

**ARH4930: Special Topics in Art History:
Contemporary Art and Science Fiction**
School of Art + Art History, University of Florida
Fall 2025

Instructor: Professor Douglas Gabriel

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Class Periods

Mondays: Period 5–6 (11:45 AM – 1:40 PM)

Wednesdays: Periods 5 (11:45 AM – 12:35 PM)

Room: FAC 0201

Office: FAC 119-B

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:55 PM – 3:50 PM + additional appointments available via PickTime scheduler (link to be provided via email)

Course Description

This course explores how the work of contemporary artists has interfaced with the genre of science fiction. It covers such themes as theories of the monster and the grotesque; time travel; the Cyberpunk movement; Afrofuturism; and ecocriticism. While holding widespread appeal in popular culture, the genre of science fiction has, over the past few decades, garnered much interest in academic circles. In this class, we will query how examples of contemporary art build upon and/or depart from classic examples of SF film and literature, as well as other cultural phenomena including music videos and video games. Works of contemporary art will be used to unpack dense theoretical ideas about science fiction, and to help us analyze the narrative devices and visual effects associated with the genre. Key questions include: How have ideas about and approaches to science fiction changed over time? How can SF help us to understand and think more critically about the world we inhabit in the present? What can representations of such creatures as aliens and cyborgs reveal about our relations with others (of different genders, ethnicities, ages, etc.)? Can the dystopian landscapes and spectacular utopias in SF help us work toward a better world now?

Objectives

- To identify major forms, actors, and episodes of science fiction across visual media
- To describe examples of contemporary art both formally and historically
- To comprehend different definitions of and approaches to science fiction
- To develop skills of close reading and visual analysis, active listening and engaged discussion

Course Materials: All readings will be provided as PDF files.

Course Requirements and Grading

Attendance: 20%

Response Posts: 15%

Discussion Points/Questions: 15%

Midterm: 15%

Final Exam: 15%

AI Teaching Assignment: 20%

Please note: Any grade of C- or below will not count toward major requirements.

For more information on UF's grading policies and assigning grade points, see:

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

Letter Grade	% Equivalency	GPA Equivalency
A	94 and above	4.00
A-	90 to 93	3.67
B+	87 to 89	3.33
B	83 to 86	3.00
B-	80 to 82	2.67
C+	77 to 79	2.33
C	73 to 76	2.00
C-	70 to 72	1.67
D+	67 to 69	1.33
D	63 to 66	1.00
D-	60 to 62	0.67
E, I, NG, WF	59 and below	0.00

Attendance Policy

Because of the structure of this course and the teaching methods utilized, attendance is mandatory. However, students who need to miss class, and who consult with the professor, will be given the opportunity (and ample time) to make up all missed classes. It is the student's responsibility to initiate communication with the professor about how they might do so, as the make-up assignments will vary depending on the topic of and activities incorporated into a given class.

This policy is consistent with the stipulations provided in the University of Florida's guidelines on attendance policies. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

Response Posts:

For **ten** of the twenty lectures, students should write (and post to Canvas) a 1–2 paragraph response to the lecture content and/or class discussion. These should not be summaries; they are meant to give you space to reflect on the material, draw connections, and raise further questions. They should be completed within 48 hours of a given class.

Discussion Points / Questions

For classes that have required readings or film screenings to be completed before class, students should prepare (and post to Canvas) 3–5 discussion points or questions related to the material. These will help guide our discussion in class. Please post these by 11 AM the day of a given class.

Midterm and Final Exam

Exams will be take-home in format, and students will have several days to complete a series of short essay responses and creative prompts.

AI Teaching Assignment

In lieu of a final paper, students will create a lesson and teach an AI chatbot about a concise aspect of the visual culture of science fiction. In addition to the transcript of the interaction, students will write a short reflection about the experience. Details will be provided in class.

Schedule

Monday, August 25: **Introduction: The Contemporary Art–SF Nexus**

Wednesday, August 27: **Origin Stories and Pulp-Era Illustration**

Monday, September 1: **Labor Day (No Class)**

Wednesday, September 3: **The Golden Age of SF + “War of the Worlds” (Again)**

Monday, September 8: **The New Wave of SF and Its Avant-Garde Precedents**

Wednesday, September 10: **Significant Others: “Monster Theory” and Alien(ation)**

Monday, September 15: **The Sublime and the Grotesque**

Wednesday, September 17: **Film Study: Tarkovsky’s *Solaris***

Monday, September 22: **Time Travel**

Wednesday, September 24: **Film Study: Chris Marker’s *La Jetée***

Monday, September 29: **The World as Disney Land: Virtual Reality, Simulacra, and Simulation**

Wednesday, October 1: **Discussion: Baudrillard After AI**

Monday, October 6: **Utopia / Dystopia**

Wednesday, October 8: **Discussion: Microtopias in Contemporary Art**

Monday, October 13: **Review for Midterm**

Wednesday, October 15: **Take-Home Midterm (Due Sunday, October 19 by 11:59 PM)**

Monday, October 20: **The Future City: Speculative Urbanism**

Wednesday, October 22: **Discussion: William Gibson's "Bridge"**

Monday, October 27: **Cyberpunk**

Wednesday, October 29: **Discussion: Hacking Contemporary Art**

Monday, November 3: **Animation + Gaming SF**

Wednesday, November 5: **Film Study: *Akira***

Monday, November 10: **Cyborgs and the Post-Human**

Wednesday, November 12: **Discussion: Body Modification in Contemporary Art**

Monday, November 17: **Asia- and Afro-Futurisms**

Wednesday, November 19: **Discussion: Exhibiting Afrofuturism**

Monday, November 24: **Thanksgiving Break (No Class)**

Wednesday, November 26: **Thanksgiving Break (No Class)**

Monday, December 1: **Eco-Criticism**

Wednesday, December 3: **Review for Final Exam**

The final exam and AI Teaching Assignment are due on Wednesday, December 10 by 11:59 PM.

Additional Information and Resources:

For the latest UF academic policies and resources, as well as campus health and wellness resources, please visit <http://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolices>