

## **Up Close and Personal with Late Twentieth-Century American Art: Objects from the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art**

USU ARTH 6790

Art History Seminar and Special Problems

Kevin R. Muller, Ph.d.

Office Hours: Mondays, 4-5 pm; Wednesdays, 11am – 12 noon, and by appointment.

Office: 140 FAV

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course focuses on the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art's superb collection of post-1960 American Art. This is a particularly rich period in the history of art, as artists of different backgrounds explored new media, revisited old media, and pushed the boundaries of art, all in an effort to address the dramatic social, technological, and political changes of the era. The subtle complexities of their work are best appreciated when experienced "up close and personal." Each week we will meet to examine a specific group of objects, exploring how their design, construction, and imagery generate insight and inquiry into particular subjects and issues. This class will emphasize and expect careful looking, critical thinking, and analytical writing.

### COURSE STRUCTURE:

This course will run more like a lab class than a traditional seminar or lecture. The museum will function as our "laboratory" while the works of art in its collection will be the subjects of our inquiry. Our methods will be experimental; we'll try varied and different strategies to engage specific works of art in order to understand their significance. Through our experimentation we will sharpen our eyes and minds, which in the end will provide us with insight into art of the last fifty years.

Full participation and regular attendance is essential for your success and the success of the class itself. I expect you to come to class fully prepared, with a desire to discuss the week's reading and/or assignment as artworks in the museum.

In order to have healthy and fruitful class discussions, I propose the following:

- Ask questions and lots of them. Asking questions is a good way to participate and generate a lively discussion. Take notes on the reading and bring to class a list of questions about statements, concepts, or ideas that are not clear or that you simply do not understand. We will devote class time to reviewing the readings and discussing any and all difficult and unclear passages.
- Participate. Discussion has a purpose. First, talking openly is a way to come to a richer understanding about an issue or topic. Second, discussion is a way we can all learn from each other. Every one of you will have something significant to contribute to each class. Therefore, I want each of you to actively contribute so that you can enrich the experience of everyone else. Participation means telling us what you know

or think, but also asking questions. If you are confused or do not fully understand someone's statement, ask him or her for a clarification.

- Be respectful. At times the topic of a discussion might not be all that straightforward and thus it might be difficult for any one of us, myself included, to say exactly what we mean. When this happens, do not convey your impatience toward the speaker. Instead, ask for clarification. Along the same lines, give all speakers your full attention at all times. If I find you doodling, texting, surfing, doing homework for another class, or reading something other than your notes, etc., I will ask you to leave the classroom immediately and will discuss the matter with the Department Chair.

Because participation is so important for this class, you may miss no more than two class sessions. If you miss more than two, I may, at my discretion, drop you from the class.

If an emergency occurs that prevents you from attending class or completing an assignment on time notify me ASAP and be prepared to provide documentation of your emergency. I will need documentation in order to grant you an exemption or extension.

#### EMAIL COMMUNICATION

Check your email regularly, at least every other day. I will use email (not Blackboard) to communicate with the class as a whole and with each of you individually. I will send reminders as well as comments about upcoming assignments and readings. I may also send you links to webpages and reading (as pdf documents). Please provide me with your current email address and notify me ASAP about changes to your address.

#### REQUIRED TEXT:

A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945. Edited by Amelia Jones. Blackwell Publishing, 2006. ISBN 1-4051-3542-5 (pbk). Plan to bring this book to class, every time there is as an assigned reading from it. We will work through the difficult passages together in class, consulting works in the museum to clarify the points made by our authors.

#### ADDITIONAL TEXTS:

Through the term I will assign additional texts as they become pertinent to the direction of the course and the interest of class participants. These will include short articles, artist's statements, art criticism, etc. Some days we will read these in-class, at other times they may be assigned for the following week.

#### COURSE LAB BOOK

You will need a spiral bound notebook dedicated to this class. In it you will need to take notes on the readings. For each reading you must identify:

1. The author's purpose for writing the text.
  2. The author's argument.
  3. The evidence the author presents to support that argument.
- continued...

4. Specific points the author makes you find of interest (and you should be able to indicate to the class why you thought it was of interest).
5. Specific passages in the text you found unclear, confusing, or simply wanted further explanation of.

I will ask you to identify these points during our discussions, so be prepared with full and complete notes. You will also use the same notebook for taking notes about works of art during class; these notes too will serve as the basis of our discussions.

N.B.: If you truly apply yourself in taking notes on the texts and the art objects, you will be well-prepared for class discussions.

#### ASSIGNMENTS:

In addition to weekly discussions, you will each write a research paper on a single work of art in the collection. The research paper will be due in stages (see below). In addition, you will give the class a presentation on your chosen object. Because this is a small class, I will work with each of you individually on these projects. NOTE: You must complete all assignments to pass the course.

#### GRADING:

Participation = 30%

Short Paper = 15%

Class Presentation = 10%

Final Research Paper= 45%.

#### PLAGIARISM:

Absolutely no plagiarism will be tolerated. You must properly acknowledge all your sources for all assignments and papers. Failure to do so will result in an automatic F for the assignment and the matter will be taken up with the Chair of the History of Art Department.

#### DUE DATES:

All assignments and papers are due in class on the due date. No late papers will be accepted.

#### ADA NOTICE:

Students with physical, sensory, emotional or medical impairments may be eligible for reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Please meet with me in the first week of class to make arrangements. All accommodations are coordinated through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Room 101 of the University Inn, 797-2444 voice, 797-0740 TTY, or toll free at 1-800-259-2966. Please contact the DRC as early in the semester as possible. Alternate format materials (Braille, large print or digital) are available with advance notice

**DISCLAIMERS:**

The course schedule is subject to change. It is the student's responsibility to attend class and pay attention to announcements. If a class meeting is missed, it is the student's responsibility to find out what was announced.

The history of art does include many images of nude or partially-nude figures, as well as images with other sexual content and texts that some may find offensive in their language or subject matter. Students who feel that viewing or reading such material is not an option for them should enroll in a different course to meet their Breadth Humanities requirement. In the case that the course is required for the student's major, discussion with the major advisor about a substitution should take place.

**SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS**

- Jan. 5            Introductions  
Discussion: What is Makes Contemporary Art Contemporary?
- Jan. 12           Strategies for Looking/Critical Visual Engagement: In-class exercise  
and Discussion.  
Mini-workshop: Strategies for Reading  
Short paper assigned – Due Jan. 26

**PART I:        HOW DID WE GET HERE? OR, WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?**

- Jan. 19           MLK Jr. Day – no class  
Although we will not meet, you need to watch on your own volumes 7  
and 8 of the PBS series American Vision (Media collections: N 6505  
.A629 1997 [VHS]) This will provide you with something of an overview  
of late twentieth-century American Art told from the point of view of the  
critic Robert Hughes. Don't believe everything he says, but do attend to  
the works shown and the general discussion.
- Jan. 26           The 50s and 60s  
Read for today and come prepared to discuss: Jones, chapters 2 and 3.  
Short paper due.
- Feb. 2            The 70s  
Read for today and come prepared to discuss: Jones, chapter 4  
In-class preparation for Sean Duffy and Karen Carson visit next week.
- Feb. 9            Sean Duffy and Karen Carson Panel Discussion  
Reading for today: TBA
- Feb. 16           The 80s  
President's Day – no class on Monday, but meet same time/place on 2/17  
Read for today and come prepared to discuss: Jones, chapter 5

Feb. 23      The 90s to the Present  
Read for today and come prepared to discuss: Jones, chapter 6

**PART II:      REVISITING THE PAST: THEMES AND THREADS OF  
CONTINUITY**

March 2      Beauty and the Beast  
Read for today and come prepared to discuss: Jones, chapter 9  
Research Paper proposal due

March 9      No class

March 16     Activisms and Feminisms  
Read for today and come prepared to discuss: Jones, chapters 11 and 16  
Individual Meetings about Paper topics

March 23     The Body and Otherness  
Read for today and come prepared to discuss: Jones, chapters 19 and 22  
Research Workshop

March 30     High/Low and the Photograph  
Read for today and come prepared to discuss: Jones, chapters 24 and 25  
Bibliography Research Paper Synopsis due

April 6      TBA/Overflow  
Draft of Research Paper due

April 13     Class Presentations

April 20     PAPER DUE