?**

Susan Casey, "The Orca, Her Dead Calf, and Us," *The New York Times*, Aug.4, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/04/opinion/sunday/the-orca-her-dead-calf-and-us.html>

Nato [Thompson](#), "Monstrous Empathy" in *Becoming Animal: Contemporary Art in the Animal Kingdom* (MIT Press, 2005), pp.8-18.

Helena [Pedersen](#) and Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir, "Art, artistic research and the animal question," *Art Monitor*, No. 3, 2008, pp. 109-123.

27 **Paper 3 FINAL DUE**