

George Mason University  
College of Visual and Performing Arts  
School of Art Department of Art and Visual Technology  
**AVT 454 – Alternative Photography Processes**  
T/Th  
Instructor: Stephanie Benassi  
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Office Hours: by appointment

Recommended book:

*Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933–1957*

by *Helen Molesworth; With Ruth Erickson*

*Leap Before You Look* is a singular exploration of this legendary school and of the work of the artists who spent time there. Scholars from a variety of fields contribute original essays about diverse aspects of the College—spanning everything from its farm program to the influence of Bauhaus principles—and about the people and ideas that gave it such a lasting impact. In addition, catalogue entries highlight selected works, including writings, musical compositions, visual arts, and crafts. The book's fresh approach and rich illustration program convey the atmosphere of creativity and experimentation that was unique to Black Mountain College, and that served as an inspiration to so many. This timely volume will be essential reading for anyone interested in the College and its enduring legacy.

\$51 online

### **Course Description and Goals**

This Alternative Process class will experiment with alternative photography, art methods, performance and learning structure.

The course is based on Black Mountain College, a school founded in 1933 in Black Mountain, North Carolina (near Asheville), which was a new kind of college in the United States in which the study of art was seen to be central to a liberal arts education. (Please see Black Mountain College page below). Keeping in the spirit of Black Mountain's educational movement, we will be creating 4 to 5 group projects that will emphasize collective learning and foster experimental outcomes. The structure of the course will mirror an artist residency where a communal open exchange of ideas and labor will be the engine for learning expectations. These exchanges will not be limited by subject matter but rather value the creative arts, in its myriad of practices, as the center of a liberal arts education as well as assert the importance of positive community interaction.

This experimental class structure will revolve around antiquated (late 1800's) photography techniques such as cyanotypes, van dyke printing and other application processes but will also foster use of current computerized technological platforms (video/ sound editing, cell phones, social media.)

The visuals/ material objects that we produce will just be one component of the larger concept of group interactions through process, performance and experimentation. The whole class semester will be varying degrees of a performance or a happening. (Please see Allan Kaprow on page below.) As your instructor, I will be creating a loose outline of projects and deadlines, but as a community, we will democratically work together on conceptual input as well as problem solving material output. In other words, for each project/ happening we will decide as a group what subject we will focus on and how we will go about making things.

For each project / happening, I will present historical context using artist's work. I will initiate a brief outline and from there we will work as group to develop a strategy for undertaking.

We will be reading and discussing various readings to inform our work, ideas and concepts. Please read these and be ready to discuss openly your thoughts and opinions.

We will also visit GMU's library of special collection to see various art works in the collection.

At the end of the semester we will have a show of our work and an art opening. We will collectively decide when and where and plan out the event.

### **Black Mountain College**

The story of Black Mountain College begins in 1933 and comprises a fascinating chapter in the history of education and the arts. Conceived by John A. Rice, a brilliant and mercurial scholar who left Rollins College in a storm of controversy, Black Mountain College was born out of a desire to create a new type of college based on John Dewey's principles of progressive education. The events that precipitated the college's founding occurred simultaneously with the rise of Adolf Hitler, the closing of the Bauhaus school in Germany, and the beginning of the persecution of artists and intellectuals in Europe. Some of these refugees found their way to Black Mountain, either as students or faculty. Meanwhile, the United States was mired in the Great Depression.

The founders of the college believed that the study and practice of art were indispensable aspects of a student's general liberal arts education, and they hired Josef Albers to be the first art teacher. Speaking not a word of English, he and his wife Anni left the turmoil in Hitler's Germany and crossed the Atlantic Ocean by boat to teach art at this small, rebellious college in the mountains of North Carolina.

Not a haphazardly conceived venture, Black Mountain College was a consciously directed liberal arts school that grew out of the progressive education movement. In its day it was a unique educational experiment for the artists and writers who conducted it. The college was not segregated at a time when other Southern colleges and universities remained segregated, and a

decade before *Brown v. Board of Education*, an African American woman named Alma Stone Williams is considered by some to be the first black student to enroll in an all-white institution of higher education in the South during the Jim Crow era.

Black Mountain College was fundamentally different from other colleges and universities of the time. It was owned and operated by the faculty and was committed to democratic governance and to the idea that the arts are central to the experience of learning. All members of the college community participated in its operation, including farm work, construction projects, and kitchen duty.

Twenty minutes east of Asheville, the secluded environment fostered a strong sense of individuality and creative intensity. The College was an important incubator for the American avant-garde. Legendary even in its own time, Black Mountain College attracted and created maverick spirits, some of whom went on to become well-known and extremely influential individuals in the latter half of the 20th century.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Mountain\\_College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Mountain_College)  
<http://www.blackmountaincollege.org/history/>

### **Allan Kaprow and Happenings**

“A game, an adventure, a number of activities engaged in by participants for the sake of playing.”

NYC in the late 1950s and early 1960s was the happening place to be. In fact Happenings were the happening place to be. The artist who coined the term ‘happening’ was Allan Kaprow, an artist and lecturer who had studied painting with one of the key exponents of Abstract Expressionism, Hans Hofmann, in the 1940s. Unlike the influential critic Clement Greenberg, Kaprow was less interested in the art object (paintings) than in the way they were created: he was excited by the performative possibilities of painting.

Hans Namuth’s 1951 photos and film of Jackson Pollock – the James Dean of the art world – making his paintings illustrated a new direction for Kaprow, where the artist was within the work, while making the work. After Pollock’s death, Kaprow wrote an essay on the Legacy of Pollock: exploring what he thought Pollock had meant for painting, art and life. He suggested that the art to come was one that incorporated everyday life, and everyday objects.

In 1957 Kaprow went on a mushroom hunt with artist, composer and founder member of the Fluxus group George Brecht and John Cage. Struggling with some of the sound elements in his own works (which he called action collages), Kaprow asked Cage’s advice. Cage invited him along to his composition class at the New School for Social Research in New York and, fascinated by what he heard about recording, editing and looping tape, Kaprow asked if he could attend regularly. Cage’s weekly homework was to create a piece of work and in response Kaprow began to create full-scale events that he called happenings.

In 1959 he presented *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* at the Reuben Gallery in New York – the first opportunity for a wider audience to experience this sort of event. He chose the word happening to suggest ‘something spontaneous, something that just happens to happen’.

Kaprow's events were tightly planned and participative. Like the Black Mountain untitled event of 1952, the environments, actions, sound, light and the timing were all integral parts of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. Rather than being passive observers, the audience were participants – invitations to the event said 'you will become part of the happenings; you will simultaneously experience them'. Once people arrived at the second floor loft space of the Reuben Gallery they were given a program of events, and instructions on how to behave, including when to take their seats or move between the three spaces, or when applause was appropriate (at the very end only). Lasting for ninety minutes, the eighteen simultaneous performances included painters painting on canvases, a procession of performers, readings from placards, the playing of musical instruments, and ended with two performers saying single-syllable words like "but", "well" as four huge scrolls fell from a horizontal bar between them. The end of the event was signaled by a bell ringing twice.

As Cage's *4' 33"* offered a found soundscape, and potentially changed the listeners' relationships to the 'noise' they heard after the performance, these participatory events blurred the line between what was life and what was art, what was an everyday movement and what was a performance. Kaprow said, 'The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct as possible'. No doubt some were bemused by the goings on, and what to make of them, but regardless, the "happening" took off.

Kaprow may have made the term, and the idea of blurring the boundary of art and life, popular but he was the first to admit that he wasn't the only one or the first working in this way.

The happening had its roots in Hugo Ball's Dada Cabaret Voltaire, Surrealist performances and the Italian Futurists in the early years of the twentieth century. Creating art out of life was first proposed as the *gesamtkunstwerk* (total art work) by Richard Wagner (yes, Wagner the opera composer) in the *Art-Work of the Future* in 1849-50.

In Tokyo, Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop), a collective of visual artists, composers, photographers, musicians, designers, writers and others were experimenting with cross-discipline presentations. Working between 1951 and 1958, Jikken Kobo members mixed dance, poetry reading, music, painting displays and architecture. From 1952, they used the term *happyōkai* (literally a recital - but especially like the school presentations you give for your parents at the end of term), for all their events, regardless of the traditional art forms the events included.

From the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, artists, musicians, dancers, filmmakers, performers were working with these ideas and making pieces and events across the world. Next week, we'll get a taster of some of these events, from Claes Oldenburg's *Store* in New York, Stan VanDerBeek's *Movie-Drome*, the Gutai events in Japan, and the grouping of artists known as Fluxus.

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/performance-art-101-happening-allan-kaprow>

**Attendance:**

*2 excused or unexcused absences are permitted. If you reach 3 absences (excused or unexcused) you will automatically receive a C for the course. 4 absences or more will result in an automatic F for the course.*

**GRADING is based on several factors:**

1. Be ready to work in a group. Much of the work will be new to you and others but it is vital that you come to this class with a can do attitude. We can do it.
2. Your personal contribution to the class is vital group projects to be a success. Each student is responsible for the success of group work.
3. Willingness to participate in class, this includes preparation both in terms of doing what you say you are going to do and coming to class with ideas and opinions that will promote discussion and advance the projects.
4. Mandatory attendance. You cannot do the above goals if you are not in class.
5. Participation in the orderly functioning of the lab...clean up, care of equipment, proper return of borrowed equipment, etc. are responsibilities everyone must share.

**Criteria for Evaluation**

1. Ambition, rigor, and involvement with the projects undertaken.
2. Risk taking for the advancement of experimental forms.
3. Willingness to discuss openly all solutions to the visual problems you face with the class as well as the ability to respond to constructive criticism from the class.
4. *Ability to work as a group, with discipline and responsibility.*

**Grade Breakdown**

- Class participation and preparedness counts for 80%

-Assignments including but not limited to projects, research (written and presented) counts for 20%

**Grade Factors to Consider**

*Perfect attendance, meeting all deadlines and working at your peak ability are universal expectations. Art and Visual Technology standards are high and only the most rigorous and consistently exceptional students earn high grades. Expect your grade to be lowered if you do not meet the standards and deadlines set by your instructor. Classroom conduct has an impact on course grades. You are expected to actively participate in class activities and be a considerate member of the "community" within the classroom. Students who are disruptive to class may be removed from the class and their grades lowered accordingly.*

Please refer to University policies relating to conduct.

A Outstanding - Consistently exceptional work that raises the standards for one's entire peer group

B Above Average - Exceeding the requirements/ expectations of the class

C Average - Meeting all class requirements

D Below Average - Completion of most, but not all, course requirements

F Fail - Failure to meet the requirements of the course

### **Critiques**

Critiques are an essential part of the practice of art and require a strong commitment on the part of all students and the instructor. Critiques are exhausting but very beneficial. Critique is the educational equivalent of exam. Therefore, work must be ready for critique and you must be in attendance at critique. **ACTIVE AND THOUGHTFUL** participation is required. Physical attendance alone does not constitute participation in critique. You will be graded on the quality of your participation in critique.

### **Collaborative Projects**

Participation, and Effort - Everyone will participate in designing and realizing an overall structure and flow of the various public and/ or class presentations of our work.

### **Preparedness**

You are expected to arrive to class prepared to work. Any additional technologies/materials that are required of you on that day. If there is a scheduled in-class discussion of readings, you are required to arrive with a hard copy of the text. In addition to the required technology/supplies, you are obligated to purchase specific materials as indicated in each assignment. It is mandatory that you stick to the materials stated on the assignment sheets and purchase them before you arrive to class. Failure to arrive prepared will result in an absence and/or lowering of your grade.

### **Deadlines**

Because of the collective aspect of the critique, it is mandatory that your project be presented on time, so that the critique covers the widest possible breadth of work. Failure to present a project at the start of class on the day of a "crit" will result in the automatic lowering of your grade for that project.

### **Disclaimer**

Because of the provocative nature of much contemporary art, some materials presented in this course may be offensive to some people. These materials may include language, body fluids, nudity and radical political viewpoints, etc. If you have any concerns, please consult me. \*\*\* Any self harm and / or to others will not be tolerated in this class. Please consult me if you have any questions.

### **George Mason University and SOA Policies**

**Personal Electronics Policy** As a courtesy to others in the class, and in accordance with George Mason University policy, **please turn off cell phones and other wireless communication devices at the start of class.** The instructor of the class will keep his/her cell phone active to assure receipt of any Mason Alerts in a timely fashion; or in the event that the

instructor does not have a cellphone, he/she will designate one student to keep a cell phone active to receive such alerts.

**ATTENDANCE is mandatory!** This is an experience class and growth comes only through continued active participation. In case of an unavoidable absence, please contact me immediately (email is best). You are responsible for all missed information. Excessive tardiness (5 minutes plus) and/or absence (more than two classes) will result in a severely reduced or failing grade for the course regardless of performance. Non-class open lab periods serve to provide additional work time. They do not serve as a replacement for scheduled class time. (The University catalog states, "Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation. Students who miss an exam with an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor's grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.")

### **Photo Lab Policies**

*No food or drink in chemical lab. Everyone must follow this rule.*

The photography area has established a policy prohibiting use of an I Pod or other portable audio devices during scheduled class time, i.e **NO HEADPHONES DURING CLASS**. You may however, use your audio devices during any open lab period (i.e. non-scheduled class time).

All late penalties for loaned equipment and fees for damaged equipment will apply.

### **University and School of Art Policies**

In accordance with George Mason University policy, **cellular telephones and other wireless communication devices at the start of class**. The instructor of the class will keep his/her cell phone active to assure receipt of any Mason Alerts in a timely fashion; or in the event that the instructor does not have a cell phone, he/she will designate one student to keep a cell phone active to receive such alerts.

### **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, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, veteran's status, or physical ability.

### **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).

### **Open Studio Hours**

SOA teaching studios are open to students for extended periods of time mornings, evenings and weekends whenever classes are not in progress. Policies, procedures and schedules for studio use are established by the SOA studio faculty and are posted in the studios.

## **ArtsBus - Dates for Fall 2017: September 23, October 21, November 18**

### **ArtsBus Credit**

\* Each student must have up to 5 AVT 300/Artsbus credits before graduation. For credit to appear on your transcript you must enroll in AVT 300. This also applies to anyone who intends to travel to New York independently, or do the DC Alternate Assignment.

\* 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. Please go to the ArtsBus website: <http://artsbus.gmu.edu> "Student Information" for additional, very important information regarding ArtsBus policy. \* Non-AVT majors taking art classes do not need Artsbus credit 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 of the Arts. Alternate trips must be approved by the instructor of the course that is requiring an ArtsBus trip.

### **Visual Voices Lecture Series**

Visual Voices is a year-long 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: <http://soa.gmu.edu/visualvoices/>

### **Important Deadlines**

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 SOA office (or 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) , LATE ADD fee will apply. 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 majors, that is the CVPA Office of Academic Affairs, Performing Arts Building A407.

### **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 Disabilities Resource Center (SUB I room 234, 703-993-2474). You must provide me with a faculty contact sheet from that office outlining the accommodations needed for your disability or learning difference. All academic accommodations must be arranged in advance through the DRC.

### **Official Communications via GMU E-Mail**

Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason e-mail account, and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

### **Attendance Policies**

Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation. Students who miss an exam with an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor's grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.

**Honor Code**

Students in this class are bound by the Honor Code, as stated in the George Mason University Catalog. The honor code requires that the work you do as an individual be the product of your own individual synthesis or integration of ideas. (This does not prohibit collaborative work when it is approved by your instructor.) As a faculty member, I have an obligation to refer the names of students who may have violated the Honor Code to the Student Honor Council, which treats such cases very seriously.

No grade is important enough to justify cheating, 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 GMU Counseling Center staff.

Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit is *plagiarism*, a very serious Honor Code offense. It is very important to understand how to prevent committing plagiarism when using material from a source. If you wish to quote verbatim, you must use the exact words and punctuation just as the passage appears in the original and must use quotation marks and page numbers in your citation. If you want to paraphrase or summarize ideas from a source, you must put the ideas into your own words, and you must cite the source, using the APA or MLA format. (For assistance with documentation, GMU recommends Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*.) The exception to this rule is information termed *general knowledge*—information that is widely known and stated in a number of sources. Determining what is general knowledge can be complicated, so the wise course is, "When in doubt, cite."

Be especially careful when using the Internet for research. Not all Internet sources are equally reliable; some are just plain wrong. Also, since you can download text, it becomes very easy to inadvertently plagiarize. If you use an Internet source, you must cite the exact URL in your paper and include with it the last date that you successfully accessed the site.

**Writing Center**

Students who are in need of intensive help with grammar, structure or mechanics in their writing should make use of the services of Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (703-993-1200). The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, online and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis.

**The Collaborative Learning Hub**

Located in Johnson Center 311 (703-993-3141), the lab offers in-person one-on-one support for the Adobe Creative Suite, Microsoft Office, Blackboard, and a variety of 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 [training.gmu.edu](http://training.gmu.edu) to see the schedule of workshops and to sign up.

Consortium Registration Deadline	TBD
<b>First day of classes</b> ; last day to submit Domicile Reclassification Application; Payment Due Date	August 28
Labor Day, university closed	September 4
<b>Last day to add classes</b> —all individualized section forms due <b>Last day to drop with no tuition penalty</b>	September 5
<b>Last day to drop with a 33% tuition penalty</b>	September 19
<b>Final Drop Deadline (67% tuition penalty)</b>	September 29
Midterm progress reporting period (100-200 level classes)—grades available via <a href="#">Patriot Web</a>	September 25 – October 20
Selective Withdrawal Period (undergraduate students only)	October 2 – October 27
Columbus Day recess (Monday classes/labs meet Tuesday. Tuesday classes do not meet this week)	October 9
Incomplete work from spring/summer 2017 due to instructor	October 27
Incomplete grade changes from spring/summer 2017 due to Registrar	November 3
Thanksgiving recess	November 22 – 26
Last day of classes	December 9
<b>Reading Days</b> Reading days provide students with additional study time for final examinations. Faculty may schedule optional study sessions, but regular classes or exams may not be held.	December 11 – 12
<b>Exam Period</b>	Wed December 13 – Wed December 20
<b>Degree Conferral Date</b> The Winter Graduation Ceremony will be held on Thu December 21.	Sat December 23