

Seattle University FQ12 ARTL-591 Special Topics: SOCIAL ISSUES THROUGH THE ARTS

Example Course Syllabus

"The Personal is Political."-- Carol Hanisch, *Feminist Revolution*, 1969.

"No one can be in the world, with the world, and with others and maintain a posture of neutrality." --Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage*, 2001.

"Students need to ignore the stupid things that most critics write about politically engaged art."--Susan Noyes Platt, Seattle art historian, author and critic, 2009.

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we examine the effects and possibilities of socially engaged contemporary visual and performance arts that speak directly to peoples' passions and politics. In order to redefine and deconstruct "didactic" art, we will view, discuss, critique and create a variety of artworks. Individually and collaboratively, we will investigate the place where social issues and aesthetics meet.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through a process of arts-based inquiry, this course:

Advocates an understanding of the arts as a language that empowers individuals and communities to utilize voice as an agent for social change.

Specifically addresses social commentary and responsibility as an important component of contemporary visual and performing arts.

Develops critical literacy and vocabulary as tools for apprehension of art forms which require more than an emotional response.

Explores some complexities of the art-and-politics connection: First Amendment rights; propaganda; provocation, audience response, and media reaction.

Suggests alternatives to "didactiphobia."

Encourages active participation in multi-media and community-based arts experiences.

Develops strategies to advocate integration of arts and social issues.

Critiques the habit of "didactiphobia" in the arts.

III. STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

It's essential to attend all class meetings and field trips.

Seek out arts experiences that address social issues.

Read all assigned texts and articles.

Create individual and collaborative arts experiences that viscerally drive home the objectives of the course.

Contribute to a supportive creative climate by participating in discussions and collaborative projects.

Take risks and work outside of your personal zone of comfort.

Keep a journal for this course, detailing and documenting class discussions, lectures, films and other related experiences. Take photos to document your own work and that of collaborators.

There is an ANGEL site for this class. Please review it regularly for updates, course content, and assignments.

IV. ASSIGNMENTS

A. Required textbooks:

Goldbard, Arlene (2006), *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development*, Oakland: New Village Press.

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ISBN-13-978-0-9766054-5-4 paper

Platt, Susan Noyes (2010), *Art and Politics Now: Cultural Activism in a Time of Crisis*
New York: Midmarch Arts Press
ISBN-978-1 877675 79-9

B. Other texts of interest but not required:

Lawrence, Deborah Faye *Dee Dee Does Utopia* 2008
ISBN 978-0-9778028-4-5

Levine, Ellen and Stephen K. Leving *Art in Action: Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change* 2011
ISBN 978-1-84905-820-9

Selz, Peter *Art of Engagement* 2006
ISBN-13 978-0-9766054-5-4

1. Read the first two books in their entirety, including Preface, Introduction, Forward.
2. Designated Expert Discussions
During class meetings, "designated experts" will be selected randomly to report on the readings and lead chapter discussions. All students should come prepared to do the following:
 - a. Provide a brief summary of concepts in the assigned reading.
 - b. Tell us how the content applies to you and the community.
 - c. Pose a related question to the class for discussion.

Reading discussion assignment expectations.

Reads the assignment and considers it in depth.

Participates actively and behaves appropriately (e.g., listens courteously, exhibits positive body language, shows respect for others' views, etc.).

Introduces substantive points by connecting personally to specific passages and/or providing thought provoking examples.

Deepens the discussion by asking clarifying questions, exploring related ideas, and/or offering alternative interpretations, and/or connecting ideas from several participants.

Facilitates group exploration by helping to keep the group on task, encouraging others to speak, acknowledging errors, and/or moderating own behavior.

C. Cultural Event or Exhibition Critiques

1. Research and identify two current, local public cultural events or exhibitions which strongly address issues of social justice (art museum or art gallery exhibition or installation; live performance --drama, dance, music; literary reading), etc. Challenge yourself to investigate at least one art form with which you've had limited experience. Be sure to select cultural events which challenge "didactophobia."

2. Attend the two events independently, or with other members in your cohort.

Use the lens of social/cultural content to write a critique of each experience. Address the question of didactophobia as it relates to event, audience response, and media coverage

Consistent with our practice in class, reserve judgment for the end of your narrative.

3. Two papers, 12-point type, double spaced, 500+ words.

First paper is due on the second meeting, Saturday, September 29, 2012, 9am.

Second paper is due in your Final Portfolio, Friday, November 16, 5 pm.

Please refer to reflection guidelines on Angel Lessons, Cultural Event Critiques.

D. Collaborative Installation Projects

A brief, one-page statement of your group's intentions is due October 13.

1. In groups of 3 or more students, create a collaborative, temporary interdisciplinary multi-media installation and/or performance which squarely addresses social justice or a another topic of political relevance.

The social issue will be determined through in-class discussion, and groups will be formed according to the conviction and passion of the individual members.

The project must integrate at least three different disciplines or modes of artistic expression, while **didactically** addressing the chosen social issue. The ideal project will operate on multiple levels, using subtlety, humor, propaganda, seduction, confrontation, etc.

Proviso: In order to challenge "didactophobia," the piece may *confront, cajole, or overwhelm* the viewer, instead of simply seducing or entertaining or perplexing. As a "site-specific artwork, it should *transcend* its original surroundings and materials.

The installations shall be temporary and site-specific (ie, the content relates to the site you choose). They may be public (viewable by all SU students) or private (viewed only by the cohort), but must be sited on the SU campus. **It is necessary to gain permission from campus security to use sites on campus. It is your group's responsibility to secure permission. If the installation is in the art department, it is necessary to alert Fine Arts office and faculty.**

Include title, topic, media, site, and group member names.

3. Collaborative Projects will be presented to the public on Saturday, October 27, 2012, at noon.

4. A one-page typed response to your collaborative experience and the public response will be due in your Final Portfolio, Friday, November 16, 5 pm.

E. The Main Project

Undertake a personal inquiry into the use of emphatic social/political commentary and didacticism in a work or works of art.

September 22: Individual meeting with instructor to discuss your topic ideas.

September 29: Main Project Topic due. One page of notes/plan.

1. Research and Development Essentials

a. Identify a social issue about which you feel personal passion and conviction.

b. Select a professional artist or group of artists who integrate art and politics for inspiration.

c. Independently conduct academic and field research on the chosen artist and issue during the duration of the course.

d. Document your process of investigation in narrative form, including consideration of intention, audience, context.

2. Select a format:

a. A complete public art grant proposal application (addressed to an authentic granting agency; inquire about their requirements and formats) for a site-specific public artwork that addresses a social issue. This option requires academic research on living artists working in this vein. The proposed artwork may be of your own design, or you may recommend a specific artist from your research. Budget must be included.

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- b.** An individual artistic investigation of a social issue, rooted in personal concern, that uses expressive media to make a clear, persuasive statement, with a particular audience in mind. For example, create a small body of artwork using visual media (approximately 3-5 pieces), literature, performance, dance, music, theater, monologue, etc. This option requires academic research on at least one professional contemporary artist working in a similar vein. Include a statement about, and supply a context for the completed work
- c.** An in-depth study of a contemporary artist who unambiguously integrates aesthetics with social issues. This option requires a short biography, a studio or site visit, and interview (or equivalent) with the artist.

3. Product

- a.** Prepare a fastidiously written report that includes **#1, a-d above**.
- Include self-critique about your creative process and your consideration of didactiphobia.
 - Include ample evidence of academic and other research.
 - Provide an annotated bibliography.
- b.** Prepare a ten-minute oral and visual presentation that includes **#1, a-d above**.

In both oral and written reports:

- Provide vivid, profuse visual documentation, and concise, articulate narrative.

4. Oral/visual presentation due at final meeting, Saturday, November 3.

5. Main Project Final Report due in Final Portfolio Friday, November 16, 5 pm.

- A written narrative, 12-point type, double spaced, 5+ pages, including
- Annotated bibliography.
- Visual documentation.
- See project guidelines on Angel.
- Drop box inside Art Office.

V. COURSE OUTLINE/CALENDAR

(This schedule is subject to change, especially to accommodate field trips)

1. Saturday, September 22, 9 am to 3 pm

Introduction/Syllabus/Didactiphobia

Video/film/slides: Survey of Contemporary Artists/Social Activism Themes

Introduction to Readings. Designated Expert.

Collage Project: Please bring a stack of magazines to share.

Peer Assessment of artwork

We will need a camera or two for documentation of artwork.

Introduction: Collaborative installation projects

Discussion of the Main Project

Individual meetings with instructor re: Main Projects.

2. Saturday, September 29, 9 am to 3 pm

Discussion of readings, **Platt, Part 1, Chapters 1-5**

Work in groups on Collaborative installation projects

Video/film/slides: Survey of Artists/Social Activism Themes

Discussion of the Main Project

Friday, October 12, 10:00 AM to 8:00 PM (also Saturday until 2:00 PM)

ARTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE CONFERENCE, Seattle Center.

3. Saturday, October 13, 9 am to 3 pm

Papers due: First Critique

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Topics due: Main Project.

Discussion of readings, **Goldbard, Chapters 1-5**

Guest Speaker, Dr. Susan Noyes Platt, art critic and author of our text,

Art and Politics Now: Cultural Activism in a Time of Crisis (2010), and

Art and Politics in the 1930s: Americanism, Marxism & Modernism (1999)

Check out Susan's blogs: [Art and Politics Now](#) and [Art Speaks Truth to Power](#)

4. Saturday, October 27, 9 am to 3 pm

Noon: Public Presentation of Collaborative installation projects

Summary discussion of readings, **Platt** and **Goldbard**.

5. Saturday, November 3, 9 am to 3 pm

Oral Presentations of Main Projects.

Evaluation, final discussion and closure.

IMPORTANT DATES

September 22. Individual meeting with instructor to discuss Main Project ideas. Bring your topic notes.

September 29. First Cultural Critique paper due, 9am.
Main Project Topic due. One page of notes/plan.

October 13. Collaborative Installation Project topic due. One paragraph/group.
Guest speaker Dr. Susan Platt.

October 27. Collaborative Projects presentations to public.

November 3. Oral/visual presentation of Main Project.

November 16. 5pm Final Portfolio due in MFA drop box, or digitally to lawrencd@seattleu.edu

FINAL PORTFOLIO CONTENTS

Second Cultural Critique paper.

One-page typed Collaborative Project reflection.

Main Project Final Report.

VI. EVALUATION AND GRADING

Performance or Exhibition Critiques 20%

Collaborative Installation Project 20%

Main Project Presentation and Paper 20%

Class attendance, preparation, participation and art projects 40%

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Cahan, S. & Kocur, Z. (1995). *Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education*, London, New York: Routledge.

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Mouris, Frank (1973). Frankfilm, <http://www.acmefilmworks.comdirMouris/mouris.html>

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Sollins, Susan (2001). *Art: 21, Art in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Harry Abrams, Inc. (artists Pepon Osorio, Maya Lin, Mel Chin, et al).