

**San José State University**  
**Department of Art & Art History**  
**ARTH 191A: ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY ART (THE THING)**  
**Fall 2019**



Instructor: Dr. Dore Bowen, Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Culture  
Office: Art 123; email: [dore.bowen@sjsu.edu](mailto:dore.bowen@sjsu.edu)  
Office Hours: Thursday 1:30-3:30pm and by appointment  
Class Days/Time: T/TH noon – 1:15, Room ART 135  
Prerequisites: Prior upper-division art history coursework

### **Course Description**

This upper-division undergraduate course is devoted to exploring contemporary art practices with a particular focus on artists who engage directly with process, materials, and objects. Over the course of the semester students will become familiar with a variety of artists and media while reading texts that explain, describe, and theorize various approaches to the work discussed. By the end of the semester students will be familiar with a range of artists and writers who grapple with the mystery of things.

The first half of the course will address different types of object-based art, while the second half of the course will focus on strategies artists have developed for altering our relationship to objects, such as alternative viewing strategies, museum intervention, and relational aesthetics. Throughout the semester the course will emphasize the way the contemporary practices discussed are inspired by, or a reaction to earlier artists and movements.

### **Course Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1) read critical texts (from art history and criticism, but also related disciplines in the humanities, such as anthropology, literature, etc.) and demonstrate an understanding of the ideas therein,
- 2) apply these ideas verbally and in writing toward an understanding of contemporary art practices, and
- 3) be able to identify significant works of contemporary art.

### **Required Texts, Materials, Resources**

- 1) **Syllabus and schedule:** <http://www.sjsu.edu/art>
- 2) **Textbook:** Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary* (Pearson, 2013) (**MySearchLab not required**). **Order ASAP from an online bookseller or from the SJSU bookstore.**
- 3) **Canvas:** You should check Canvas frequently. Under each module you will find a description of the weekly topic, weekly readings, and assignment information. You will also use Canvas to upload your paper rough draft and final. Class changes or announcements will be posted on Canvas. Use your SJSU ID and password to log in; Help Desk is at 408-924-2377.
- 4) **Object Project Website:** Your group project will be posted to the Object Project Website at <https://objectproject2019.blogspot.com/>
- 5) **Binder:** A pocket binder or notebook for class notes, assignments, etc.

**Art21**

A number of the featured artists can be found at Art 21 at <https://art21.org>. This PBS series on contemporary art features programs on a variety of artists which you can access online. You will find images, texts, and interviews to search for your group project. The descriptions of the weekly topics on Canvas indicate when a featured artist is on Art 21.

**Library Liaison**

Gareth Scott, email: [gareth.scott@sjsu.edu](mailto:gareth.scott@sjsu.edu), phone: (408) 808-2094

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, 4th Floor Administration Offices

Gareth can be reached via email or by telephone. Library Resources specific to art and art history are available online at <https://libguides.sjsu.edu/Art>

**Department Advising**

For information about majors and minors in Art & Art History, for a change of major/minor forms and a list of advisors: <http://www.sjsu.edu/art/> or the Art & Art History department office in ART 116, 408-924-4320, [art@sjsu.edu](mailto:art@sjsu.edu)

**Course Requirements and Assignments**

- 1) **GROUP PROJECT EXERCISE:** See schedule. Intended to introduce ideas and groups (CLO 2).
- 2) **GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATION:** See schedule and **Object Project pdf** on Canvas for more information about the group project and presentation. The group write-up on the Object Project Website is due at the beginning of the class day upon which your group presents. (CLO 1, 2)
- 3) **ROUGH DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER AND PEER REVIEW:** This assignment is graded P/NP. See schedule for due date. See **Research Paper pdf** on Canvas for details of the assignment. You must also participate in the Peer Review to receive full credit. (CLO 1, 2, 3)
- 4) **RESEARCH PAPER:** Drawing on the ideas involved in your group project you will write a 5-page paper contextualizing a work of art in relation to its life-cycle. See **Research Paper pdf** on Canvas for a full explanation of the paper assignment. See schedule for due date. (CLO 1, 2, 3).
- 5) **FINAL EXAM CUMULATIVE REVIEW: The final exam is Tuesday December 17 945-1200.** The exam includes image identification, multiple-choice, and essay questions. It will focus on the most significant ideas and artwork addressed over the semester. **Students are expected to take notes on lectures and assigned readings over the course of the semester.** The Canvas modules provide a list of weekly topics, readings, and significant artists. There will be a review the last week in preparation for the final (CLO 3). **No make-up exam without a signed doctor's note. Absolutely no exceptions. (You should change your holiday plans now if they interfere with the final.)**

**Grading Percentages**

1) Group Found Object Exercise	5%
2) Group Project, Blog, and Presentation	20%
3) Rough Draft of Research Paper and Peer Review	20% P/NP
4) Research Paper	20%
5) Cumulative Review	35%

### Grading Policy and Criteria

Grades will be assigned according to University policy from A to F as outlined in the SJSU catalog. All work must be finished and turned in according to ascribed deadlines and instructions.

#### PLEASE NOTE:

Late or missed assignments will only be accepted *for emergency circumstances*. A signed physician's note explaining why the student is not able to fulfill the assignment is required.

Except in cases of documented emergencies, incomplete grades are not given.

There are no extra credit options for this course.

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, it is expected that students will spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit. More details about student workload can be found in [University Policy S12-3](#) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf>.

#### NUMERIC GRADE EQUIVALENTS

93% and above	A
92% - 90%	A-
89% - 88%	B+
87% - 83%	B
82% - 80%	B-
79% - 78%	C+
77% - 73%	C
72% - 70%	C-
69% - 68%	D+
67% - 63%	D
62% - 60%	D-
below 60%	F

GRADING CRITERIA	A	B	C	D	F
(1) Responds appropriately to the assignment	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(2) Presents a clear topic or position	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(3) Focused and organized	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(4) Uses critical thinking	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(5) Uses a variety of appropriate college-level resources and cites sources	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(6) Provides supporting arguments along with examples	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(7) Evidence of research	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
8) Free of errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and format	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(9) Originality	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(10) Uses appropriate language for the discipline	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR

#### CLASSROOM PROTOCOL

##### Cell Phones and Computers

Students will turn their cell phones off while in class. Students who use electronic devices for activities *unrelated to the class* will be asked to leave the class. Students will be referred to the Judicial Affairs Officer of the University if necessary.

**Personal Responsibility**

- **If students miss class for any reason they are responsible for acquiring the lecture notes from a fellow student.**
- Late or missed assignments will only be accepted *for emergency circumstances*. A *signed* physician's note explaining why the student is not able to fulfill the assignment is required.
- Except in cases of documented emergencies, incomplete grades are not given.
- There are no extra credit options for this course.
- SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, it is expected that students will spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit. More details about student workload can be found in [University Policy S12-3](#) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf>.

**Plagiarism and Recycling**

Plagiarism is taken very seriously and will result in an F on the assignment and possibly the course. If students would like to include material or planned to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Integrity policy S04-12 requires approval by instructors.

**University Policies**

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page](#) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>."

## Course Schedule ARTH 191a, Fall 2019

The schedule is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and posted on Canvas as announcements.

Wk	Date	Topics, Readings	Assignments and In-Class Projects
1	8/22	<p><b>INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE</b></p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kalb Textbook, Introduction (10-17); Mark Dion (287)</li> <li>• Martin Heidegger, “The Thing” (1950) (Canvas)</li> </ul>	
2	8/27-29	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Part I: OBJECTS AND THINGS</u></b></p> <p><b>RELICS AND RELIQUARIES</b></p> <p>We begin our class with artists and thinkers that look back to a time when natural objects mingled with art objects, and both were thought to be alive. Featured artists include the Museum of Jurassic Technology and Jeffrey Vallance. See Canvas.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook, Christian Boltanski (146)</li> <li>• Lawrence Weschler, excerpt from <i>Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder</i> (Canvas)</li> <li>• Celeste Olalquiaga, “The Organ of Marvelousness,” <i>The Artificial Kingdom</i> (Canvas)</li> </ul>	
3	9/3-5	<p><b>COMMODITIES: POP AND NEO-POP ART</b></p> <p>This week we will address commodities in relation to the work of Pop and Neo-Pop artists. Featured artists include Andy Warhol, Takashi Murakami, Jeff Koons, etc. See Canvas.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook Ch. 5: Commodities and Consumerism; Takashi Murakami (235)</li> <li>• Murakami et al, “My Warhol,” <i>Artforum</i> 43.2 (Oct. 2004) (Canvas)</li> </ul>	<p><b>IN-CLASS:</b></p> <p><b>9/3 DIVIDE INTO GROUPS; PREPARE GROUP PROJECT EXERCISE FOR NEXT WEEK.</b></p>
4	9/10-12	<p><b>FOUND OBJECTS: READYMADE, ASSEMBLAGE, APPROPRIATION</b></p> <p>This week we look at artists who work with found objects including Marcel Duchamp and the Surrealists working in the 1930s, and contemporary artists, such as David Hammons, Wang Guangyi, and Willie Cole. See Canvas.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook, Doris Salcedo (160); David Hammons (103); Wang Guangyi (205)</li> <li>• André Breton, “<a href="#">Crisis of the Object</a>” (1936), in <i>Surrealists on Art</i> (Canvas)</li> <li>• Salvador Dali, “<a href="#">The Object as Revealed</a>” (1932), in <i>Surrealists on Art</i> (Canvas)</li> </ul> <p><i>Suggested Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Julia Kelly, “<a href="#">The Anthropology of Assemblage</a>” in <i>Art Journal</i> (Spring 2008)</li> </ul>	<p><b>9/10 TYPE “found object” at <a href="http://www.moma.org/collection/theme.php?theme_id=10135">http://www.moma.org/collection/theme.php?theme_id=10135</a> and pick an artwork. Be prepared to discuss in class.</b></p>
5	9/17-19	<p><b>MEMORY OBJECTS: MNEMONIC ART</b></p> <p>This week we examine objects that engage with memory and history. Featured artists include Kara Walker. See Canvas.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p>	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook, Ch. 6: Memory and History</li> <li>• “Kara Walker, <a href="http://www.moma.org/interactives/projects/1999/conversations/kw_f.html">http://www.moma.org/interactives/projects/1999/conversations/kw_f.html</a> _</li> <li>• Kara Walker exhibition, <a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/19/AR2007101900687.html?noredirect=on">http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/19/AR2007101900687.html?noredirect=on</a></li> </ul>	
6	9/24-26	<p><b>THE SYSTEM OF OBJECTS: PROCESS ART</b></p> <p>This week we begin to look at practices from the 1960s onward that concern the <i>systems that objects participate in</i>. While some of the artists reveal natural systems of object circulation others engage with the political and cultural systems that influence the way objects circulate. Featured artists include Martha Rosler, Joseph Beuys, Terry Fox, and Andy Goldsworthy. See Canvas.</p> <p><b>Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook, Ch. 1: Discovering the Contemporary; Ch. 7: Culture, Body, Self</li> <li>• <i>Object Project</i> pdf (Canvas)</li> <li>• Object Retrieval Website, <a href="https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/objectretrieval/">https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/objectretrieval/</a></li> </ul>	<p><b>9/26 GROUPS DISCUSS PROJECT</b></p> <p>Bring notes to class on the Group Project. Your group will select an artwork for your group project and distribute the activities. <b>See the details on Canvas.</b></p>
7	10/1-3	<p><b>THE LIFE-CYCLE OF AN OBJECT</b></p> <p>This week we will discuss the essays required for your group projects (and research paper) in light of the topic of body art in chapter 7 of your textbook. Featured artists include Janine Antoni and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. See Canvas.</p> <p><b>Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook, Ch. 7: Culture, Body, Self (continued)</li> <li>• Michael Shanks, “<i>The Life of an Artifact</i>” <i>Fennoscandia Archeologica</i> 15:15–42 (1998) (Canvas)</li> <li>• <i>Object Project</i> pdf (Canvas)</li> </ul>	<p><b>10/3 GROUPS MEET</b></p>
8	10/8-10	<p><b>HYBRIDITY IN ART</b></p> <p>Although hybrid objects have always been with us, with globalism objects now appear in new ways. A product may be designed in Silicon Valley, manufactured in China, and then shipped back to Asia. People also move across borders to seek opportunities. The artists examined this week construct stories of mixed media, mixed nationality, mixed genders, and mixed cultures. Featured artists include Mona Hatoum, Matthew Barney, and Pierre Huyghe. See Canvas.</p> <p><b>Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook, Ch. 9: Engaging the Global Present, Mona Hatoum (183), Matthew Barney (267), and Pierre Huyghe (269)</li> <li>• Edward Said, “The Art of Displacement” at <a href="http://www.iemed.org/observatori-en/arees-danalisi/arxiu-adjunts/qm-15-origins/The%20art%20of%20displacement.pdf">http://www.iemed.org/observatori-en/arees-danalisi/arxiu-adjunts/qm-15-origins/The%20art%20of%20displacement.pdf</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arjun Appaduria, “Disjunction and Difference” in <i>Modernity at Large</i> (Canvas)</li> </ul>	<p><b>10/10 GROUPS MEET</b></p>

9	10/15-17	<p>GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS</p> <p><b>Note: attendance mandatory for credit</b></p>	<p><b>GROUPS 1-6 10/15 AND 10/17</b></p> <p>The group write-up on the Object Project Website is due at the beginning of the class day upon which your group presents.</p>
10	10/22-24	<p>GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS</p> <p><b>Note: attendance mandatory for credit</b></p>	<p><b>GROUPS 7-12 10/22 AND 10/24</b></p> <p>The group write-up on the Object Project Website is due at the beginning of the class day upon which your group presents.</p>
11	10/29-31	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Part II: ENGAGING OBJECTS</u></b></p> <p><b>LOOKING AND TAKING</b></p> <p>The last half of the semester this course looks at the relationship of the viewer to the work of art and how this relationship alters our understanding of the objects around us. This week we examine artists that look at images askew to reveal the power dynamics that underpin the act of viewing. Featured artists include Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman. See Canvas.</p> <p><b>Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Textbook, Ch. 2: Taking Pictures</li> <li>● Dan Collins, "<a href="http://www.asu.edu/cfa/art/people/faculty/collins/Anamorph.html">Anamorphosis and the Eccentric Observer pt. 1</a>" <i>Leonardo Journal</i> 25, 1-2 (1992) (at <a href="http://www.asu.edu/cfa/art/people/faculty/collins/Anamorph.html">http://www.asu.edu/cfa/art/people/faculty/collins/Anamorph.html</a>)</li> <li>● Review NY Times, Brothers Quay exhibition at <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/10/arts/design/quay-brothers-retrospective-at-moma.html?pagewanted=all&amp;_r=2&amp;">http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/10/arts/design/quay-brothers-retrospective-at-moma.html?pagewanted=all&amp;_r=2&amp;</a>)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Halloween come as your favorite thing.</i></p>
12	11/5-7	<p><b>EXHIBITION AS CRITICAL FORM</b></p> <p>Recently the exhibition has itself become a form of practice. Artists such as Walid Raad, Fred Wilson, Ai Weiwei, and Ydessa Hendeles use the exhibition to address issues pertaining to collecting.</p> <p><b>NOTE: PEER REVIEW ON 11/7: ATTENDANCE MANDATORY FOR CREDIT</b></p> <p><b>Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Textbook Ch. 10: New Metaphors and New Narratives, Ai Weiwei (212), Fred Wilson (154)</li> <li>● Brigitte van der Sande, "Partners: Ydessa Hendeles' Holocaust Memorial," <i>Open</i> 7 (2004) at <a href="http://www.onlineopen.org/download.php?id=388">www.onlineopen.org/download.php?id=388</a></li> </ul>	<p><b>11/5 ROUGH DRAFT OF PAPER DUE ON CANVAS AND IN HARDCOPY BY BEGINNING OF CLASS. ALSO BRING A COLORED PEN TO CLASS FOR PEER REVIEW.</b></p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excerpt from James Voorhies, <i>Beyond Objecthood</i> (MIT Press, 2017) (Canvas)</li> </ul>	
13	11/12-14	<p><b>EXPERIENTIAL ART</b></p> <p>Art as experience is a new model in which artists manipulates the participant’s experience via light, sound, etc. Featured artists include Krzysztof Wodiczko, Olafur Eliasson, Roni Horn, Hasan M. Elahi and Harun Farocki.</p> <p>g</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook Ch. 11: Contemporary Experience; Krzysztof Wodiczko (106)</li> </ul>	<b>11/14 PAPER DUE IN HARDCOPY AND ON CANVAS BY THE BEGINNING OF CLASS.</b>
14	11/19-21	<p><b>EXCHANGE AS ART</b></p> <p>For many artists, the gift-model is an attractive alternative to the commodity since it operates outside the market, encouraging a kind of committed engagement between individuals and ultimately creating communities rather than consumers. In this vein, some contemporary artists create sites of exchange rather than objects, while others interrogate technology’s role in crafting human experience. See Canvas.</p> <p><b>Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clive Dilnot, “<a href="https://syelavich.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/the-gift.pdf">The Gift</a>,” <i>Design Issues</i> (Autumn 1993)</li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nicolas Bourriaud, from <i>Relational Aesthetics</i>, 1998 (Canvas)</li> <li>• Molly Nesbit et al, “<a href="http://projects.e-flux.com/utopia/about.html">What is a Station</a>,” (2003) (at <a href="http://projects.e-flux.com/utopia/about.html">http://projects.e-flux.com/utopia/about.html</a> )</li> </ul>	
15	11/26-NO CLASS 11/28 FOR THANKS GVNG	<b>EXCHANGE AS ART (continued from last week)</b>	
16	12/3-5	<b>IN-CLASS REVIEW</b>	
<b>Final</b>	12/17	The cumulative review is Tuesday December 17 from 945-1200	