

Art 201: Professional Writing in Contemporary Art

San José State University

Fall Semester 2009

Art Building 105 -- Monday, 6:00-8:50 PM

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Office: Art Building, Room 123

Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, 10:00-11:30 AM, or Tuesday by appointment

* E-mail is generally the best method of contact during non-office hours.

* Please allow 48-hours for an e-mail response.

* Emergency: 911.....Campus Escort: 42222

* Individuals with disabilities may contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC), Administrative Building 110, 408/924-6000, for a variety of formats such as Braille, large print, sign interpreters, assistive listening devices, audio tape and accommodations for physical accessibility. The Learning Assistance Resource Center (LARC), Student Services Center 600, 924-2587, is available free to all students seeking help with writing.

* The \$10 course fee for this Art History class supports course materials including website and image development.

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION:

Topic and Scope of the Course: This course provides an opportunity for graduate students to refine writing skills in both artistic and curatorial practices. It is designed to help both students in the fine arts to develop statements about their own work and art history students to develop curatorial writing skills in the context of an exhibition. The course is also intended as a forum for dialog between artists and art historians in writing about contemporary art. Students will be asked to submit final projects in the form, either of an artist's statement to be submitted as part of an MFA thesis, or as a formal section of a catalog to accompany the annual Lift-Off Exhibition.

One of the challenges of writing on contemporary art is the open-endedness of the goals and processes. For artists, there is a multiplicity of models to choose from, and the model chosen will depend very much on the nature of the particular work. For art historians, it is difficult to categorize and historicize artistic processes that are unfolding in the present. This course aims to build familiarity with a number of the major genres of writing on contemporary art in order that students might employ these rhetorical strategies in their own work. At the same time it tackles problems that are basic to any verbal representation of the visual arts. How does one begin to describe an artwork or an artistic process? What should be said and what merely seen? How does one manage the gap between word and image? How does a description become argument that allows the work to be seen in a different way?

The course will begin with basic issues and theories in writing about art. It will then move into an analysis of genres of art writing, including journals, manifestos, cultural criticism, aesthetic criticism and contemporary art history. Finally it will provide a forum for students to present their own writing and receive constructive feedback.

Student Learning Objectives: This course seeks to provide students with essential writing skills in the context of professional practice. It also seeks to sharpen the ability of students to think critically about their own work through the use of writing.

Students in this course will:

- Learn to read texts closely and apply the knowledge gained to their own writing;

- Express (explain, analyze, develop, and criticize) ideas effectively, including ideas encountered in multiple readings and expressed in different forms of discourse;
- Develop a set of rhetorical strategies for discussing contemporary art;
- Learn to articulate their own artistic or art historical intentions;
- Apply writing skills to professional contexts;
- Refine their practice of professional writing about art and design;
- Become familiar with issues and discourses in contemporary art;
- Learn how to contextualize their own practices; and
- Write clearly, effectively, and critically to accomplish specific artistic or curatorial goals and address specific audiences
- Organize and develop essays and documents for both professional and general audiences, including appropriate editorial standards for citing primary and secondary sources.

Class Format: This course will be a seminar course, with strong workshop component. Discussions of readings will be complemented by student presentations of their own writing. Students will be expected to explore their own goals and desires through the processes of critical reading and writing. Peer discussion and dialog will form a significant component of the course

Course Prerequisites: graduate standing in Art and Design, or instructor consent.

Required Texts: All readings will be available on-line.

- ARTH 160 Course materials on-line on the SJSU Blackboard site for the course at <http://sjsu6.blackboard.com/webct/> (login instructions to be announced in class).
- ARTH 160 Course Website. Available at <http://arth.sjsu.edu/>, select **Course Web Pages**. Access through User: and Password: (login instructions to be announced in class).
- Additional resources may be made available through King Library Electronic Course Reserves. At www.sjlibrary.org/services/reserves/index.htm; you will need a library password to access.
- Optional Resources include: Electronic Resources links to writing guides and Internet sites will posted to the Course Website and/or to Blackboard.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Week 1 – August 24: Introduction

Week 2 – August 31: Ekphrasis – The Art of Description

W.J.T. Mitchell, “Ekphrasis and the Other,” in *Picture Theory*, pp. 151-81; John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”

Week 3: [NO CLASS SEPTEMBER 7TH – LABOR DAY]

Week 4 – September 14: Word and Image

Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*, chapters 2 and 3, pp. 19-35; Nicolas Flynn, “The Last Modern Painting,” *Oxford Art Journal*, V. 20, 1997, pp. 13-22.

Ekphrasis assignment due in class

Week 5 – September 21: Poetics and Phenomenology

Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp.165-182; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, pp. 121-148.

Week 6 – September 28: Art and Autobiography – Representing the Creative Self

Louis Sullivan, *The Autobiography of an Idea*, pp. 285-303; Louise Bourgeois, *Destruction of the Father / Reconstitution of the Father*, pp. 66-79, 205-209.

Biography assignment due in class

Week 7 – October 5: Art and Process – The Documentary Journal as Statement

Robert Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, pp. 109-116; Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture Part III” and Eva Hesse, “Untitled Statements” in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, pp. 588-596.

Week 8 – October 12: Wall Labels and Artistic Appropriations of Language

W.J.T. Mitchell, “Word, Image and Object,” in *Picture Theory*, pp. 241-79; Robert Smithson, “A Museum Language in the Vicinity of Art” in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, pp. 67-78.

Preliminary proposal due in class

Week 9 – October 19: [NO CLASS OCTOBER 19TH –STATE BUDGET CONTSTRAINTS]

Week 10 – October 26: Artists Theorizing the Significance Their Own Art I – Piet Mondrian

Piet Mondrian, “The New Plastic in Painting,” in *The New Art – The New Life*, pp. 28-55; Daniel Herwitz, “Mondrian’s Plato,” in *Making Theory / Constructing Art*, pp. 93-139.

Theory and context assignment due in class

Week 11 – November 2: Artists Theorizing the Significance Their Own Art II – Mary Kelly

Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, pp. 20-25, 40-62; Jacques Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus,” in *Écrits*, pp. 281-291.

Week 12 – November 9: Arts of Social Engagement – Manifestos and Dialogs

Joseph Beuys, “Untitled Statement” and “An Appeal for an Alternative,” in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, pp. 633-635; Mierle Laderman Ukeles, “A Journey: Earth/City/Flow” in *Art Journal*, vol. 51, 1992, pp. 12-14; Krzysztof Wodiczko, “Public Projections,” in *October*, vol. 38, 1986, pp. 3-22; Suzi Gablik, “Connective Aesthetics,” in *American Art*, Spring 1992, pp. 2-7

Draft of final project due in class

Week 13 – November 16: Art Criticism – Interpreting Contemporary Art

Hal Foster, “An Art of Missing Parts,” in *October*, v. 92, Spring 2000, pp. 128-156; Elizabeth Legge, “Reinventing Derivation: Roles, Stereotypes, and ‘Young British Art,’” in *Representations*, Summer 2000, pp. 1-23

Week 14 – November 23: Institutions of Exhibition – Constructing Themes and Categories

Jean Fisher, “The Syncretic Turn: Cross-Cultural Practices in the Age of Multiculturalism,” in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, pp. 233-241; Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Beyond ‘The Fantastic’: Framing Identity in U.S. Exhibitions of Latin American Art,” in *Art Journal*, vol. 51, 1992, pp. 60-68

Criticism assignment due in class

Week 15 – November 30: Dialogues between Artists and Critics – The Interview

W.J.T. Mitchell and Barbara Kruger, “An Interview with Barbara Kruger,” in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, 1991, pp. 434-448; Raymond Bellour and Bill Viola, “An Interview with Bill Viola,” in *October*, vol. 34, 1985, pp. 91-119

Week 16 – December 7: Student Presentations

- *Presentation of artist statements and curatorial texts*
- *Workshop and discussion of catalog text and format*

All final projects and journals due in class

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

General Requirements:

The course requires close readings of the assigned pages; the active reading and response to other students’ work; active participation in class discussion; class presentation; and writing assignments. Students should be prepared to discuss all of the assigned readings for each class session. A final project, 15 pages in length, will be developed from a proposal and rough draft over the course of the semester. In addition to the major writing assignments, students will be expected to keep a weekly journal, containing written responses to each week’s readings. There will also be four short, 1-2 page written assignments on specific themes. By the end of the semester, students will be expected to have written at least 35 pages. Evaluations will be based on the quality of written assignments, attendance, and verbal participation in class.

Relative weight of course requirements:

- 1) Proposal (5%)
- 2) Short written assignments (20%)
- 3) Weekly Journal (15%)
- 4) Draft of Final Project (10%)
- 5) Final Project (40%)
- 4) Class Participation (10%)

University Policies:

A) Academic Integrity Statement

The University's Academic Integrity Policy is available at

http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf.

From the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development: "Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University's Academic Integrity Policy requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development." Further information can be found at [<http://sa.sjsu.edu/student_conduct>](http://sa.sjsu.edu/student_conduct)."

B) Campus Policy in Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act:

"If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the city must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC, in Administrative City 110, 408/924-6000) to establish a record of their disability."

C) Dropping and Adding:

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. Information on add/drops are available at <http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-324.html> .

Information about late drop is available at <http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/> .

Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

Additional Note:

This syllabus is subject to change, in the event of unforeseen circumstances, or in the case that changes will significantly enhance the quality of the course. Students will collectively have the opportunity to shape the ways in which the course unfolds.