

History 510:552/American Studies 050:550, American Intellectual and Cultural History

## ***American Art & Its Publics***

Fall 2016

Thursdays 5:30-8:10, Newark Museum

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### **Course Description**

As practices of socially engaged art proliferate around the world and here in Newark – creative placemaking, arts across the curriculum, mural programs, STEAM initiatives, community arts centers, etc. – this graduate seminar in American cultural and intellectual culture will explore a deeper history of how artists, curators, and others have thought about the relationship between art and the American public. Using the Newark Museum, its collections, and the writings of its first director, John Cotton Dana, as our home base, we will delve into several themed units including public funding for the arts and its controversies, the arts and social protest, the social role of art museums, and art and the commercial market. Throughout, students are asked to put the ideas encountered in readings to work in examining specific exhibitions at the Newark Museum, using its archival collections as their research base. Throughout, then, our discussions will be informed by specific artists and exhibitions as they both shape and are shaped by key developments in twentieth-century American history.

### **Required Texts**

These books are available at the campus bookstore in Bradley Hall or used (and cheap) at online booksellers. They are also on two-hour checkout at the Dana Library reserve desk.

- Elizabeth Lunday, *Modern Art Invasion: Picasso, Duchamp, and the 1913 Armory Show that Scandalized America*
- Michael Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War*
- Susan Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power*
- Hilde Hein, *Public Art: Thinking Museums Differently*
- Harriet F. Senie, *The Tilted Arc Controversy: Dangerous Precedent?*

All other required readings on the syllabus are available as pdfs on our class Blackboard site. Please print them, read them (obviously), effusively mark them up, and bring them to class.

## Requirements

Weekly pithy commentaries (15%): Each week you will write a brief (1-2 page) commentary on the week's reading to hand in during seminar. You should feel free to comment on whatever aspect of the readings most strikes you. I only ask that your commentary be thoughtful, *not be summary*, and that it come out of a desire to construct a *critical understanding* of the text at hand (rather than, say, a desire to simply celebrate or trash it). *You need not submit a pithy commentary on the weeks that you do a presentation or open discussion* (see below).

Exhibition presentation (15%): At the beginning of the semester, each student will sign up for an exhibition presentation. With the help of Newark Museum librarian and archivist William Penniston, I have identified specific Museum exhibitions that relate to several of the course's weekly themes. Each student will spend time examining the archival holdings related to that specific exhibition and prepare a presentation on it for the class. We will collectively determine the guidelines for these presentations early in the semester.

Short exhibition essay (20% each): You will write a short (5-6 page, circa 2000-2500 word) essay that forges out of your presentation material an argument about how your chosen exhibition grows out of and engages with its historical context, both in terms of its content and form. A *full* draft of the essay is due one week after your presentation, and you will have an opportunity to revise it based on my comments.

Long essay (30%): This longer (10-15 pages, circa 5000 word) essay is an opportunity to consider how the legacy of John Cotton Dana and the long history of art's public roles is alive today in Newark. Early in the semester, each student will choose a local arts project – whether in the Newark Museum or out in the city; we will discuss the possibilities – and begin researching it, using both publicly available material and personal interviews. Like the short essay, the task is to make an argument about how your chosen arts project grows out of and engages with its historical context (in this case, the present day) both in terms of its content and form. Making that argument will require that you think back through the semester in order to determine how we came to *this* historical moment and *this* arts project. Though no formal proposal is required, you should consult with me on your topic as early as possible in the semester, and certainly by the middle of it. The final essay is due on December 15, but I am happy to read drafts if submitted at least one week before then.

Final presentation (5%): On the last day of class, we will gather to present and discuss our findings.

Participation (15%): This includes basic attendance and punctuality; informed and active participation in class discussions; and holding each other accountable – *in a civil manner* – for the scholarly claims we make. About a third of this grade will be based on the week that you open class with discussion questions.

*Note:* To my mind, more than one unexcused absence from a graduate seminar is cause for concern and constitutes grounds for serious diminution of final grades.

## Course Schedule

Where there are multiple readings, I strongly suggest reading them in the order listed.

- September 8:**           **Intro to the Class and the Newark Museum**  
Reading Assignment: Steven Kern, “The Modern American Museum Was Invented in Newark”
- September 15:**       **John Cotton Dana, the Art Museum, and the Modern City**  
Reading Assignment: Holger Cahill, “John Cotton Dana and the Newark Museum”; and three essays by John Cotton Dana, “Relation of Art to American Life,” “The New Museum,” and “The Gloom of the Museum”
- September 22:**       **The Museum Archives and Exhibition Files**  
Reading Assignment: Ward, “What’s Important About the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?”; and Dana, “An Industrial Exhibit in a Municipal Museum”
- September 29:**       **Modern Art and Its Publics, I**  
Reading Assignment: selections from Zurier, *Picturing the City* (intro and chapters 1, 4, and 7)
- October 6:**           **Modern Art and Its Publics, II**  
Reading Assignment: Lunday, *The Modern Art Invasion*
- October 13:**       **The State and the Arts, I: The New Deal**  
Reading Assignment: Cahill, “New Horizons in American Art”; Grieve, selections from *The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture*; Harris, selections from *Federal Art and National Culture*
- October 20:**       **The State and the Arts, II: The Cold War**  
**NOTE: Meet in 338 Conklin today!!**  
Reading Assignment: Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit*
- October 27:**       **The State and the Arts, III: The NEA**  
Reading Assignment: Binkiewicz, “A Modernist Vision”; selections from Ziegler, *Arts in Crisis*; selection from Danto, *Playing with the Edge*
- November 3:**       **Public Art, I**  
Reading Assignment: Hein, *Public Art*
- November 10:**      **Art & Social Protest, I**  
Reading Assignment: Cahan, *Mounting Frustration*
- November 17:**      **Art & Social Protest, II**  
Reading Assignment: Becker, “Herbert Marcuse and the Subversive Potential of Art”; Reed, “Acting UP against AIDS: The (Very) Graphic Arts in a Moment of Crisis”; Gaspar de Alba, “‘Between the Ghetto and the Melting Pot’: Popular Hegemony”
- November 22:**      **TUESDAY; THURSDAY CLASSES MEET**  
**Public Art, II**  
Reading Assignment: Senie, *The Tilted Arc Controversy*

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- December 1:**           **Creative Placemaking**  
Reading Assignment: “Defining Creative Placemaking”  
(<https://www.arts.gov/NEARTS/2012v3-arts-and-culture-core/defining-creative-placemaking>)
- December 8:**           **Class Presentations and Wrap-up**  
**Remember:** Last day to submit draft of long essay for my comments!
- December 15:**       **Long Essay Due**

### **Rutgers ODS Statement**

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. For more information please contact Kate Torres at (973) 353-5375 or in the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219 or by contacting [odsnewark@rutgers.edu](mailto:odsnewark@rutgers.edu).

### **Rutgers Academic Honesty and Plagiarism Policy**

Academic dishonesty in this class will not be tolerated. Period. This includes plagiarism, cheating, and any other behavior described in the Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy. **For this reason it is absolutely crucial that you familiarize yourself with this document, which describes the actions that will be counted as violations of academic integrity:**  
<http://policies.rutgers.edu/10213-currentpdf>

You must include the following Rutgers Honor Code Pledge statement on every assignment which you turn in: “On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this assignment. (Name) (Signature – typing your name is fine) (Date).”

If anyone has any questions at all about this policy, what counts as a violation of academic integrity, or even simply how to cite sources on a paper (a topic which we will cover in class), I am always willing to discuss these issues with you. Students who plagiarize assignments or otherwise violate academic integrity will receive serious penalties, ranging from a failing grade in the class to suspension.

**DISCUSSION & PRESENTATION SIGN-UP SHEET**  
fall 2016

- September 8:**        **Intro to the Class and the Newark Museum**
- September 15:**    **John Cotton Dana, the Art Museum, and the Modern City**
- September 22:**    **The Museum Archives and Exhibition Files**
- September 29:**    **Modern Art and Its Publics, I**  
Discussion Starter:  
  
Exhibition: American Paintings of Today (1917)  
Exhibition Presenter:
- October 6:**        **Modern Art and Its Publics, II**  
Discussion Starter:  
  
Exhibition: Paintings by Max Weber (1913)  
Exhibition Presenter:
- October 13:**      **The State and the Arts, I: The New Deal**  
Discussion Starter:  
  
Exhibition: WPA Federal Art Project, Index of American Design (1935)  
Exhibition Presenter:
- October 20:**      **The State and the Arts, II: The Cold War**  
Discussion Starter:  
  
Exhibition: Native Peoples in the Theaters of War (1942-44)  
Exhibition Presenter:
- October 27:**      **The State and the Arts, III: The NEA**  
Discussion Starter:  
  
Exhibition: NEA Challenge Grant for Renovation (1983)  
Exhibition Presenter:
- November 3:**     **Public Art, I**  
Discussion Starter:  
  
Exhibition: In the Public Eye: Sculpture in Newark (1975)  
Exhibition Presenter:

- November 10:**     **Art & Social Protest, I**  
Discussion Starter:
- Exhibition: Art of Africa/Black Motion Artists (1969)  
Exhibition Presenter:
- November 17:**     **Art & Social Protest, II**  
Discussion Starter:
- Exhibition: Art With a Conscience (1995)  
Exhibition Presenter:
- November 22:**     **TUESDAY; THURSDAY CLASSES MEET**  
**Public Art, II**  
Discussion Starter:
- Exhibition: Street Art of Black America (1974-75)  
Exhibition Presenter:
- December 1:**     **Creative Placemaking**  
Discussion Starter:
- December 8:**     **Class Presentations and Wrap-up**