

Conceptual Art: AFA-112-02: Fall 2006
Professor: John Enxuto
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Holman Hall: Room 377
Mondays 8:00 - 11:45 am
office hours by appointment

HISTORY

At the heart of Conceptual Art lies the question "What is Art?" Conceptual Art is a line of thinking that challenges the status of the traditional art object as product and refocuses significance in the process of art making, the ideas invoked and the meaning of cultural production. Conceptualism can be considered questioning the nature of a work of art.

The height of the Conceptual Art movement is considered to run from 1966 through 1972, however it has a lineage dating back at least 50 years to the Dada art movement and the early work of Marcel Duchamp. Conceptualism is now considered one of the most influential artistic movements of the 20th Century. It is a practice that draws a natural relationship between the concept and the materials used. Emphasis will shift from the art object to its execution. When the artist Robert Morris made *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961), critic Leo Steinberg described it as "a plain wooden box and a tape recording of the sawing and hammering that put it together. The work strips the adverb from the definition of art. A thing done-period.

The resistant nature of high Conceptualism dovetails with the countercultural movements and political turmoil of the late 1960s in Western Europe and America. Conceptual artists not only questioned the autonomy of the art object, but also critiqued its modes of representation within the gallery and museum. Conceptualism, however, cannot be reduced to a historical period; conceptual practices still greatly define the heterogeneous field of contemporary art as artist continue to ask the question, "What is Art?"

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course will require students to put aside any assumptions of what art is and to critically rethink what art can be. Conceptual Art is organized around structured assignments designed to assist the student in developing a personal, non-medium-specific approach to art making, a learning experience leading to transferable conceptual skills. Studio time will be accompanied by lectures presenting the history and theory of conceptual art. This class is intended to encourage inventive problem solving. Studio time will be accompanied by lectures presenting the history and theory of conceptual art. Among the approaches to art making that is researched and put into practice will be the **readymade, public intervention, performance** and **ephemeral works, language** and the use of **signifiers**.

REQUIRED TEXT:

Godfrey, Tony, *Conceptual Art*. New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998.

CLASS READINGS:

Conceptual Art a Critical Anthology, Ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999.

Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin Books, 1972

The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, 2nd edition, Ed. Hal Foster. New York: New Press, 2002.

Staniszewski, Mary Anne, *Believing Is Seeing: Creating the Culture of Art*, Penguin Books, 1995.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Develop a personal creative process that is based upon ideas rather than directed by an assigned medium.
- Gain an informed historical vision of contemporary art, new genres and postmodernism in Fine Art.
- Develop a further understanding of how culture, current events, and technological advancement are interwoven elements of human experience and artistic practice.
- Determine whether or not a work provides new directions or varies from the conventional.
- Make informed judgments concerning the aesthetic and intellectual value of a work.
- Evaluate the cultural significance of a conceptual approach to art making.
- Present a vision of contemporary art, new genres and postmodernism in Fine Art.

COURSE WORK and ASSESSMENT

Weekly readings accompanied by weekly quizzes or response essays - **10% of final grade.**

Active class participation during discussion and critique - **5%**

Research Presentation - 20%

Each student will be required to do one research presentation on a selected artist who has somehow expanded the definition or interpretation of what art is.

1. The presentation must contextualize the work of the artist by describing the period s/he was/is working in - including any major socio-political events or technological innovations as well as the stylistic lineage of the artist's work.
2. Three major works by the individual artist must be discussed.
3. Students must critique the artist's work and consider how the work has contributed to contemporary art. Critiques should serve as a basis for a class discussion, so students must prepare questions pertaining to the presentation that the class should address as a whole.
4. Each presentation should be approximately 20 minutes long.

Four major projects will be assigned over the course of the semester:

1. The Readymade - 15% of final grade.
2. Intervention / Performance to address social or political issue - 15% of final grade.
3. The Artist Book / Documentation, this is a semester long project that will be reviewed following midterm break and at the end of the semester. - 15% of final grade.
4. Final Project - A Postmodern Work of Art - simulation, appropriation, pastiche, and identity. - 20% of final grade.

Grading Assessment for major projects:

1. Meeting all basic requirements of the assignments: 60%
2. Conceptual strength of the project: 30%
3. Focused development of the project from starting concept to ending presentation: 10%

*There is a 10% deduction for late assignments.

Each project will require a single page statement that describes your work process: What were the initial ideas and what decisions were made as the work progressed? Was the project successful? Why?

ATTENDANCE POLICY

This class will present a lot of material in a short period of time. This material will be complicated, theoretical, and detail-oriented. Prompt attendance for all class periods is essential. This course also requires at least six hours a week of outside studio time. These kinds of projects require a lot of time and energy. They will be impossible to complete unless you work consistently throughout the semester and stay with the class. Students will be entitled to **two** unexcused absence. Each additional absence will result in the drop of a letter grade.

The class will take one required field trip to an art exhibition during the semester.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1: September 5

Course Introduction: What is conceptual art?

Screening: *The Way Things Go* (1987) by **Peter Fischli and David Weiss**

Readings: **Believing is Seeing** (handout) and **Introduction and Anti-Art Gestures in Early Modernism** from *Conceptual Art* (Godfrey)

Week 2: September 11

Field Trip to **Dada** at the Modern Museum of Art, New York.

Please visit <http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/2006/Dada.html> for more information.

Week 3: September 18

Begin brainstorming and sketching for Assignment 1: Ready-Made, due October 2

Screening: **Man Ray**, *Le Retour de la Raison* (1923)

Marcel Duchamp, *Anemic Cinema* (1926)

Hans Richter, *Rhythmus 21* (1921)

Reading: **The Postwar Period** and **False Radical and Obdurate** from *Conceptual Art*

Dada Response Paper Due

Week 4: September 25

Bring in Ready Made Object; discussion of ideas and work in class the project

Lecture: Warhol's Factory and Thomas Kinkade's Gallery.

Screening: *60 Minutes*, *Painter of Light: Thomas Kinkade* (2002)

Reading: **A Defense of the "Conceptual" Process in Art** by Adrian Piper (1967) (handout)

The Dematerialized Object, Almost and **Who Were the Brain Police** from *Conceptual Art*

Week 5: October 2

Discussion and Critique of Ready-Made assignment

Begin brainstorming and sketching for Project 3:

Intervention/Performance, due October 16

Reading: **The Crisis of Authority** from *Conceptual Art*

Paragraphs on Conceptual Art by Sol Lewitt (1967) (handout)

Week 6: October 9

Discuss ideas for Intervention/Performance, due October 30.

Screening: **Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña**, *The Couple in the Cage: Guatianai Odyssey* (1993).
Reading: **The End?** from *Conceptual Art*.

Week 7: October 16

Group Discussion of ideas and work in class on for the third project: Intervention/Performance.

Screening: **William Wegman**, *Reel 3* (1972), **Vito Acconci**, *Undertone* (1973), **Bruce Nauman**, *Bouncing in the Corner No. 1* (1968),
Documentation of selected works, 1971-75, by **Chris Burden**,
Reading: Reading: **Where Were They?** and **Looking at Others** from *Conceptual Art*

Week 8: October 30

Critique and Discussion of Intervention/Performance.

Class Review of Artist Books

Reading: **What is Your Name?** from *Conceptual Art*

Week 9: November 6

Student Presentations

Reading: **Who Are the Style Police?** from *Conceptual Art* and Ways of Seeing by John Berger (1973).

Week 10: November 13

Student Presentations

Discussion of Final (Postmodernism) Project, due December 11

Screening: **Charles and Ray Eames**, *Powers of Ten* (1977), **Wachowski Brothers**, *The Matrix* (1999), *Google Earth* on the internet.
Ways of Seeing response paper due

Week 11: November 20

Lecture: Introduction to Postmodernism. We will be discussing Cindy Sherman, Fred Wilson, Sherrie Levine, and Jeff Koons.

Screening: **Cindy Sherman**, *Interview* (1983), **Dara Birnbaum**, *Technology Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1979)

Three Readings for Response Paper #4

1) excerpt from White Noise by Don DeLillo, 1985, pp. 12-13.

2) *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, by Walter Benjamin, 1936, From Illuminations, pp. 219-253.

3) *Statement* by Sherrie Levine, 1982.

Week 12: November 27

Individual Meetings.

Lecture: New Modernisms, Globalism, and Relational Aesthetics. We will be discussing Rikrit Tiravanija, Pierre Huyghe, and Emily Jacir.

Screening: **John Bock**, *Selected Video Works* (1999-2002), **Matthew Barney**, *Cremaster 3*, 2003.

Week 13: December 4

Open Work Period

Week 14: December 11

Final Project are Artist Books Due.