

ART AS SOCIAL ACTION

AVT 309:001, 3 credits, Spring 2017

MW 10:30-11:45 a.m., AB 1007

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2017 Art & Design Building
Office Hours: By appointment
MW 8:30-9 a.m. & noon-1:30 p.m.

Art is not only a form of action, it is a form of social action. For art is a type of communication, and when it enters the environment it produces its effects just as any other form of action does.

-Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality*

Every great work of art... is a celebration of insubordination against the betrayals, horrors and infidelities of life.

-Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*

Begin with art, because art tries to take us outside ourselves. It is a matter of trying to create an atmosphere and context so conversation can flow back and forth, and we can be influenced by each other.

-W. E. B. Dubois

[T]he creation and public sharing of art is essential to any practice of freedom.

-bell hooks

Course Description

Art as Social Action is an encounter with artworks across all media by artists for whom social engagement is the inspiration for art making, and for whom the social encounter itself becomes a creative medium. Through mini-lectures, guest artists, field trips, and collaborative and individual projects, we will explore historical and contemporary art of social engagement (focused on American art and artists, but looking outward to artists from outside the U.S. as well). We also create individual and collaborative projects that address the social in a variety of media and environments.

Among the questions we will be exploring this term are the following:

- What is the history of art as social action?
- Can art really make a difference in the social world?
- What are the different types of art that engage with the social, and who are some especially interesting practitioners?
- What do people who want to make art that engages with the social have to know beyond how to make art, and how do they get the knowledge they need?

- What are the ethical and intellectual responsibilities of artists who engage in social practice art?

During the course we will also engage in experiential learning about collaboration, public engagement, project planning and execution, follow-up and evaluation.

Course Learning Objectives

By actively participating in this course, students will be able to:

- Understand that all art springs from particular historical, social, and cultural circumstances
- Identify the major intersections of cultural and social circumstances with the practices of particular individual artists or groups of artists of the 20th and 21st centuries
- Recognize that culture is a creative process, not merely expressive, within social movements
- Invigorate their own artistic practice with the experience of having participated in art interventions
- Apply the principles of culture as a creative process through participating in collaborative artmaking

COURSE TEXTS

Required Texts

You are not required to purchase any textbooks for this class. Readings and media assignments will be posted for you (as PDFs or as links) on our AVT 309 course site on Blackboard. Files distributed in this way may be password protected—I will provide you with the password in class, and it is also provided in a PDF file at the top of the Course Content page on our Blackboard site.

Any moving-image materials assigned for viewing *outside* of class either will be screened at an announced time and location, made available on reserve in the Media Services area of the Johnson Center Library, or provided to you via Blackboard as a link to a download or a streaming site. Where our viewing assignments are available for streaming on such sites as Netflix, HuluPlus, Amazon Video, iTunes, Vudu or other repositories, I will identify these sites for you for your convenience in viewing them.

From time to time, I may substitute or supplement the assignments on the schedule with other materials (articles, websites, etc.). If and when I do so, you will receive instructions for accessing the material by e-mail and on Blackboard.

Statement on Materials of a Potentially Objectionable Nature: For AVT majors in the School of Art, this is a elective course that investigates a range of contemporary art artwork and art practices. We may from time to time be viewing or reading materials that some students may find distressing or objectionable for religious, cultural, or personal reasons. These materials are presented as objects of study and analysis and as part of the educational process, without any intent to cause offense or distress. If you are concerned that your religious or cultural beliefs would make it impossible for you to participate in part or in whole in this class, please see me at the beginning of the term so that we can discuss ways to manage your concerns.

Suggested Texts for Further Study

On Blackboard, I will be posting annotated lists of books, periodicals and web sites for you to investigate. I will bring some of them to your attention in class, and you will be reading selections from some of them. These lists will be continually updated throughout the semester.

ATTENDANCE

DON'T MISS CLASS, DON'T BE LATE, DON'T LEAVE EARLY.

Much of the learning in this course takes place in the classroom and cannot be gleaned merely from reading texts or completing assignments. ***Therefore, each absence beyond THREE over the course of the term will lower your final grade by 5 points; significantly more than three absences may cause you to fail the course regardless of your grades on particular assignments. Each late arrival or early departure will count as ½ absence.*** *Late arrival* means arriving after I have taken the initial roll. *Early departure* means leaving before the scheduled end time of the class. If you arrive late, it is your responsibility to sign the “late arrival” sheet that I will set out in the classroom when I have completed the initial taking of the roll.

In case of absence, you are responsible for finding out what happened in class by consulting a classmate. If we have in-class assignments or presentations when you are late or absent, this work cannot be made up.

Please understand: there are no “excused” absences. I permit three absences that will not count against you, so be sure that you preserve them for use during illness, unavoidable personal issues, or other situations that require you not to be present. If a serious issue arises that may affect your presence or participation for a longer period of time (serious personal illness, family illness, etc.), consult with me immediately and we will determine what you should do.

If you are absent on either day that we do proposal planning or other announced collaborative work in class, your final grade for the relevant project may be reduced, I will make a decision based on the nature of your absence and the information I gather about your participation in the collaborative process.

SPECIAL NOTE: MASON CLOSURES AND UNFORESEEN INSTRUCTOR ABSENCES

MASON CLOSURES

Please be sure you are signed up for Mason Alerts to receive notification of unanticipated university closures or delays caused by campus emergencies, weather issues or other unforeseeable problems. In the event of such an alert, we will follow the university's decisions for whether our class will meet. I will also send an announcement as soon as possible via Blackboard to confirm, and will follow that as soon as possible with a second announcement to let you know how we will adjust our schedule and assignments. *Even if Mason does not close or delay its opening, please use good judgment if you live in an area where ice and snow make travel too risky on a particular day.*

UNFORESEEN INSTRUCTOR ABSENCES

If I ever have to cancel class because of illness or a personal emergency, I will send an announcement via Blackboard as soon as I am aware of the issue. If you miss the announcement, you will see a note on the classroom door when you arrive. I will follow my announcement as soon as possible with a second announcement to let you know how we will adjust our schedule and assignments.

PREPARED PARTICIPATION

Consistent class participation is expected of all students. I expect you to read and/or view carefully all assignments, and to come to class prepared to discuss the day's materials. I will also expect courteous behavior in discussions; that is, respectful exchanges (even in heated disagreements) and enough self-awareness to keep yourself from monopolizing the discussion.

Your participation will be considered "adequate" (C-level) if you are paying attention, adding a comment now and then, and following my instructions for in-class activities. "Good" (B-level) participation includes all of the C-level expectations plus active interaction with teacher and students on a regular basis about the works we read or the projects we've done. "Excellent" (A-level) participation includes all of the B-level expectations plus out-of-class enrichment activities, such as bringing to class the URL for a website that is relevant to the class discussion. D-level participation grades result from disruptive behavior, texting or using social media during class, discourtesy, inattention or sleeping in class, or lack of involvement in group work. F-level participation grades result from excessive absence and/or egregious D-level behaviors.

REQUIRED COMMUNICATION VIA MASON EMAIL AND BLACKBOARD

Please note that because of university policies, I can only communicate with you via your Mason e-mail address. You will be expected to check your George Mason University e-mail and the Blackboard site for this course frequently during the term. Updates to the syllabus and other vital course information will be sent to you at your George Mason University e-mail address and via the Blackboard site. You will be responsible for having read whatever I send you via these means.

ABSOLUTE BAN ON ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND NON-CLASS-RELATED COMPUTING DURING CLASS

It is extremely rude to be engaged outside the classroom while class is in session—especially in a small room where we are all packed together and can see each others' actions. Phones and social media distract other students, and they distract me too. **PUT YOUR PHONE AWAY** and deactivate social media apps on your tablet or computer during class time.

Computers and tablets may **ONLY** be used during class time if the work is **DIRECTLY** related to what we are doing at the moment. **NEVER** work on assignments for other classes during our class time. One violation will result in a warning; more than one violation will affect your grade, because I will mark you absent for that class.

ASSIGNMENTS

Students will demonstrate their mastery of the course learning objectives by completing the assignments and requirements listed below. Due dates for projects and experiments are in the schedule at the end of this syllabus and on the assignment sheets (which will be provided on Blackboard)

- Reading the assigned texts and other resources and participating fully, actively and thoughtfully in class activities and discussion.
- Engaging in a series of **5 experiments** (at home; only minimal materials required). Some are thought-experiments, while others will require you to try something specific. Each experiment will be reported on a response sheet specific to that assignment
- Participating actively in **3 collaborative projects** (initial project descriptions and deadlines will be provided via Blackboard; the details will be developed collaboratively as a part of the project)
 - Project 1: Communicating Human Rights project (with accompanying reflection paper of 3-4 pages)
 - Project 2: Sensory observation project (with accompanying reflection paper of 3-4 pages)
 - Project 3: Interventions project (with accompanying reflection paper of 4-5 pages)
- A final integrative essay (approximately 8-10 pages, exclusive of images) that will allow you to draw together your research, experiential learning, and personal responses to the work of the term.
- If opportunities arise to attend talks, exhibitions, or other activities related to our course subject matter, I may alter the assignments to fit these opportunities (e.g., by giving the option to replace one experiment with an available opportunity)

TURNING IN YOUR WORK

Written components of projects will be turned in via an assignment drop box on Blackboard; no printed copy is required. Assignment sheets will give full instructions for how to turn in project documentation and other non-written materials.

NOTE: If your deadline is approaching and Blackboard is experiencing problems, send your submission to me via e-mail so that you can meet the deadline, and then post it to Blackboard at your first opportunity.

ASSIGNMENT LATENESS PENALTIES

Any assignments turned in after the *announced due date and time* will be **marked down one letter grade per day it is late, with an additional one letter grade deducted for each subsequent**

class period until the assignment is turned in. Work that is more than two weeks late will not be graded, but it is to your advantage to turn it in anyway: a paper or project that is accepted but ungraded counts into your term grade as an F, while a paper or project not received at all counts into your term grade as a zero.

No additional work will be accepted for a grade after 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday 5/3. NO EXCEPTIONS.

WEIGHTING OF ASSIGNMENTS

Course assignments and requirements will be weighted as follows in determining your final grade:

Experiments (5% each)	25%
Project 1	10%
Project 2	10%
Project 3	15%
Final essay	20%
Attendance and PREPARED participation	20%

Note that excessive absence or failure to turn in any of the major assignments may result in failure of the course regardless of these weightings. For further explanation, please see the sections above on “Attendance” and “Assignment Lateness Penalties.”

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND PROJECTS

IN WRITING ASSIGNMENTS, I WILL LOOK FOR THE FOLLOWING:

- A clear understanding of the assignment, evidence of engagement with the topic, and an attempt to find personal solutions
- Individual initiative and an effort to carry assignments as far as possible
- Evidence of drawing upon the materials studied in class, additional research and other resources to expand understanding and enrich content
- Overall quality of thinking and writing.
- Attention to the proprieties of college-level writing

IN PROJECTS, I WILL LOOK FOR THE FOLLOWING:

- The degree to which the project responds to the assignment and demonstrates growth of understanding of the issue through the process of developing the project
- Individual initiative and an effort to think through the implications of the project
- Clear presentation of your process in class and your openness in responding to questions and to *constructive* criticism from me and from your fellow class members
- Technical and aesthetic merit, the appropriateness of the craft choices to the project’s objectives, the intellectual and emotional engagement that the project engenders, and the degree to which it engages its intended audience

In general, a paper or project in the A range shows SUPERIOR mastery of these criteria (exploring the possibilities of the assignment well beyond what's required, with significant success); a paper or project in the B range is STRONG (showing ambition and effort beyond the bare requirements, with some success); a C or C+ paper or project is COMPETENT (meets all criteria adequately); a C- or D paper or project is FLAWED (missing the mark on several important criteria); an F paper or project is SEVERELY FLAWED, INCOMPLETE, or MORE THAN TWO WEEKS LATE. A paper or project that is not submitted receives a zero.

COURSE GRADING CRITERIA

Final grades reflect how well you accomplish the objectives of the course. Possible grades for this class are A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D, F.

In calculating your final grade, I will apply the following equivalencies:

A+:	98 and above	B+:	88-89	C+:	78-79	D:	60-69
A:	95-97	B:	85-87	C:	75-77	F:	59 and below
A-:	90-94	B-:	80-84	C-:	70-74		

Note: Scores are rounded one decimal place to the nearest whole number. Thus 93.5=94; 88.467=88.

Academic Policies

As a courtesy to others in the class, and in accordance with George Mason University policy, please turn off all cellphones and other wireless communication devices at the start of class. The instructor will keep her cell phone active to assure receipt of any Mason Alerts in a timely fashion.

Commitment to Diversity

This class will be conducted as an *intentionally* inclusive community that celebrates diversity and welcomes the participation in the life of the university of faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. All may feel free to speak and to be heard without fear that the content of the opinions they express will bias the evaluation of their academic performance or hinder their opportunities for participation in class activities. In turn, all are expected to be respectful of each other without regard to race, class, linguistic background, religion, political beliefs, gender identity and expression, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, veteran's status, or physical ability.

Resource for University Policies

The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs. Other policies are available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

Important Deadlines

Last Day to Add/Last Day to Drop with no tuition penalty January 30

Last Day to Drop	February 24
Selective Withdrawal Period	February 27-March 31
Incomplete work from Fall 2016 due to instructor	March 31

Once the add-and-drop deadlines have passed, instructors do not have the authority to approve requests from students to add or drop/withdraw late. Requests for late adds (up until the last day of classes) must be made by the student in the School of Art office (or in the office of the department offering the course), and generally are only approved in the case of a documented university error (such as a problem with financial aid being processed). Requests for non-selective withdrawals and retroactive adds (adds after the last day of classes) must be approved by the academic dean of the college in which the student's major is located. For AVT/School of Art majors, that is the CVPA Office of Academic Affairs, College Hall C211.

Official Communications via Mason E-Mail

To comply with University, Virginia and federal student privacy requirements, I am only permitted to exchange e-mail communications with you via your MasonLive e-mail account. You are responsible for the content of all university communication sent to your MasonLive e-mail account, so be sure to activate and check it regularly.

Statement on Ethics in Teaching and Practicing Art and Design

As professionals responsible for the education of undergraduate and graduate art and design students, the faculty of the School of Art adheres to the ethical standards and practices incorporated in the professional Code of Ethics of our national accreditation organization, The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

Academic Integrity

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously, and violations are handled as grave matters.

What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind), please ask for guidance and clarification.

No grade is important enough to justify Honor Code violations, for which there are serious consequences that will follow you for the rest of your life. If you feel unusual pressure about your grade in this or any other course, please talk to me or to a member of the Mason Counseling and Psychological Services staff.

Students with Disabilities and Learning Differences

If you have a diagnosed disability or learning difference and you need academic accommodations, please inform me at the beginning of the semester and contact the Office of Disability Services (703-993-2474). You must provide me with a faculty contact sheet from ODS outlining the accommodations needed for your disability or learning difference. All academic accommodations must be arranged in advance through ODS (<http://ods.gmu.edu>).

The Collaborative Learning Hub (CLUB)

Located in Johnson Center 311 (703-993-3141), the lab offers in-person one-on-one support for Adobe Creative Suite, Microsoft Office, Blackboard, and other software. Dual-monitor PCs make the lab ideal for collaborating on group projects. Macs are also available, as well as a digital recording space, collaborative tables, and a SMART Board. Free workshops are also available (Adobe and Microsoft) through Training and Certification; visit ittraining.gmu.edu to see the schedule of workshops and to sign up.

Other Useful Campus Resources

- *For help with writing:* The Writing Center, A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200 or <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>
 - *For help with research:* University Libraries “Ask a Librarian” service; send a text message to 703-291-1468 or go to <http://library.gmu.edu/ask>
 - *For help with academic problems or with personal problems affecting academic performance:* Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS); (703) 993-2380 or <http://caps.gmu.edu>
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School of Art Enrichment Opportunities

ArtsBus

The dates for Spring 2017 ArtsBus trips are February 18, March 25, and April 15.

The ArtsBus is an all-day trip to New York City’s art districts via chartered buses. School of Art faculty members accompany the trip and offer 2-hour guided tours of various museums and galleries when you arrive. If you choose to join one of the tours, you will have several hours of free time on your own afterwards (typically starting at about 1 p.m.) to have lunch, to visit additional art venues or to explore the city.

- AVT 300 is a 0-credit course open to students in any major; the course has no tuition charge but does have a course fee. The course fee covers the cost of your seat on the bus, plus the administrative costs of running the ArtsBus program. The fee is less than the cost of a ticket purchased at the general box office rate.
- Each SOA major must have up to five AVT 300/ArtsBus credits before graduation. For credit to appear on your transcript, you must enroll in AVT 300, complete the required trip and work, and receive an “S” (satisfactory). These credit requirements also apply to anyone who intends to travel to New York independently, or do the DC Alternate Assignment. Alternate trips must be approved by the instructor of the course that is requiring an ArtsBus trip.

- If you plan/need to go on multiple ArtsBus trips during a semester and need them towards your total requirement, you must enroll in multiple sections of AVT 300.
- Non-AVT majors taking art classes do not need ArtsBus credit for graduation **BUT** may need to go on the ArtsBus for a class assignment. You can either sign up for AVT 300 or buy a ticket for the bus trip at the Center for the Arts.

Please go to the ArtsBus website: <http://artsbus.gmu.edu> "Student Information" for additional, very important information regarding ArtsBus policy.

Visual Voices Lecture Series

Visual Voices is a yearlong series of lectures by artists, art historians and others about contemporary art and art practice. Visual Voices lectures are held on Thursday evenings from 7:20- 9:00 p.m. in Harris Theater. The Spring 2017 schedule includes five lectures:

January 26	Walter Kravitz, "Art is what isn't—studio pursuits"
February 9	J.J. McCracken, "The Dirt Eater and the Scold: Reflections on a Research-led Art Practice"
March 9	John Jacob, "Photography at the Smithsonian American Art Museum"
March 23	E. Carmen Ramos, "Ruffino Tamayo: The New York Years"
March 30	Helen Frederick, "Absorbing Traditions: The Labor of Art"

Publishing Work Completed for This Class in *The George Mason Review*

The George Mason Review, Mason's journal of undergraduate student scholarship, publishes excellent undergraduate scholarship and creative research from across the disciplines. Every year *The George Mason Review* recognizes outstanding student work with a total of \$900 in awards. For more information, talk to me or visit the GMR website at <http://gmreview.gmu.edu/>

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Topic and Assignment Schedule

Spring 2017

This schedule is subject to change. Updates will be announced in class and/or by e-mail and will be made available on Blackboard.

Date	Topic	Assignments due on this date
Week 1 1/23-1/25	1/23: Welcome, introductions, photos, course procedures, introductory activities	1/23: No assignment.
	1/25: The underpinnings of commitment to social engagement	1/25: Review the materials in the 1/25 folder on Blackboard. By 8:30 a.m. today, post a link to an artist whose socially engaged work has inspired you.
Week 2 1/30-2/1	1/30: The Engaged Artist as Nomad, Observer, Connector: Histories and practitioners Introduction of Project 1	1/30: Review the materials in the 1/30 folder on Blackboard. Review description for Project 1 (in Course Content folder on Blackboard)
	2/1: Social action, social practice, intervention: histories and genres	2/1: Review the materials in the 2/1 folder on Blackboard.
Week 3 2/6-2/8	2/6: Crisis as Opportunity: Communities in crisis and the arts of survival	2/6: Review the materials in the 2/6 folder on Blackboard.
	2/8: Does Art Change the World? Hint: Start Where You Are	2/8: Review the materials in the 2/8 folder on Blackboard.
Week 4 2/13-2/15	2/13: Reclaiming the Streets: Art as Street Politics	2/13: Review the materials in the 2/13 folder on Blackboard.
	2/15: Has art ever changed the world?	2/15: Review the materials in the 2/15 folder on Blackboard. Project 1 completed; Project 1 reflection paper posted to Blackboard by 8:30 a.m.
Week 5 2/20-2/22	2/20: Be the Change You Want to See: Or, Wearing Your Art on Your Sleeve Introduction of Project 2	2/20: Review the materials in the 2/20 folder on Blackboard. Experiment 1 due
	2/22: Engaged Art as Social Experiment	2/22: Review the materials in the 2/22 folder on Blackboard.

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Date	Topic	Assignments due on this date
Week 6 2/27-3/1	2/27: Artist as Sensuous Observer	2/27: Review the materials in the 2/27 folder on Blackboard. Experiment 2 due
	3/1: The Ethics of Observation	3/1: Review the materials in the 3/1 folder on Blackboard.
Week 7 3/6-3/8	3/6: Engaging with “Otherness”	3/6: Review the materials in the 3/6 folder on Blackboard. Experiment 3 due
	3/8: Knowledge for Social Change	3/8: Review the materials in the 3/8 folder on Blackboard.
Week 8 SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK—CLASSES DO NOT MEET	
Week 9 3/20-3/22	3/20: Making Visible the Truth of Experience: Art as Research, Art as Connection, Art as Aspiration	3/20: Review the materials in the 3/20 folder on Blackboard.
	3/22: Can Cultural Interventions Bring Social Change Today?	3/22: Review the materials in the 3/22 folder on Blackboard.
Week 10 3/27-3/29	3/27: The challenges of collaboration	3/27: Review the materials in the 3/27 folder on Blackboard.
	3/29: When do you ask permission?	3/29: Review the materials in the 3/29 folder on Blackboard. Project 2 completed; reflection paper posted to Blackboard by 8:30 a.m.
Week 11 4/3-4/5	4/3: Being inspired by others	4/3: Review the materials in the 4/3 folder on Blackboard.
	Introduction of Project 3	Experiment 4 due
	4/5: Becoming brave	4/5: Review the materials in the 4/5 folder on Blackboard.
Week 12 4/10-4/12	4/10: Engaging with institutions	4/10: Review the materials in the 4/10 folder on Blackboard. Experiment 5 due

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Date	Topic	Assignments due on this date
	4/12: Hidden histories: how entire socially engaged histories disappeared	4/12: Review the materials in the 4/12 folder on Blackboard.
Week 13	4/17: Pragmatics: sustaining a life of engaged practice	4/17: Review the materials in the 4/17 folder on Blackboard.
4/17-4/19	4/19: Sustaining your spirit in an engaged practice/avoiding burnout	4/19: Review the materials in the 4/19 folder on Blackboard. Project 3 completed; reflection paper posted to Blackboard by 8:30 a.m.
Week 14	4/24: Art in socially turbulent times	4/24: Review the materials in the 4/24 folder on Blackboard.
4/24-4/26	4/26: Art in politically turbulent times	4/26: Review the materials in the 4/26 folder on Blackboard.
Week 15	5/1: Wrap-up	5/1: No new assignment.
5/1-5/3	5/3: Optional consultations on your final essay.	5/3: Optional consultations today. Final essay due by 5 p.m. today via Blackboard. No work will be accepted for grade consideration after 5 p.m. today. NO EXCEPTIONS