

George Mason University College of Visual and Performing Arts School of Art

AVT 359 - About Photography: Practice and Research, Spring 2017

This syllabus is subject to change

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Office Hours: Tuesday, noon to 3:00PM by appointment

“But essentially the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people’s reality, and eventually in one’s own” - Susan Sontag from *On Photography* (1977)

“ ... a photograph cannot be transformed (spoken) philosophically, it is wholly ballasted by the contingency of which it is the weightless, transparent envelope.” – Roland Barthes from *Camera Lucida* (1980)

“The best thing about a picture is that it never changes, even when the people in it do.” – Andy Warhol

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This combined lecture/discussion and critique course will provide students with a critical overview of photographic history and contemporary photography that emphasizes the relationships between the various image-forms and functions developed from the 1840’s to the present day. Unlike a general history course, which catalogues basic formal and technical chronologies or surveys contemporary photographic history; this course will focus on a variety of issues and theories and examine how photography has both influenced and altered human perception as well as influenced contemporary art and culture. Lectures, readings, discussions and projects will encourage critical looking, thinking, writing and working with photographic images as well as understanding the histories of ideas about photography. There will also be critiques of projects you are currently working on.

OBJECTIVES

1- To gain an understanding of the many facets of photography, their issues, approaches and theories. 2- To understand the value of photographic discourse. 3- To enrich one’s skills in applying exploratory aesthetic criticism and increase one’s understanding that criticism is much more than judging the photograph. 4- To learn editing and aesthetic principles necessary for the communication of ideas through visual imagery. 5- To complete the semester assignments as outlined.

CLASS POLICIES

ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY! You are expected to be present for the entire class. Please note that if absent, it is your responsibility to find out from a classmate what you have missed and what to prepare for the following class. **You are permitted a total of up to three excused absences.** Any additional absences will result in a very low or failing grade for this course. Except for a serious emergency and /or a letter from a doctor, no excuses for late work or absence will be accepted. If you wish to be excused from class to observe a religious holiday, or for any other serious matter of a personal nature, you must bring it to my attention so that arrangements can be made for you to keep up with the progress of the class. Class starts and ends at its designated time. Habitual tardiness or leaving early on a habitual basis will affect your grade.

- Assignments are to be submitted when due. Late assignments will be reduced one full letter grade for each class past due. Late assignments over one week past due will be subject to failure.
- Subjects for your presentation and the visual book are to be approved by me.
- I will meet with each student at mid-term to discuss your grade and progress in the class. We will review all assignments up to that point and outline steps that you can take to improve your performance if necessary.
- Each student is expected to participate in class discussions and class critiques.
- Each student is required to complete all reading assignments prior to the class lectures as noted on the course outline.
- New book work should be brought to class for review as noted in course outline.
- All cell phones must be turned off before entering the classroom. Calls and text messages may be made before class and during class breaks, but must take place outside of the classroom. No cell phone calls are permitted in the film processing or darkroom areas and NO TEXT Messaging is allowed during lectures, critiques or general class time.
- Laptops may be used for note taking only!!! Anyone caught using either the classroom computers or their laptops for anything but note taking during the class will be banned from using a computer for the entire semester.
- **Please adhere to all University and AVT policies, see below:**

University and School of Art Policies

In accordance with George Mason University policy, turn off all beepers, 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 Spring 2017:

February 18

March 25

April 15

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

Dates for Spring 2017:

January 26

February 9

March 9

March 23

March 30

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

| <i>January / Day of Week</i> | <i>Sunday</i> |
|---|-------------------------|
| Martin Luther King Day (no classes) | Mon Jan 16 |
| First day of classes ; last day to submit Domicile Reclassification Application; Payment Due Date; full semester waitlists removed | Mon Jan 23 |
| Last day to add classes —all individualized section forms due Last day to drop with no tuition penalty | Mon Jan 30 |
| Last day to drop with a 33% tuition penalty | Mon Feb 13 |
| Final Drop Deadline (67% tuition penalty) | Fri Feb 24 |
| Immunization Record Deadline | Wed Mar 1 |
| Midterm progress reporting period (100-200 level classes)—grades available via Patriot Web | Mon Feb 20 – Fri Mar 24 |
| Selective Withdrawal Period (undergraduate students only) | Mon Feb 27 – Fri Mar 31 |
| Spring Break | Mon Mar 13 – Sun Mar 19 |
| Incomplete work from Fall 2016 due to Instructor | Fri March 31 |
| Incomplete grade changes from Fall 2016 due to Registrar | Fri April 7 |
| Dissertation/Thesis Deadline | Fri May 5 |
| Last day of classes | Sat May 6 |
| Reading Days 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. | Mon May 8 – Tue May 9 |
| Exam Period (beginning at 7:30 a.m.) | Wed May 10 – Wed May 17 |
| Commencement and Degree Conferral Date | May 20 |

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, I recommend 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 ittraining.gmu.edu to see the schedule of workshops and to sign up.

ASSIGNMENTS

There are three "defined" assignments for this semester. (Handouts for shooting assignments will be distributed at various times through out the semester.) The defined assignments are as follows:

1- **Presentation** – a 20- minute presentation on a SIGNIFICANT CRITICAL ARTICLE written on photography since 1980. Your presentation should briefly discuss the author, the purpose of the article (where it was published and its context), your reason for selecting it, what you gained from the article, any criticisms you have and what you feel the work brings to the world of photographic theory and criticism. I recommend the use of projected images but no more than 20 images. Please review the attached recommended reading list for possible consideration (you may also research the web). I will assist you with recommendations as well. You **MUST** let me know your selection before the end of March and no later than March 29th.

3 – **The Visual Book** - the major studio project for the semester is the creation of a visual book. This book is to be made by you, although the work contained in it need not be your own. You must make use of the book form as a mode of expression and presentation. This means that the images contained in your book must take advantage of, and indeed **DEPEND** upon the page and the book experience (self-contained object with pages and a binding, etc.) for their ability to convey ideas.

A book is a harmonious unit; therefore all aspects of its appearance should be consistent. **EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT** – the physicality of the book (its tactile and visual nature as well as, but not necessary including, the other senses - auditory, olfactory and taste) the images included- their relative size, contrast, tone, the binding of your book, the nature of the page, the stock of its paper, typography or calligraphy (if any) – ALL must be carefully selected with the overall concept in mind. Nothing should disrupt the unity of your idea, and your book is the physicalization of that idea and its vehicle.

In order to assure that you do not deal with this as a test, but rather as a problem to be dealt with openly and with all the assistance I can offer, you will be **REQUIRED** to bring your books into the class at several stages of completeness. Bookwork in progress will be checked every four weeks during the semester. The work can be in digital form. You will receive progress grades, so be prepared!

Recommended website for publishing photo books - BUT be careful - remember you're making an artist's book not a scrapbook or a portfolio of your images. The book must have a solid concept and involve thoughtful approaches. A self-published book may not necessary be the best-finished product.

www.magcloud.com

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CRITERIA FOR GRADING

A = Superior

* demonstrates a commitment to course material* demonstrates an excellent understanding of formal and

conceptual concerns * intellectually interesting approaches and solutions to the assignment* submission of assignment on time

B = Strong

* fulfills all course requirements with dedication and understanding* most solution(s) to assignment(s) are thoughtfully executed, but could be taken further * some minor problems in presentation of materials

C = Competent/Satisfactory

* adequate understanding of course content* most solutions do not yield significant interpretation or insight to the problem

* minor/major presentation problems

D = Unsatisfactory

* inadequate understanding of course content * solutions lack rigor and understanding* submitted work is poorly presented

F = Failure/Inadequate

* lack of understanding in all course requirements* assignments are incomplete* work submitted lacks an understanding of assignment as given and shows very little creative effort.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

Presentation = 20%

Book Project = 40%

Other in class assignments = 20%

Participation= 20%

SUPPLIES

1. Recommended Texts: *On Photography*, Susan Sontag, *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, Charlotte Cotton
2. Standard photographic equipment
3. Notebook for recording notes, ideas, etc.
4. Other suggested readings and materials to be discussed

RECOMMENDED READING LIST (See Black board for additional materials)

*Camera Lucida, Reflections of Photography, Roland Barthes

*On Photography, Susan Sontag

*The Photograph as Contemporary Art, Charlotte Cotton

*Ways of Seeing, John Berger

COURSE OUTLINE (Schedule subject to change)

January

- Mon. 23: **Introduction, explain syllabus and overview of course**
Bring in work Wednesday to present what you have been working on recently.
- Wed. 25: Presentation of your recent work.
- Mon. 30: Meet in Fenwick

February

- Wed. 01: **Discussion on Assignment #1**
- Mon. 06: **Discussion on Reading**
- Wed. 08: No class: We will meet at LOC & NGA Friday – details to come
- Fri 10: **Visits to Library of Congress & National Gallery**
- Mon. 13: **Critique on #1**
- Tuesday 14 <3**

- Wed. 15: **Discussion on reading**

SAT 18 ARTSBUS

- Mon. 20: **In class meetings to discuss book project – submit proposal**
- Wed. 22: **Discussion on assignment #2**
- Mon. 27: **Viewing of Christopher Marker's *Le Jette***

March

- Wed 01: **Critique on #2**
- Mon 06 Discussion on reading & assignment #3**
- Wed 08. Open Lab for printing / research / discussion etc.**

March 12 – March 19th *** S P R I N G B R E A K - No Classes!! **☺*******

- Mon. 20 Open Lab for printing / research / discussion etc.**
- Wed. 22: **Critique on assignment #3**

| | | |
|---------------------|------------|---|
| SAT | 25 | <u>ARTSBUS</u> |
| Mon. | 27 | Potential visit from Mark Strandquist, visiting artist |
| Wed | 29: | Lecture: Questioning Authenticity |
| <u>April</u> | | |
| Monday | 03 | Discussion on reading |
| Wed. | 05: | BRING IN WORK COMPLETED ON VISUAL BOOK (digital) |
| Saturday | 08: | OFF THE WALL – collaborative project w/ foundations |
| Mon. | 10: | Lecture: Death of the Faithful Witness |
| Wed. | 12: | Discussion on reading |
| SAT | 15 | <u>ARTSBUS</u> |
| Mon. | 17: | Lecture: Photography’s New Directions |
| Wed | 19: | Discussion on reading |
| Mon. | 24: | BRING IN WORK COMPLETED ON VISUAL BOOK (digital) |
| Wed. | 26: | Presentations/Discussion |
| May Mon. | 01: | Presentations/Discussion |
| Wed | 03: | Open Lab for ALL Photo Classes |
| Mon. | 08: | Reading Day |
| Wed. | 10: | Critique on Self-published books |