EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION
ART HISTORY
School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design
Department of Visual Art Art History

FA / ARTH 4800J.30 SECTION M
PHOTOGRAPHY IN CONTEMPORARY ART
FALL 2018 / WINTER 2019

Last Modified Date: 12/03/2018

COURSE CALENDAR DESCRIPTION

Examines the relationship of photography to contemporary art with particular focus on a range of global artists who draw on the aesthetics and conventions of family photography and related archives to explore issues such as identity and migration.

Examines the standing of photography in the recent history of art. In the early 1960s, both the fine art and the popular photograph were increasingly incorporated into the materials and practices of the studio, market, museum and art theory. Later, with conceptual art, photography developed into a primary means of analysis and presentation of fine art itself, yielding further examination of the institutional and historiographic basis of the medium, including decisive essays by practitioners, theorists and art historians that critiqued and presented new, complex frameworks for considering photography as a system of signs and social meaning.

Prompted by this theoretical move, and utilizing more technologically sophisticated instruments, artists working with still and moving photographic images extended the pictorial and formal aspects of photography, lending it qualities analogous to those of the history of painting and, in installations using projection, the space of sculpture. This course traces and elaborates this history, looking at the aesthetic, social and methodological implications of this development, including focus on such artists as Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, Cindy Sherman, Martha Rosler and Jeff Wall, and writers such as Roland Barthes, Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss and Abigail Solomon-Godeau. While historical and theoretical attention to photography as fine art is a continual concern, other issues, such as the reproducibility and ubiquity of photography as spectacular culture are figured, as is consideration of interpretive models such as semiotics, feminism, institutional critique, and the conditions of photography under digitisation. The course can take advantage of the resources of local collections and exhibitions-at the Art Gallery of Ontario, The Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, the Power Plant and the Art Gallery of York University-in order for students to have direct contact with art works exemplifying the themes and concerns of the course.

INSTRUCTOR(S)

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Section / Format / Term</th>
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<tbody>
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SPECIAL FEATURES

This course is less a survey of contemporary photography than it is an examination of the interplay between photography, other artistic practices, and the wider field of critical discourse over the past few decades. Beginning in the early 1960s, fine art and the popular photograph were increasingly incorporated into the materials and practices of the studio. Later, with conceptual art, photography developed into a primary means of analysis and presentation of fine art itself. Through decisive essays, practitioners, theorists, and art historians critiqued and presented new, complex frameworks for considering photography as a system of signs and social meaning. This course traces and elaborates this history, looking at the aesthetic, social, and methodological implications of this development. This year, we will focus on the relationship between photography and (auto)biography—broadly defined—in theory and contemporary art practice. We will explore themes such as memory, identity, family photography, autofictions, creative archiving, and collaborative portraiture.
This is a blended course. There are a number of films, additional readings, discussions, and online peer review components, which is why we will meet for 2 hours a week instead of 3. Therefore, our Moodle site and the work that transpires there is essential to the course.

**TOPICS AND CONCEPTS**

**Required Text:**
Available at York University Bookstore ($16.00)

All other texts for this course are available electronically via Moodle. It is essential that you read the assigned texts/watch the assigned films and videos before class. In order to read or watch actively and to create a tangible record of your thoughts on the texts, some students find it helpful to keep a reading journal and to print out a hard copy or annotate PDFs online. Readings, films and videos might take 2-3 hours a week outside of class time, but keep in mind that the equivalent of 1 hour of weekly class time is directed to online activities such as watching films, reading, and answering questions posted to Moodle.

**Schedule:**
(This schedule is tentative and subject to change)

**Week 1 (Jan. 3) Memory, Love, and Death: Snapshots and Science Fiction**
“Today it is as if we have repressed the profound madness of photography.” -Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980)

**Read:** Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Part I
**Watch:** Chris Marker, *La Jetée* 1962: https://yorku.kanopy.com/video/la-jetee

**Week 2 (Jan 10) Theorizing Photography and (Auto)Biography**

**Read:** Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Part II

**Week 3 (Jan. 17) Cindy Sherman and Carrie Mae Weems**


**Week 4 (Jan. 24) Photography and Family**

Watch: Nan Goldin, *I’ll be Your Mirror* (BBC, 1995, 51 min)  
https://yorku.kanopy.com/video/ill-be-your-mirror


Week 5 (Jan. 31)  
**Class visit to the Ryerson Image Centre – Jo Spence Archive**

Charlene Heath, Archives Assistant, will discuss the Jo Spence Archive  


Week 6 (Feb. 7)  
**Family and Photography, continued…**


Watch: Thomas Allan Harris, *Through a Lens Darkly: Black Photographers and the Emergence of a People* (First Run Pictures, 2014, 90 min)

Week 7 (Feb. 14)  
**The Family as Political Unit**


Watch: Excerpt from “LaToya Ruby Frazier in Conversation with Daywoud Bey” (*Aperture*, 2014). Start at the 11:30 mark of the conversation and watch through minute 36 (or beyond):  
https://vimeo.com/110471405

Read: Larry Abbott’s interview with Shelley Niro:  
http://dev.cushing.org/abbott/sniro.htm

Feb. 21st  
**Reading Week – NO CLASSES**

Week 8 (Feb. 28)  
**Inventing/Destroying the Archive**


Watch: Max Dean – *As Yet Untitled* (4 mins):  
https://youtube.com/watch?v=XXYqGMmsA9w

Read: Simone Wharton, “How the lost are found” (*AGO Art matters* blog on Max Dean)  
http://artmatters.ca/wp/tag/album/

Research/Read: Look up Ydessa Hendeles’ *Teddy Bear Project*. The project was first shown in Toronto in 2002 and most recently at the New Museum in New York in 2016. Read a review and generate a question or two about the project as it relates to family photographs.

Week 9 (March 7)  
**Online Student Research Proposals** (no class meeting)

Read: Excerpt on Academics Papers from *How to Write about Contemporary Art* by Gilda Williams:  
107-125.

Week 10 (March 14)  
**Portraiture and Participation**

“nobody can commit photography alone” -Marshall McLuhan, 1964
**Watch:** Susan Meiselas and Wendy Ewald, “Patterns of Collaboration” (Magnum Foundation: Photography Expanded, 2017, 26 min)
https://vimeo.com/223191526

**Listen, Look, and Read:** Sara Angelucci, “My Mother’s Threads: daughter weaves garment factory stories into art” (24 min):

128-135

Week 11 (March 21) **Class Visit to the Art Gallery of Ontario: “Mickalene Thomas: Femmes Noires”**

Week 12 (March 28) **Digital Directions**


**Read:** Carmen Winant, “Our Bodies, Online: Feminist Images in the Age of Instagram”:
https://aperture.org/blog/bodies-online-feminism/

**LIST OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EXAMPLES OF**

At the end of this course, students who complete all requirements will be able to:

1. attain an understanding of the role of photography in recent artistic practice (reading responses and discussion)
2. identify visual, thematic, and theoretical concerns related to photography and (auto)biography and understand their implications in terms of gender, sexuality, and race (readings, discussions, research paper)
3. Understand, synthesize, and apply the methods of photography theory and cultural history (reading responses and research paper project)
4. Look at, think, and write critically about the intersections of contemporary photographic practice and issues of identity and (auto)biography (reading responses and research paper project)

**GRADED ASSESSMENT**

1. A) **Reading Responses** (#1 due Jan 10th or 17th and you will sign up for a date for #2)

   **10% and 15% = 25%**

   Responses should be about 1000 words (4 pages double spaced, typed) and should respond to one reading. In each response, you will *briefly* summarize the argument of the text and you will then devote most of the document to analyzing the argument. This entails analyzing how the author frames and builds their argument, considering its relationship to arguments made by other authors, and the text’s possible use in making sense of contemporary photographic practices engaged with issues of identity. This means you should take some time to connect the readings to images, either ones we have considered in the course or ones you are already familiar with. The point of this assignment is absolutely not a “reading report.” Simply summarizing the article you read without critically engaging with the arguments presented by the author or the issues raised is unacceptable. Be creative and be thoughtful. You are welcome to point out possible weaknesses in the article. Just be sure to back up your argument. Each response should end with a question or two for discussion.

   On the days your responses are due, you must bring a printed version of your reading response and be ready to discuss it with the class. The objective of this assignment is to help you read critically and actively. These
responses will help you digest the readings, help you identify confusing issues and provide you with ready access to your ideas so you can contribute meaningfully to class discussions. Many students find it useful to sketch out a reading response for their own use even when they are not signed up to submit their response for evaluation.

1. B) Research Paper

Please choose one artist whose photo-based work you would like to consider in light of the issues we have discussed in the course. Your research topic needs to be approved by the instructor and confirmed before Reading Week. Ideally, we will discuss them and you will have a topic before you leave class on February 14th but if you need a bit more time to consider your options, please let me know by email before Friday February 15 at 10pm. All other components of this assignment will be submitted via Moodle.

Research Paper Components:

1) **Online Research Proposal** (due Monday, March 4th by 10pm) 20%

This is a significant part of the final paper assignment. Drawing on the course material and your research, this step asks you to synthesize the sources you have read and to develop your particular line of inquiry. The proposal should consist of a paragraph introducing your topic, another paragraph that identifies your thesis and research questions, a brief outline of your analysis, and finally a paragraph on how your treatment of the topic will differ from existing research on this artist. This proposal should be about 2-3 pages of double-spaced text. In addition to the written text, you should submit a bibliography of catalogue essays, journal articles, theoretical texts, and any other relevant sources. You should include a link to at least one image by the artist under consideration.

Components of the proposal to be considered include a clear thesis statement, relevant and concise discussion of the work, logical sequencing of argument, enjoyable format, and an ability to stay within the space limit of 750 words plus references.

2) **Peer Review** (due Friday, March 8th by 10 pm) 10%

The proposals will be assessed by another seminar participant and by the instructor. When reviewing the proposal, please do your best to be a “critical friend.” You should be as critical as you need to be to help the other student write their best paper. However, you obviously want to do this as tactfully and positively as possible. The objective of this component of the assignment is to improve each other’s work. Both the peer reviewer and the instructor will offer specific feedback as indicated on the evaluation sheet (posted on Moodle) and will give the proposal a letter grade. The instructor will take the peer assessment into consideration; however, the instructor will determine the grade.

3) **Research Paper** (due via Moodle on Wednesday, April 3rd by 10 pm) 30%

In the final essay, you will develop your argument into a paper. The shape and argument of this paper is for you to decide. Your paper, like the proposal, must include a clear thesis statement, relevant and concise discussion of the work, logical sequencing of an analytical argument, critical engagement with some of the texts we have read this term as well as others, enjoyable format, and an ability to stay within the space limit. The essay should be between 2000 – 2500 words.

1. C) Participation 15%

Participation in this seminar class is mandatory and since this participation requires your presence in the classroom, attendance is mandatory as well. You will be asked to participate in the class in a variety of ways. We will often break down into small groups to discuss particular readings. You may also be asked to debate a particular issue or to undertake a short writing assignment. Of course, we will also have larger group
discussions. I have listed some of the photographers and artists we will be discussing each week, but these are not exhaustive so feel free to contribute. Finally, you are expected to participate in Moodle discussions online.

In order to receive full marks for participation you must be present, on time and well prepared at every class, and you must also contribute to the discussion in ways that are both thoughtful and respectful. Coming late to class, leaving early, not being prepared and not participating in class or small group discussions all make the seminar less enjoyable for everyone and will impact your grade. **When you are late or absent, you are responsible for finding out what happened in class by contacting one of your classmates.**

**Late Assignments**

You will lose 10% from the assignment grade for each day writing assignments are late. The exception is the reading response, which loses 50% because one of its core purposes is to foster discussion in class. Late assignments will not always be returned to you along with assignments received on time. Exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc., may be entertained by the Course Instructor but will require supporting documentation (e.g., a doctor’s letter).

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Last date to drop a winter term (W) course without receiving a grade: **March 8, 2019**

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

York students are required to maintain high standards of academic integrity. Please consult the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty: [http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/academic-honesty-senate-policy-on/](http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/academic-honesty-senate-policy-on/)

Plagiarism and cheating are taken extremely seriously. If you have any questions or concerns about how to properly cite a source, please consult your TA for clarification. Please also consult: [https://spark.library.yorku.ca/academic-integrity-what-is-academic-integrity/](https://spark.library.yorku.ca/academic-integrity-what-is-academic-integrity/)

**ACCESSIBILITY:**

York University is committed to making reasonable accommodations and adaptations in order to make equitable the educational experience of students with special needs (physical, learning, and psychiatric disabilities) and to promote their full integration into the campus community. Please let your professor know immediately if you have any concerns or require assistance with regard to class participation or the completion of your course assignments.

For further information on services and accommodations offered at York University, please contact Student Accessibility Services: [http://accessibility.students.yorku.ca/](http://accessibility.students.yorku.ca/)

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**Many courses utilize Moodle, York University's course website system. If your course is using Moodle, click here to access it.**

*Moodle @ York University*