

Professor Nika Elder  
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Class: W, Per. 6-8  
Location: FAC 116

### ARH 4931: Cultural Politics in America Fall 2016



Andrea Fraser, *Little Frank and His Carp*, 2001. Single-channel video

What is art? Over the past several centuries, this question has been asked and answered in many different ways by many different people. Tackling both art and politics, this course examines how and why a select group of “institutions”—namely, the museum, the government, and private citizens—have shaped the idea and function of art, artists, and audiences in America. At times, these efforts were conscious; at others, they were unwitting; but all have been equally critical in defining the significance of culture at different moments in the history of the United States. Discussions will place equal emphasis on the analysis of works of art, the politics of exhibitions and space, and the construction of social identities, privilege, and power. Case studies will span the late eighteenth century through the present and consider such sites as the home, the artist’s studio, World’s Fairs, government property, and the gallery as well as artists like Charles Willson Peale, William Merritt Chase, Andrea Fraser, Kara Walker, and Fred Wilson and prominent exhibitions like *Harlem on My Mind* (1969) and *Primitivism in Twentieth-Century Art* (1985). The class includes trips to local museums and visits with guest speakers.

#### **Course Requirements:**

The course has three requirements: engagement, short assignments, and a final project.

#### **1. ENGAGEMENT**

The engagement grade is based on two things:

## 1) Participation

A. In order to fulfill the participation requirement, you will want to be sure to **attend every class session**.

B. **Do the readings and prepare for discussion**.

Readings should be completed in advance of the dates for which they are assigned. They are available in the “Course Reserves” section on Canvas and should be brought to class.

Every week, you will be asked to either respond to the readings on Canvas or prepare a short writing assignment (see page 3). The writing requirement for each week is indicated in the course schedule and will help you digest the assigned material and prepare for discussion.

In responding to the readings on Canvas:

- Responses are due by 8am on the day of class.
- Posts should be approximately one-paragraph long and include the following components:
  1. a summary of the topic and argument of each reading.
  2. Either: a shared theme across the readings—something all the readings address, but from alternate perspectives. Or, a series of questions that the readings raise about the nature and role of art.

C. **Participate in class discussion**. As a seminar, this class will only be as productive as each and every student makes it. Conversation and discussion are its lifeblood.

Engaging in discussion can take many forms: contributing your responses to the discussion questions; responding to questions about the readings, to the images on the screen, to the comments made by your classmates; or asking questions of your own, introducing connections to other conversations in this class, other classes, or the events, media, and world around us. You may think these connections are obvious, but everyone sees things differently—please feel encouraged to share your point of view.

D. **Take extensive notes**. Class discussions will be critical to your papers. Take notes on the lecture portion of classes, what your classmates say, ideas that come to mind while we’re talking, etc. These things are as important as anything you may write down in a lecture class and will prepare you to write the course papers.

## 2) Policies

Adhere to course policies, as listed below.

A. Electronics Policy

Cell phones should be placed on silent and, along with other electronic devices, including laptops, put away for the duration of lecture and section. Notes can and should be taken with pen/pencil on paper rather than by laptop.

Research has proven that taking notes by hand benefits comprehension, retention, and the overall classroom experience. See, for example, the following article from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/taking-notes-by-hand-benefits-recall-researchers-find/51411> and the journal article on which that piece was based [http://www.academia.edu/6273095/The\\_Pen\\_Is\\_Mightier\\_Than\\_The\\_Keyboard\\_Advantages\\_of\\_Longhand\\_Over\\_Laptop\\_Note\\_Taking](http://www.academia.edu/6273095/The_Pen_Is_Mightier_Than_The_Keyboard_Advantages_of_Longhand_Over_Laptop_Note_Taking). With documentation from the Dean of Students Office, a waiver will be made to the laptop policy.

#### Accommodations

Every effort will be made to accommodate students with disabilities. Students in need of disability accommodations should schedule an appointment with me as soon as possible. All accommodations requests must be accompanied by necessary documentation from the Dean of Students Office.

#### B. Email Policy

Please check your UF email and Canvas regularly. Important information about assignments, meeting locations, etc. will be disseminated via section list-servs. You are automatically subscribed to the list-serv with your UFL email. In most cases, I respond to emails within 24-48 hours.

#### C. Conduct Policy

As a matter of course, students are expected to abide by the University's policies regarding academic honesty, the honor code, and student conduct related to the honor code. Full information regarding these policies is available at the following sites:

Academic Honesty: <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/students.html#honesty>

Honor Code: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

Student Conduct: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/conductcode.php>

## 2. SHORT ASSIGNMENTS

Over the course of the semester, there are five short writing assignments, which will serve as springboards for class discussions. Specific instructions will be provided for each response paper. Each will be roughly three pages in length. Treat these papers as final drafts, which is to say, they should present a cogent argument and be polished pieces of writing. Check formatting and proofread to ensure nothing distracts from the quality of your work. Whether quoted or not, all sources should always be cited. Use Chicago-style citation. A document about Chicago-citation style can be found on Canvas.

### 3. FINAL PROJECT

The final project will enable you to apply and develop the skills and ideas cultivated over the course of the semester and use them to create a meaningful intervention into the thinking on the relationship between art and politics in America. It can take one of three forms:

1. Analyze how and why a given work of art responds to or criticizes its anticipated site of display.
2. Analyze a controversy over a work of public art and determine the definition of (or assumptions about) art that the controversy betrays and what social, cultural, or political interests the sponsoring institution would have had in such a definition.
3. Critique and revise a critical exhibition in the history of America.
4. MFA students: produce a new and original work of art that explores one of the course themes and provide an artist statement to accompany it. Project requires professor's approval; please see me prior to the deadline for the research proposal.

Papers will be roughly 10-15 pages long. They will be preceded by a preliminary conversation with me, a research proposal, and a class presentation. Detailed instructions will be provided for each step in the project—from the proposal to the presentation to the final paper.

#### Course Resources

1) Canvas – slide lists and any other documents distributed in class will be posted on the course page.

2) OFFICE HOURS: I'm happy to meet with you during my office hours Wednesdays, 4pm-6pm in my office, FAC 121, to discuss any questions pertaining to the course content, reading assignments, writing assignments, or exams. Office hours don't require an appointment; feel free to just drop by. If you're unavailable at that time, just ask or email me, and we can arrange another time to meet.

3) ACADEMIC SUPPORT

UF Teaching Center  
<https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>

UF Writing Studio  
<http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

University Counseling & Wellness Center  
<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/>

## Grading

The final course grade is calculated as follows:

- 30% Engagement
- 30% Short Assignments
- 40% Final Project
  - Proposal: 10%
  - Presentation: 10%
  - Paper: 20%

All exams and assignments will be assigned letter grades. Below please find a chart that outlines the numeric equivalents used to calculate the final grade, and the point range each grade encompasses.

Grades	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E	WF	I	NG	S-U
Grade Points	4.0	3.67	3.33	3.0	2.67	2.33	2.0	1.67	1.33	1.0	.67	0	0	0	0	0

Score (95-Point Scale)	Letter Grade	Score (4.0 Scale)	Letter Grade
92.51 – 95.00	A	3.86-4.0	A
<b>89.01 - 92.50</b>	A-	3.51-3.85	A-
86.51 – 89.00	B+	3.16-3.50	B+
<b>82.51 - 86.50</b>	B	2.86-3.15	B
79.01 - 82.50	B-	2.51-2.85	B-
<b>76.51 – 79.00</b>	C+	2.16-2.5	C+
72.51 - 76.50	C	1.86-2.15	C
<b>69.01 - 72.50</b>	C-	1.51-1.85	C-
64.51 – 69.00	D	.86-1.50	D
0 - 64.50	F	0-.85	F

Grading rubrics for each component of the course can be found in the appendices to this syllabus.

In order to pass this course, all assignments must be completed. No exceptions. To receive full credit, assignments must be turned in on time. Extensions will only be granted under special or extreme circumstances with valid documentation and, unless impossible, must be arranged in advance. Without an approved extension, late assignments will be marked down 1/3 of a grade per day.

## Projected Course Schedule and Readings

W Aug 24      **Introduction**

### Unit 1: The Museum

W Aug 31      **Museums and Citizenship I: Peale's Museum in the Early Republic**

Reading:

Manasseh Cutler, [journal entry], July 13, 1787 & Charles Willson Peale, [broadside for the Museum], February 1, 1790 in *American Art to 1900: A Documentary History* (2009), pgs. 145-148

David R. Brigham, "Contemporary Institutions of Education and Entertainment and Their Audiences" in *Public Culture in the Early Republic* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), pgs. 13-33

David C. Ward, "'The Medicinal Office of the Mind': The Peale Museum's Mission of Reform, 1793-1810" in *Charles Willson Peale: Art and Selfhood in the Early Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pgs. 34-50

Writing:

Please post a response to the readings on Canvas.

W Sept 7      **Museums and Citizenship II: The Harn and Citizenship Today**

\*\*\* CLASS MEETS AT THE HARN\*\*\*

Reading:

Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, pgs. 88-103

Harn Museum of Art, "2013-2018 Strategic Plan"  
<http://harn.ufl.edu/linkedfiles/publication-strategicplan1318.pdf>

"University of Florida: Purpose, Mission, and Goals"  
<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalogarchive/99-00-catalog/general.html>

Writing:

Short Assignment 1: on your own time, visit the Harn Museum of Art in advance of this class session and analyze one of the pre-selected installations or one of the pre-determined aspects of the museum as a whole.

**W Sept 14 Institutional Critique I: from within**

Reading:

Andrea Fraser, "What is Institutional Critique?" in *Institutional Critique and After* (2006), pgs. 304-309

Writing:

Short Assignment 2: Having the read Fraser's essay, select and analyze one of the pre-selected works of institutional critique, determining—in specific terms—what aspect(s) of the museum it puts under pressure.

**W Sept 21 Institutional Critique II: from without**

Reading:

"Editor's Forward" in *Harlem on My Mind* (Delta Publishing Co., **1979**)

"Introduction" and "1920-1929: An Urban Black Culture" in *Harlem on My Mind* (Delta Publishing Co., **1968**), pgs. [intro.] + look closely at images on pages 86-122

"The Quilts of Gee's Bend"  
<https://vimeo.com/50454661>

Lisa G. Corrin, "'Mining the Museum': Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves" in *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson* (Baltimore: The Contemporary in cooperation with The New Press, 1994), pgs. 1-22

Writing:

Short Assignment 3: write a response paper that addresses how each of these exhibits defined blackness.

## Unit 2: Public Space

**W Sept 28**

### **“Confederate Joe”**

\*\*\* Class Meets Downtown, at the Monument\*\*\*

Reading:

Kirk Savage, “Common Soldiers,” in *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c1997), pgs. 162-180

Erika Doss, “Shame: Duluth’s Lynching Memorial and Issues of National Morality,” in *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), pgs. 255-264, 287-298, 302-312

Writing:

Please post a response to the readings on Canvas.

**W Oct 5**

### **Public Art & Censorship**

Reading:

Douglas Crimp, “Redefining Site Specificity” (1986) in *Richard Serra* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), pgs. 146-173

Richard Meyer, “The Jesse Helms Theory of Art” *October* Vol. 104 (Spring, 2003), pgs. 131-148

Writing:

Please post a response to the readings on Canvas.

**W Oct 12**

### **Project Prep**

Readings:

Wayne Booth, et al. “From Problems to Sources” in *The Craft of Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pgs. 68-82

Gordon Harvey, “Integrating Sources into a Paper,” *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Harvard Students* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), pgs. 3-13

Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual* [review pages 208-242]

Optional Reading:



Joseph Harris, "Forwarding," *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts* (Logan: Utah State University, 2006), pgs. 34-53

### Unit 3: The Private Domain

**W Oct 19**

#### **The Artist, The Studio: A Conversation with Bob Mueller**

\*\* Class meets in the printmaking studio on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of FAC \*\*

Readings:

John Singleton Copley, [letter to R.G. Bruce (?)], undated 1767 in *American Art to 1900: A Documentary History*, p. 49

Sarah Burns, "The Artist in the Age of Surfaces: The Culture of Display and the Taint of Trade," *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pgs. 46-76.

Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Aspen* no. 5-6 (1967), [6 pgs.]

Writing:

Please post a response to the readings on Canvas.

**NOTE:** individual meetings about project topics will take place this week.

**W Oct 26**

#### **The Home**

\*\*\* Note: readings this week are long; plan accordingly \*\*\*

Margaretta Lovell, "The Remembering Eye: Copley's Men and the Case of the Joshua Henshaw," *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pgs. 94-140.

Alexandra A. Chan, "Black Betty and Her Children and the Tragedy of George" Black Family and Master-Slave Relations at Ten Hill Farm" in *Slavery in the Age of Reason: Archaeology at a New England Farm* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007), pgs. 127-196

Writing:

Please post a response to the readings on Canvas.

**W Nov 2**

#### **The Gallery**

Reading:

Celeste Connor, "A Direct Point of Contact': The Intimate Gallery and An American Place" in *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924-1934* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pgs. 51-75

T.J. Demos, "Duchamp's Labyrinth: 'First Papers of Surrealism,' 1942," *October* Vol. 97 (Summer, 2001), pp. 91-119

Writing:

Please post a response to the readings on Canvas.

**Th Nov 3**      **\*\* Project Proposal Due \*\***  
Upload to Canvas by 5pm

**W Nov 9**      **Hollywood on Art**

Watching:

*Basquiat* (1996)

*I Shot Andy Warhol* (1996)

*Downtown 81* (2001; shot 1980-1981)

Writing:

Short Assignment 4: Having watched all the films, select a scene from one that offers critical insight into how the film defines what an artist is or does. Write a response paper that explains how the scene stages this claim.

#### **Unit 4: Future Directions**

**W Nov 16**      **Culture on Display: A Conversation with Coco Fusco**

Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pgs. 1-4, 40-44

Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," *TDR*, Vol. 38, No. 1. (Spring, 1994), pgs. 1-21

Coco Fusco, "Still in the Cage: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Twenty Years Later," *Modern Painters* (February 2012), pgs. [4]

Writing:

Short Assignment 5: On your own time, visit the Florida Museum of Natural History in advance of this class session. Having read the excerpts from Said's *Orientalism*, offer a post-colonial critique of one of the pre-selected exhibits.

**W Nov 23**      **Happy Thanksgiving! (No class)**

**W Nov 30**      **Presentations or workshops**

**W Dec 7**        **Presentations or workshops**

**M Dec 12**      **Final Project Due**

## **Appendix A**

### **Engagement: Grading Rubric**

**A:** student has gone above and beyond in achieving the course goals—has really worked to define and understand the relationship between art and politics in the United States. The student read and processed the readings and was prepared for discussion; was engaged in class—listened to professor and peers and took notes; and truly advanced conversations by posing probing questions, making deep insights into the art and readings, offering alternative viewpoints, or noting complicating factors. It goes without saying that this student has attended every class, always arrived on time, and adhered to other course policies.

**A-:** great, but falls just short of the above.

**B+:** a very good effort. Student did and processed the readings; regularly contributed to conversations by answering questions, but also introducing new points, questions, etc.

**B:** a good effort. Student did the reading and regularly answered questions in class. This student has attended almost all classes, generally arrived on time, and adhered to other course policies. In short, the student has met the minimum requirements for the course.

**B-:** an okay effort. Student usually did the reading and answered questions on occasion.

**C+:** almost there. Student usually shows up for class, mostly on time, but has yet to really make her or his presence known by participating in the conversation; unclear whether or not the readings have been done.

**C:** falls short of the above in some way.

**C-:** falls short of a C+ in more than one way.

**D:** something that makes the grade not an F.

**F:** student is disengaged from the class—does not attend regularly and, therefore, has not put herself or himself in a position to fulfill the engagement requirement.

**Appendix B**  
**Short Assignments: Grading Rubric**

Over the course of the semester, short assignments will receive grades of ✓+, ✓, or ✓-. At the end of the semester, these grades will be translated into one letter grade on the basis of the following criteria:

- analysis: how deeply and critically papers engaged with the assigned materials; strength and insights of arguments put forward; careful and creative use of evidence
- polish: structure and flow of the argument and paper; clarity of argument and writing
- mechanics: consistent formatting, spell checking, and, most importantly, citation of sources
- improvement: increasing attention and commitment to all of the above from assignment to assignment

## **Appendix C**

### **Final Project: Grading Rubric**

A = meets and exceeds assignment goals. There's something about the paper/project that's truly exciting and fresh and revelatory—it really captures your attention. The argument is insightful and well supported by the evidence provided (i.e. descriptions of the work of art and analyses of those descriptions and supporting texts); the structure serves the argument, and the paper is, as a whole, convincing and a pleasure to read.

A- = the paper falls just short of the above. It's great, but misses some key aspect of the image, controversy, or exhibit or offers an insightful thesis, but not necessarily a surprising or unexpected one.

B+ = a very good effort, but the argument could be better executed; some aspects of the image, controversy, or exhibit might go unaddressed, the analysis could be deeper, the structure could be clearer, or more or better evidence is required at certain points in the argument.

B = a solid effort. There's a sense of a thesis/interpretation, but it's a bit vague or general. The structural logic behind the paper is unclear. The paper addresses some, but not all, key aspects of the image, controversy, or exhibit and offer analyses of some descriptions, but not others. Evidence is lacking.

B- = an okay effort, but falls short of the above. The paper has moments of analytical glimmer and promise, but does not cohere into a concerted argument or a very insightful one.

C+ = the paper falls just short of the above. Perhaps lacking the moments of glimmer, it is largely descriptive.

C = the paper exhibits some effort, but it's unclear to what end. The purpose of the assignment appears to be lost.

C- = the paper exhibits little effort at the level of evidence and analysis.

D = something that makes the paper not an F

F = the paper exhibits almost no effort, interest in its topic, or respect for the assignment.