
**COURSE DESCRIPTION**
This course examines the production and reception of American visual culture from 1913 to the present, paying particular attention to painting and photography. Students will study theory and criticism in addition to the formal qualities of American visual art to examine how artists engaged and interpreted the world around them in material form, as well as how American visual culture helped shape and promulgate certain attitudes toward nationhood, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in the 20th century.

The course format consists of lectures by the instructor accompanied by PowerPoint presentations. You are expected to be able to identify the most important of these images in your final exam. Many of the images can be found in your text. This course encourages students to engage art objects through careful observation and thoughtful visual analysis. Writing and critical reading are crucial components of this class.
**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Become familiar with a range of American artists working in the twentieth century.
- Refine skills in visual analysis in relation to the arts of the United States.
- Demonstrate the dependence of meaning upon cultural, social, and political contexts when analyzing American art.
- Communicate effectively through written and oral communication.

These goals highlight the method we will employ in this class, since we will examine both the formal construction of works of art *and* the social contexts in which they were produced and received. Such an approach enables us to investigate the active role visual culture played in shaping American ideas, values, and social practices, and provides a more multifaceted understanding of art's social power and America's national and cultural formation.

**EMAIL**
You may email me at brobertson@wesleyan.edu.

**OFFICE HOURS**
My office hours are on Wednesdays from 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. and by appointment. My office is located in 41 Wyllys, Room 304.

**REQUIRED BOOKS**
Most of the readings for this course are posted to the web as electronic reserves, or can be accessed via one of the online databases. There are three required book for this course, available for purchase at Broad Street Books:


**RESERVE READING**
Additional readings for ARHA 271 are on reserve at Olin Library, available through the library’s electronic reserves, or uploaded to the course documents section of Moodle. Reserve readings are indicated by the letters **RSRV, ERES** or **PDF** in parenthesis in the course outline section of this syllabus. To access the readings marked **ERES** on the syllabus, go to the library homepage at [www.wesleyan.edu/libr](http://www.wesleyan.edu/libr). Click on the **ITEMS ONLINE – ERES** link under RESERVES in the FIND bucket. Password: ARHA271

You can also access these readings from off campus by using your Wesleyan user name and password.

*Readings may be added or deleted during the semester.*
Moodle
All course information including syllabus, research paper guidelines, readings (PDF), and research tips can be found on Moodle. I will post announcements to Moodle; be sure to check the course site once a week.

You can sign in to Moodle from your portfolio or at https://moodle.wesleyan.edu/login/index.php

Course Requirements
In addition to providing a broad survey of the approaches and issues that shape the study of American art and culture in the 20th century, this class endeavors to develop your skills of critical reading, writing, and looking. The assignments are designed to enhance your abilities in these areas.

A. Readings
All readings for the course are to be done weekly. You are expected to read all of the material for this course.

B. Weekly Summaries (20%)
Throughout the semester, you will be asked to write a paragraph (150 words) summary of an assigned reading, normally a short essay or chapter from a book. All reading summaries must be typed, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-point font (Times New Roman), standard page size (8 1/2 x 11). Please include your name, date, and title of article in the upper-left of the summary. Each reading summary is due at the beginning of class. I will not accept late or electronic copies of the reading summaries.

In the syllabus, the days in which these papers are due are marked with a “*.” The first reading summary is due on September 7. You will write ten (10) summaries during the semester. Each summary is worth 10 points for a total of 100 points.

C. Term Paper (40%)
You are required to prepare two term papers. The first paper (5-7 pages) is worth 15%, and the second (7-10 pages) is worth 25%, for a total of 40%.

You will be asked to select a single object for investigation (it can be a painting, photograph, sculpture, monument, etc.). It will be the focus of two paper assignments.

In the first paper, you will do a close analysis of your object, taking its form, content, and historical context into account. In the second paper, you will examine a single issue of a periodical published in the year your object was made. After considering the contents of the periodical, you will investigate how your object both engages and departs from the events, ideas, and interpretations presented in the periodical. I will distribute more detailed assignment instructions during the semester.

Papers will be evaluated with the following considerations in mind:
1. Point – Does the paper make a point? Is it carefully and clearly stated? Is it significant? Is it interesting and engaging for the reader? Does it take a stand and make an argument?
2. **Structure** – Is the paper well structured: does it include an introduction with a thesis? Paragraphs that defend and elucidate its thesis, as well as build a coherent and consistent argument? A conclusion that ties together the different ideas and themes? Are the individual paragraphs well structured, breaking points down into logical sub-points? Do they include a topic sentence that connects the theme of the paragraph to the other paragraphs and the thesis of the paper?

3. **Argument and Evidence** – Are the interpretive points of the argument fully discussed and well supported? Are there visual observations or texts that support the argument? Is the evidence well-chosen and appropriate? Does the discussion make the point clear with explanation and example where necessary, and explore the full implications of the claim being made?

4. **Overall Depth of Thought** – How well does the paper succeed at going beyond the surface of the text to notice and bring out underlying issues, particularly in a way that shows how the text/image/building might have something to say about our contemporary concerns? Does the paper wrestle with the complexities of the object and problems in interpretation?

**Late Policy:**
I accept late term papers if—and only if—I am notified two class periods before the assignment is due by email and you provide an alternative due date. Otherwise, you will lose five (5) percent per day, including Saturday and Sunday.

**D. FINAL EXAM (30%)**
The final exam, schedule for Friday, December 14, from 9:00 to 12:00, will be cumulative. It will cover the assigned readings and material covered in lecture. It will consist of three primary parts, which will total 100 points. It will be worth 30% of your final grade.

**Section One: Slide Identification**
- Six questions worth five points, for a total of thirty points.
- The slides will be taken from the assigned readings or course handouts.
- You will have five minutes to identify the slide, provide a brief description that explains why you have identified it as such, and account for its significance.

**Section Two: Short Answer Questions**
- Three questions worth ten points, for a total of thirty points.
- You will have fifteen minutes for each question.
- The short answer questions will be based on slide comparisons or contrasts. They will be directed, focused questions that require you to explain how the physical characteristics of the objects relate to their cultural contexts.

**Section Three: Essay Question**
- One essay worth forty points.
- You will have forty-five minutes to complete your response.
- One week before the exam, I will distribute two possible essay questions. You can prepare your responses to these questions in whatever way you wish, and you are free to discuss your potential responses with other students. You are allowed to bring in notes or outlines, but NOT a finished, polished essay.
On the day of the exam, I will flip a coin to determine which question will be asked.

Make-up exams will be scheduled if there are compelling circumstances beyond the student’s control (for example: illness, religious observance, car accident, death in the family). You must provide appropriate documentation (doctor’s note, police report, etc.) in order to take a make-up exam. Be advised that only one make-up exam will be scheduled within a week of the missed exam.

E. ATTENDANCE & CLASS PARTICIPATION (10%)
Attendance and active participation in class sessions are essential. This involves assuming the responsibility to speak thoughtfully and listen attentively. Such participation is, of course, only possible when you have done the week’s reading and are present in class. The lectures are designed to supplement the assigned articles, not reiterate or summarize them. You will be held responsible for the information presented in both the lectures and the readings. Class participation also includes group discussions and in-class writing assignments.

Please notify me in advance if you must be absent from class. Students may be excused from class if they present documentation (from the deans’ office or health services) for personal emergencies or illness within a week of the missed class. More than one unexplained absences will result in a reduction of your final grade. Students who miss four or more classes will fail the course. No exceptions.

**COURSE GRADING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REQUIREMENTS</th>
<th>WEIGHT</th>
<th>DUE DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Summaries</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>See course calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>October 19 &amp; November 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>December 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in class discussion based on readings, images, and lectures</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Determined at end of semester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COURSE ETIQUETTE:

Cell Phones and Laptop Computers: It is a mark of courtesy to your fellow students and to me to turn all cell phones completely OFF during class. Taking notes on a laptop computer is not encouraged. This is an image-intensive course and it is very easy to miss an important point if your eyes (and brain!) are trying to process the information on two (or more) screens. Better to stick with older technology – a notebook and pen.

Tardiness: Please arrive on time; latecomers can be disruptive.

UNIVERSITY POLICY

A. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
The university has a recognized Honor Code, administered by the Honor Board. This code sets standards for academic integrity for all undergraduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. To further exhibit your commitment to academic integrity, remember to sign the Honor Pledge on all examinations and assignments.

For additional information on the Honor Code visit the Student Handbook web site: http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/studentconduct.html.

B. ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible [during the 2nd week of the semester], so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/index.html.

C. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES
University policy states that students should not be penalized in any way for participation in religious observances. Students shall be allowed, whenever practicable, to make up academic assignments that are missed due to such absences. It is the student’s responsibility to contact the professor, and make arrangements for make-up work or examinations. The student is responsible for providing written notification to the professor within the first two weeks of the semester. The notification must identify the religious holiday(s) and date(s).
COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1  INTRODUCTION
Sept. 5  Introduction

*Sept. 7  The Art of Modern American Life
  - Giles Edgerton, Robert Henri, and John Sloan in Hills, 5-10.

WEEK 2  THE ADVENT OF MODERN ART AND CRITICISM
Sept. 12  Introducing Modern Art to American Audiences: The Armory Show
  - Take a tour of the Armory Show at the Armory Show website, created for the American Studies Program at the University of Virginia: http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MUSEUM/Armory/armoryshow.html

*Sept. 14  Representing the Modern Self
  - William Carlos Williams, “The Great Figure” in Hills, 51-52.

WEEK 3  CULTURAL NATIONALISM: THE “AMERICANIZATION” OF ART
Sept. 19  The Skyscraper as American Icon
  - Doss, “Modernism and the Interwar Years,” 75-95.

Sept. 21  Américanisme and Creating a “Usable Past”
**First Paper Assigned**
**WEEK 4  ART AS SOCIAL COMMENTARY**

**Sept. 26  Race Politics in the New Negro Movement**

*Sept. 28  Social Realism*
- Diana Linden, “Ben Shahn’s New Deal Murals: Jewish Identity in the American Scene,” in *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere*, ed. Alejandro Anreaus, Diana L. Linden, and Jonathan Weinberg (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2006), 241-260. (ERES*)

**WEEK 5  DEFINING AMERICAN IDENTITY**

*Oct. 3  Picturing the Great Depression*
- Roy Stryker, “Memorandum” in Hills, 125-128.
- All 50 of Walker Evans’ photographs that opened *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* are located at the website: [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/fsa/gallery.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/fsa/gallery.html)

Oct. 5  **Painting the American Scene**
**No Class**

**WEEK 6  CONSENSUS AND INDIVIDUALISM IN WARTIME**

*Oct. 10  The Fight for Democracy: Art and Propaganda during World War II*
Oct. 12 The New York School
**Classroom Change: PAC 107**

FALL BREAK
Oct. 13 – Oct. 16

Week 7 ART, AMERICANISM, AND THE COLD WAR

*Oct. 17 Modernist Criticism*
- Guilbaut, “Success” and “Conclusion,” 165-206.
- Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” Partisan Review 6 (Fall 1939): 34-49. (PDF*)

Oct. 19 McCarthyism and Encoded Meaning in American Art
**First Paper Due Today**
- Doss, “Neo Dada and Pop,” 138-159.

Week 8 ART RESPONDS TO CONSUMER CULTURE

Oct. 24 The Art of Consumption

Oct. 26 Art as Presence: Happenings, Minimalism, and Conceptual Art
- Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” in Hills, 208-211.
- Michael Fried, “Shape as Form” in Hills, 245-259.
**WEEK 9  REINTRODUCING POLITICS**

*Oct. 31  Earthworks*
- Read about Land Artist Christo's proposed project "Over the River" and local objections to its construction here:
  1. Huffington Post article about the project's postponement: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/22/christos-over-the-river-f_n_1293230.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/22/christos-over-the-river-f_n_1293230.html)
Which side of the debate do you most agree with? Why or why not?

*Nov. 2  Sexual Politics*

**WEEK 10  NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCE**

*Nov. 7  The Black Arts Movement*

*Nov. 9  Challenging Stereotypes*
- Dean Rader, *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 7-46. (ERES*)
WEEK 11  POSTMODERN SUBJECTIVITIES

Nov. 14  The Image and its Reproductions
** Paper Workshop Today ** (Draft due to Moodle by 11:59 p.m. on November 12)

Nov. 16  Mediated Images: Video Art
- In Class: Watch the documentary Matthew Barney: No Restraint

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Nov. 21 – Nov. 23

WEEK 12  ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

*Nov. 28  The Culture Wars of the 1980s

Nov. 30  Roman Catholicism and the Body
** Second Paper Due Today **
- Listen to NPR’s coverage of the recent controversy surrounding the National Portrait Gallery’s Hide/Seek exhibition: http://www.npr.org/2010/12/01/131730255/smithsonian-under-fire-for-gay-portraiture-exhibit
WEEK 13  AMERICAN ART IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

Dec 5  Diasporic Identities

*Dec 7  Reenvisioning the American Art Museum
- Martha Buskirk, “Interview with Fred Wilson” in Hills, 427-430.

Reading Period

Dec 8 – Dec 11

Final Exam

Friday, December 14  9:00 A.M.-12:00 P.M.