

ART 6933 Critical Methodologies Section 294C

Instructor: Coco Fusco

Class schedule: Mondays 11:30-2:30

Room: FAC 201

Contact: jfusco@arts.ufl.edu; 352 273 3029

Preferred communication method: Email

Office Hours: Mon - 3-4pm & Wed 12-1pm

Office: Fine Arts Bldg. D, Room 233

DESCRIPTION:

This seminar will focus on writing for artists. It is designed to help sharpen student's technical and conceptual fluency with writing about art, including but not limited to his or her own work. There will be weekly writing assignments, the purpose of which is to isolate and clarify the key elements of writing used to describe and comment on art and aesthetic experience. We will devote sections of the course to experimenting with description, analysis and critique, and personal chronicles. Students will also be expected to produce artist's statements, a thesis proposal and an annotated bibliography.

Readings that will be assigned are short examples of different kinds of prose styles, genres and expository tactics that artists use to write about their work, their views on art and their experiences as artists. We will look at personal chronicles, memoirs reviews, manifestoes and theoretical tracts by contemporary artists. We will also review and comment on writing by students in the class as a group.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: You must complete all reading and writing assignments on time in order to pass this course. No late assignments will be accepted and no incompletes will be issued. This course is a writing workshop and in order to participate you must write on a weekly basis.

Writing assignments when produced as homework must be typed in 12-point font and double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Unless otherwise noted in the syllabus, each assignment should be 250 words long. 250 words are equivalent to a page of text that is formatted in this manner. **You must bring several copies of your writing assignments to class – enough for each student in the class to have a copy. Take care of copying or printing your texts BEFORE class begins.**

OBJECTIVES AND GOALS: This class is designed to improve students writing and interpretive skills. The goal is to encourage students to become more effective

spokespeople for their respective creative practices and to enhance their ability to use different modes of aesthetic analysis strategically.

ATTENDANCE POLICIES: Students are expected to attend and participate in all sessions. If you are absent due to illness, a family emergency, religious observance, or another academic obligation, you must provide a written explanation to the instructor and when warranted, a note from a medical professional or your advisor. The UF policy on attendance can be found here:

[https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx - absences](https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx-absences)

METHOD OF EVALUATION: You will be assessed based on the quality of your participation in class and your assignments. Any student who may be in danger of not receiving credit or not passing the course will receive a written warning prior to the end of the term. The final grade for the course will be determined by the following: quality and consistency of the student's participation in discussions (50%); quality of writing assignments (50%). The UF policies on grading can be found here:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Policy on cell phones, laptops and recording: Cell phones should be turned on silent during class sessions. Laptops may only be used to produce work in class. Seminars may not be recorded without prior consent of the instructor.

For students with disabilities: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation. Link to Disability Resource Center:

<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Policy regarding non-completion of assignments: Students must complete all assignments on time and participate in discussions regularly to pass the course.

AUGUST 22: INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS

Discussion of text excerpts by Rosalind Krauss and Shannon Jackson.

AUGUST 29: DESCRIPTION: OBJECTS

Writing Assignment: 250 words. Describe an art object. That object can be flat, such as a drawing or painting, or a three dimensional sculpture. Start out by making a list of all of its physical characteristics and then build two or three paragraphs from there. Concentrate exclusively on describing the thing, not on its author, its history, the experience of seeing or its context. You can write about a work that is not your own if you prefer. It is highly recommended that you work from direct observation of

the object and not from a photograph of the work. Bring the original work or a reproduction of the work to class.

Reading: Foucault's description of Las Meninas in **The Order of Things**

NOTE: Artist William Cordova will lecture at UF on September 8 at 6pm. Please attend this lecture as you will have a writing assignment related to it later in the term.

SEPTEMBER 12: DESCRIPTION: EVENTS/ENVIRONMENTS

Writing Assignment: 250 words. Describe an art event or an immersive artwork (such as an installation). Start again with a list of elements you want to take into account. What are the materials involved in the creation and presentation of the event? Are they all visual or are some meant to appeal to aural, oral or olfactory senses? Is there a story? How does the event progress? Is there a proscribed order of things in the environment? Consider what makes an event or an environment different from an object. Take into account how time plays a role in shaping the work. Consider the work's duration and its pacing, is there any point at which you can apprehend the entire work? How does the event or environment affect your body? How does experience in time affect you as a viewer?

Reading: John Miller, Public Image Ltd., *Artforum*, and January 2010.

Michael Asher, September 4 – September 28, 1973, Heiner Friedrich Gallery, Cologne, West Germany.

SEPTEMBER 19: CHRONICLE

Writing exercise: Describe one afternoon or evening's activity that leads to the creation of an artwork or that recounts the experience of creating an artwork. You could be in your studio or out doing research, gathering materials or engaged in another activity that contributes to your creative process. Or you could be performing in front of an audience or before a camera. Single out important details of the allotted time period. Make a list of the activities. Recall and describe what your physical, emotional and intellectual experiences were during the activity. Try to diversify the sensory experiences recalled if it is appropriate. In other words consider tactile, aural, oral and olfactory experiences as well as visual experiences in your chronicle. The key to writing a compelling chronicle is not to be exhaustive in your account of what happened – you are best off being selective in what you decide to reveal. Allow the kind of impression you want to create to determine the choice of details.

Reading: Rev. Billy's "Counter Visions in the Disney Store" in **What Should I do if Reverend Billy is in My Store**

SEPTEMBER 26: MEMOIR

Writing exercise: Recall a personal relationship, an event or experience in your past that has had a lasting impact on your art practice. Because the length of the text will be short, choose a particular highlight of the relationship, the event or the experience to concentrate on for this exercise. Also include at least two sentences that explain how that highlight is representative of the larger phenomenon and that make clear why it is important to your current art practice. What you choose to focus on does not have to be momentous – sometimes seemingly minor events end up having lasting importance for us. What is key here however is making the connection between past and present as explicit as possible.

Reading: Adrian Piper, “Political Self-Portrait.”

“A project by *Louise Bourgeois: Child Abuse*,” *Artforum*, Dec. 1982

NOTE: Artist Anoka Faruqee will lecture at UF on September 29 at 6pm. Please attend this lecture as you will have a writing assignment related to it next week.

OCTOBER 3 – NO CLASS – COCO WILL BE OUT OF TOWN

Writing exercise: You have attended two visiting artists' lectures this fall. Write a one-page description of one of those lectures as an event. Then write one page chronicling the other lecture. Pay close attention to the difference between these two writing styles.

OCTOBER 10: ANALYSIS – QUALITATIVE JUDGEMENT AND CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Writing exercise: Choose an artwork and devise an argument in favor of or against its relevance. Keep in mind that the goal is not to explain why you like the work but to justify its importance to the field of art. That said your attraction to the work could be included in your argument. Ground your assessment in aspects of the work – such as its form, its topicality, the locale of its presentation, or its capacity to alter your understanding of art and its significance.

Reading: Isabelle Graw, “Too Early, Too Late: Market Success Versus Symbolic Relevance, from **High Price: Art between the Market and Celebrity Culture**

OCTOBER 17: ANALYSIS – CONTEXTUAL CRITICISM

Writing exercise: Choose an artwork and explain how it is expressive of or particularly relevant to the cultural moment from which it emerges. Consider the many ways that art can be meaningful that extend beyond formal considerations. Does the work have particular social, political, economic or spiritual significance? You may also want to consider its patrons or viewers. Who are or were they? Were there limitations that made the work inaccessible to certain people? Is/was the work especially meaningful to any particular group? Does/did the place in which the work was presented affect its significance? Were there any political, cultural or religious rituals that were implicated or commented on by the work? Were there historical elements in the work that would be particularly resonant and affect audience response to the work?

Reading: Francis Frascina, "Gaza: Francis Frascina revisits Lament of Images," *Art Monthly*, April 2009.

OCTOBER 24: ANALYSIS - THEORETICAL

Writing Exercise: When theorists address the visual arts they usually do so to illustrate a socio-cultural logic or system that they are attempting to analyze. For example, Walter Benjamin argued that photography and film were the forms best suited to representing the social formations of early 20th century capitalism, while Frederic Jameson argued that video art was most evocative of the phenomenon of cognitive mapping that he argued was endemic to the postmodern era of late capitalism. Many theorists also single out individual works to illustrate their theories: for example, Jacques Lacan discusses anamorphosis in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* to elaborate his theory of the Gaze.

Choose a theoretical term or idea you are interested in. Make sure you can provide a precise definition of the term's meaning in two or three sentences. Select an artwork that is expressive of this theoretical term or idea. Make a list of elements of the artwork that you seek to relate to the theoretical term. Then, elaborate an argument that demonstrates how they are related.

Reading: Slavoj Žižek: "Why are Laibach and the NSK not Fascists?" and

"Jack Bauer and the Ethics of Urgency," *In These Times*, 2006

OCTOBER 31: ARTIST STATEMENTS

Writing Assignment: An artist statement is a brief summary of an artist's intention as expressed through their work. It is the text that most frequently represents the artist's point of view and is publicly circulated at galleries, museum exhibitions and in the context of grant proposals and other solicitations.

For this assignment, you should write a straightforward artist statement, which means that you should take its premise seriously and not satirize the form. It should include: a summary of your vision of art; a sentence or two that characterizes your practice; a list of key materials and processes in your work; and a list of important critical and historical influences. If there is a philosophical or theoretical idea that is central to your artistic practice you should note what it is and what strategies you use to address it.

Reading: Untitled Statement by Maya Lin (from *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*)

Allan McCollum, *The Shapes Project*

NOVEMBER 7: ARTIST STATEMENTS

Writing Assignment: There are numerous ways in which artists have adapted the artist statement format. They have made fun of its conventions, conveying the sense that their irreverent attitude is a key component of their artistic personae. They have expanded the statement to make more general comments about art and cultural theory. They have produced manifestoes as proposals for projects that are aimed at changing the rules of art.

For this assignment you should try to create an artist's statement that communicates your sense of who you are as a creative being, or what your view of art is without sticking to the rules of the previous assignment. You can use parody, storytelling, bombast, or critical theory to elaborate your statement.

Readings:

Paul Chan, *What Art Is and Where It Belongs*, (published on *Eflux* in 2009)

Statement by Dieter Roth (1976)

D. Roth was born 46 years ago among the butchering Germans at that horrible stretch of time, when that cannibal, awful Hitler, Adolf, was just getting the Germans going at their best hit; butchering war. Hell was loose, both Roth survived, beating and scolding he survived, shitting and pissing in his timid pants, poor shaking little turd, he even managed to live through that rainstorm of bombs and grenades awful smashing horror, brought about on all, the living and the dead, by the horridly cruel cool English and the annihilatingly maneating cannibals those fantastically cruel citizens of the so-called United States of North America, horrible mankillers. Roth got out of that place (described) by chance of being one of the citizens of his horrible home country, namely, self-righteously, murderously Christian Switzerland. He survived, pantpissing there for twelve years. Then one of the friendly helped him out of it, getting to wonderful, wonderful Copenhagen. Having managed to happily survive there for a year matrimony got him, catching up with him. An awfully,

dreadfully fearful drain he fell down into, wriggling there, at the bottom, pissing in his wet pants, shitting and drinking terrible, awfully pissing lots, screaming for mercy. Again he managed to escape, this time to a place that soon proved to him to be full of his like, butchering bastards, dwellers in shit, pissing in their pissing wet pants, eating each other's awful bodies and souls, dwellers of Hell. He did escape though, to another place, thoughtful eyes watching him (the eyes of his second parents, his children), doubling hi raging shame. Steamer of the dampsteamingwets, shit pissing pants, stumbling around the corners of all the encompassing butcher's shop. Turdknicking awful bastard of fear, complaining. (D.R., Barcelona, 1976)

Statement by Rachel Harrison:

In much of Harrison's work, there is a kind of internal tug-of-war of elements, what the formalists called "relational" with respect to composition, extended to include social, economic, material, and "mediation" factors. And while other deployments of discontinuity and non sequitur often lead you back to an interpretive place, a place of thought, Harrison's work leads you to a place of nonthought, looking at the specific thing before you. The sculptures sit in the room like yearning creatures caked in the sludge of capitalist desire. Nothing here really seems anchored: like an acrobat, these impermanent materials put on a tour de force of formalistic skill. If social possibility is to be found here, it is in the way of families with nothing much to talk about anymore. The art is equivalent to being stranded in an airport.

NOVEMBER 14: THESIS PROPOSALS

Writing Assignment: Your thesis proposal is a description of what you will create for your thesis exhibition. If you have not reached that point in your course of study then imagine a thesis exhibition you would like to create in the future. The proposal is also an outline of the argument that you will develop to analyze your work. The proposal should include a description of the works that will be presented in the exhibition that includes physical details (medium, scale, materials). You should also map out the argument you will elaborate about the meaning of your work, the key influences that shape it, and the theories and or ideas about art that are most important to your practice.

NOTE: Artist Doug Ashford will lecture at UF on November 17 at 6pm. Please attend this lecture as you will have a writing assignment related to it later in the term.

NOVEMBER 21: NO CLASS

Writing Assignment: Based on your impression of Doug Ashford's lecture, choose one of the artworks he showed during his lecture and write a one-page analysis of it. The method you use should be one of the following: contextual, theoretical or qualitative analysis. Be explicit in stating which method you use.

NOVEMBER 28: THESIS PROPOSALS

We will devote a second session to discussions and revisions of the proposals.

Reading and Writing Assignment: You should begin working on your annotated bibliography for during this week.

DECEMBER 5: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bibliographies are lists of publications that a writer has consulted in preparation of his/her text. The publications do not necessarily have to appear in the footnote of the author's text. However, in many instances, publications are referred to, summarized or excerpted in the body of the text.

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited. It is important to make note of the relevance of the publication to your own research topic.

Annotations are not abstracts. Abstracts are the purely descriptive summaries often found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles or in periodical indexes. Annotations are descriptive and critical; they expose the author's point of view, clarity and appropriateness of expression, and authority.

Writing Assignment: Prepare your own annotated bibliography listing the publications that you would use for a research paper about an artist or an artwork.

END OF COURSE

