

San José State University
Department of Art & Art History
ARTH 191A, Section 01, ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY ART (THE THING)
Spring 2020



Kate Clark, *Licking the Plate*, 2014

Instructor: Dr. Dore Bowen, Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Culture

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10am-noon, and by appointment

Class Days and 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 papers and group project pdf. 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) **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, phone: (408) 808-2094

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

Gareth can be reached via e-mail at 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

Course Requirements and Assignments

- 1) **FOUND OBJECT EXERCISE:** Students will participate in an in-class group exercise, which will be explained in class. Attendance is mandatory for credit. C/NC. (CLO 1, 2)
- 2) **GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATION:** See the schedule and **Object Project pdf** on Canvas for more information about the group project and related in-class activities. The presentation is due as a pdf on Canvas by the beginning of the class day upon which your group presents. See schedule for due date. Attendance mandatory for full credit. (CLO 1, 2)
- 3) **RESPONSE PAPER:** This response paper examines an object in Mark Dion's *Melancholy Museum*. See **Response Paper pdf** on Canvas for the details of this assignment. See schedule for due date. (CLO 1, 2, 3)
- 4) **RESEARCH PAPER:** This research paper will take three concepts from Michael Shanks' essay "*The Life of an Artifact*" to examine a contemporary work of art in terms of its life-cycle. See **Research Paper pdf** on Canvas for a full explanation of the paper assignment. See schedule for due date. (CLO 2, 3)
- 5) **RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTATION:** A one minute presentation of the research paper topic. A jpg image must be uploaded to Canvas by the date listed on the schedule. Attendance Mandatory. C/NC. (CLO 2)
- 6) **FINAL EXAM - CUMULATIVE REVIEW:** The final exam is Wednesday May 13, 945-1200. It includes image identification, multiple-choice, and essay questions, focusing 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 plans now if they interfere with the final.)***

Grading Assignment Percentages

1) Found Object Exercise	10% C/NC
2) Group Project-Participation, Presentation, PDF	20%
3) Response Paper	15%
4) Research Paper	15%
5) Research Paper Presentation	10% C/NC

6) Final - Cumulative Review

30%

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.

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 and examples	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(3) Work is focused and organized	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(4) Evidence of critical thinking and originality	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(5) Evidence of research: uses appropriate college-level sources and cites sources correctly	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR
(6) Correct grammar, punctuation, spelling, and formatting	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	ADEQUATE	WEAK	POOR

Grading Information

- **Late or missed assignments are not accepted.** The **only** exceptions will be in the case of a signed physician's note explaining why the student is unable to fulfill the assignment.
- **Incompletes are not given in this course** except in cases of documented emergencies.
- **There are no extra credit options for this course.**
- "All students have the right, within a reasonable time, to know their academic scores, to review their grade-dependent work, and to be provided with explanations for the determination of their course grades." See University Policy F13-1 at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F13-1.pdf> for more details.

Classroom Protocol*Electronic Devices*

Students will turn their cell phones off while in class. Students who use electronic devices for activities *unrelated the class* will be asked to leave the classroom. If such behavior continues students will be referred to the Judicial Affairs Officer of the University.

Personal Responsibility

- If students miss class for any reason they are responsible for acquiring the lecture notes from a fellow student. It is recommended that students arrange for exchanging notes in advance. Do not ask the instructor for lecture notes or summaries.
- Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, withdrawal, etc.

Plagiarism

- Plagiarism will result in an F on the assignment and possibly the course. Canvas is equipped with plagiarism detection so do not try it! A definition of plagiarism can be found on Judicial Affairs website.
- 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](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo>), which is hosted by the Office of Undergraduate Education. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule - ARTH 191A, Section 1/ Issues in Contemporary Art (The Thing) Spring 2020

The schedule is subject to change with fair notice and based on the progression of the course. Changes will be announced in class and posted on Canvas as announcements.

Wk	Date	Weekly Topics and Readings	Class Activities	Assignments Due
1	1/23	INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE		

Part I: THINGS

We begin by looking back to a time when natural objects mingled with art objects, and both were thought to be alive.

2	1/28 1/30	<p>THINGS, RELICS, AND RELIQUARIES</p> <p>This week introduces the topic of things by looking at what makes a thing a thing.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kalb Textbook: Introduction (10-17) • Lawrence Weschler, excerpt from <i>Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder</i> (Canvas) • Celeste Olalquiaga, "The Organ of Marvelousness," <i>The Artificial Kingdom</i> (Canvas) • Martin Heidegger, "The Thing" (1950) (Canvas) 	<p>1/30 Students divide into groups to consult https://www.moma.org/collection/, plug in "found object," and pick a work to discuss on 2/13. Students should prepare to explain the work, how it uses found object(s), and why your group selected it.</p> <p>ATTENDANCE TAKEN.</p>	
3	2/4 2/6	<p>MARK DION AND THE CURIOSITY CABINET</p> <p>This week we will consider the curiosity cabinet, discussed last week, in the work of Mark Dion.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook: Mark Dion (287) • Ruth Erickson, "Into the Field" [catalogue essay from <i>Misadventures</i> (ICA Boston)], pp. 13 – 69 (Canvas) • Info on Dion, from <i>The Melancholy Museum</i>, https://news.stanford.edu/2019/09/17/compelling-origin-story-stanford-museum-university-silicon-valley/ and https://museum.stanford.edu/exhibitions/melancholy-museum-love-death-and-mourning-stanford/dackerman-essay 	<p>2/6 Class meets at Cantor museum @ Stanford Univ. to see Mark Dion's <i>The Melancholy Museum</i> (if you can't attend please plan to go on your own): https://museum.stanford.edu/visit</p>	
4	2/11 2/13	<p>FOUND OBJECTS, THE READYMADE, ASSEMBLAGE</p> <p>This week we look at artists who work with found objects, including Marcel Duchamp and the Surrealists in the 1930s, and contemporary artists inspired by these earlier movements. See Canvas.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook: Doris Salcedo (160); David Hammons (103); Wang Guangyi (205) <p>Suggested Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • André Breton, "Crisis of the Object" (1936) (Canvas) • Salvador Dali, "The Object as Revealed" (1932) (Canvas) 		<p>2/13 GROUPS PRESENT "FOUND OBJECT" EXERCISE IN UNDER FOUR MINUTES.</p> <p>ATTENDANCE TAKEN.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julia Kelly, “The Anthropology of Assemblage” in Art Journal (Spring 2008) (Canvas) 		
5	2/18 2/20	<p>TAXIDERMY AND THE DIORAMA IN ART</p> <p>This week we look at artists who appropriate taxidermy and the staging of the natural history diorama to interrogate our relationship to nature and animals. We will focus on contemporary exhibitions and artists, such as “Dead Animals” at Brown University, “Making Nature” at the Wellcome Collection in London, “Diorama” at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, and Kent Monkman at the Met.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reckoning with “The Curious Occurrence of Taxidermy in Contemporary Art,” https://www.wbur.org/artery/2016/03/25/taxidermy-in-contemporary-art • Giovanni Aloï, “Dioramas: Realism and Decorum,” http://www.antennae.org.uk/ (browse the entire issue) • Review of “Diorama” at the Palais de Tokyo, https://necus-ejms.org/promenade-through-the-theatre-of-illusion-dioramas-in-palais-de-tokyo/ 		2/20 RESPONSE PAPER DUE ON CANVAS BEGINNING OF CLASS

Part II: OBJECTS IN CIRCULATION

This section concerns the systems
objects circulate within.

6	2/25 2/27	<p>COMMODITIES: POP AND NEO-POP ART</p> <p>This week we will address commodities in the work of Pop and Neo-Pop artists. The artists discussed engage with mass produced objects and, in doing so, address money, politics, and value in contemporary culture. See Canvas.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook: Ch. 5: Commodities and Consumerism; Takashi Murakami (235) • Takashi Murakami, https://www.cnn.com/videos/arts/2019/07/26/takashi-murakami-guest-editor-cnn-style.cnn • Stephanie Syjuco’s <i>Counterfeit Crochet Project</i>, http://sds.parsons.edu/designdialogues/?post_type=article&p=701 		
7	3/3 3/5	<p>THE SYSTEM OF OBJECTS IN PROCESS ART</p> <p>This week we look at practices from the 1960s onward that disrupt the seeming stability of objects to reveal the systems they participate in. While some of the artists reveal natural systems, others engage with political and cultural systems. See Canvas.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook: Ch. 1: Discovering the Contemporary; Ch. 7: Culture, Body, Self • <i>Object Project pdf</i> (Canvas) 	3/5 GROUP PROJECT DISCUSSION - Students bring notes to class on the Group Project after reading the <i>Object Project pdf</i> on Canvas. Groups will select an artwork for the project and distribute roles.	ATTENDANCE TAKEN.

8	3/10 3/12	<p>THE LIFE-CYCLE OF AN OBJECT</p> <p>This week we continue discussing process art, and the artists in chapter 7 of your textbook, while bringing the conceptual ideas in Shanks' essay to bear on the topic. See Canvas.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Shanks, "The Life of an Artifact" <i>Fennoscandia Archeologica</i> 15:15–42 (1998) (Canvas) <p>Reread</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook: Ch. 7: Culture, Body, Self • <i>Object Project</i> pdf (Canvas) 	3/12 GROUPS MEET - ATTENDANCE TAKEN.	
9	3/17 3/19	<p>HYBRIDITY</p> <p>Although hybridity has always been with us, globalism has accelerated the production of hybrid objects. A product may be designed in Silicon Valley, manufactured in China, and shipped to Asia. People also move across borders to seek opportunities or flee danger. The artists examined this week construct stories using hybrid media to speak of hybrid nationalities, genders, cultures, memories, and histories. See Canvas.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook" Ch. 9: Engaging the Global Present; also Doris Salcedo (160); Kara Walker (155); William Kentridge (161); Matthew Barney (267); Pierre Huyghe (269) 	3/19 GROUPS MEET - ATTENDANCE TAKEN.	
10	3/24 3/26	GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS		3/23 & 3/25 GROUP PRESENTATIONS; PDF DUE ON CANVAS DAY OF PRESENTATION. ATTENDANCE TAKEN.
11	3/31 4/2	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS		

Part III: OBJECT ENGAGEMENT

The last half of the semester this course examines the viewer and viewing space, considering the responsibility these factors have in cultivating our relationship to things.

12	4/7 4/9	<p>VIEWING AND THE VIEWER</p> <p>How does looking influence what we see? This week we examine the history of looking askew (anamorphically). We also examine contemporary artists that consider viewing in terms of digital appropriation, politics, and power. See Canvas.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook: Ch. 2: Taking Pictures 	4/7 (TBD) Art Librarian Gareth Scott presents on research methods	4/9 ONE JPG IMAGE DUE ON CANVAS FOR RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTATION ON 4/16.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dan Collins, "Anamorphosis <u>pt. 1</u>" <i>Leonardo</i> 25, 1-2 (1992), http://www.asu.edu/cfa/art/people/faculty/collins/Anamorph.html <p>Suggested Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review NY Times of Brothers Quay exhibition, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/10/arts/design/quay-brothers-retrospective-at-moma.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2& 			
13	4/14 4/16	<p>THE EXHIBITION AS CRITICAL FORM</p> <p>Recently, the exhibition and collection have become a form of practice for artists such as Walid Raad, Fred Wilson, Ai Weiwei, and Ydessa Hendeles.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Textbook: Ch. 10: New Metaphors and New Narratives; also Ai Weiwei (212); Fred Wilson (154); Walid Raad (164) Brigitte van der Sande, "Partners: Ydessa Hendeles' Holocaust Memorial," <i>Open</i> 7 (2004) at www.onlineopen.org/download.php?id=388 		4/16 RESEARCH PAPER DUE ON CANVAS AND IN HARDCOPY BEGINNING OF CLASS. STUDENTS GIVE A 1 MINUTE PRESENTATION OF PAPER TOPIC.	
14	4/21 4/23	<p>EXPERIENCE AS ART</p> <p>Art as experience is a new model in which artists manipulate the participant's experience via light, sound, etc. At the same time, artists like Krzysztof Wodiczko address technology's role in crafting human experience. See Canvas.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Textbook: Ch. 11: The Art of Contemporary Experience; Krzysztof Wodiczko (106) 			
15	4/28 4/30	<p>EXCHANGE IN SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART</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, contemporary artists create sites of exchange rather than objects. For display See Canvas.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shannon Jackson, "Ch. 2: Quality Time: Social Practice Debates," in <i>Social Works</i>, 2011 (Canvas) <p>Suggested Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nicolas Bourriaud, from <i>Relational Aesthetics</i>, 1998 (Canvas) Molly Nesbit et al, "What is a Station," (2003) (at http://projects.e-flux.com/utopia/about.html) 			
16	5/5 5/7	IN-CLASS REVIEW FOR FINAL EXAM			
		FINAL EXAM Wednesday, May 13	0945-1200	FINAL EXAM	FINAL EXAM