

**ARH6917 – 21894: Special Topics in Art History:  
Contemporary Art and Science Fiction (Graduate Section)**  
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%

Discussion Points/Questions: 15%

Midterm: 15%

Final Exam: 15%

Research Paper: 35%

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>

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>% Equivalency</b>	<b>GPA Equivalency</b>
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/>

### **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.

### Research Paper

Graduate students will write a 15–20 page research paper on a topic adjacent to the course material in consultation with the professor. MFA students may opt to undertake a creative project that is supplemented by a critical and well-researched artist statement.

### 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 research paper 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>