

## CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE VENICE BIENNALE

**Instructor:** Alexander Alberro  
**AHIS OC3431**  
**Location:** tbd  
**Seminar meetings:** tbd  
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**Summer Intensive 2019**

This course introduces the relationship between contemporary artistic practices and this year's Venice Biennale. In addition to classroom meetings with PowerPoint presentations and seminar-style discussion, students will visit exhibition spaces located in the historical national pavilions of the *giardini* (the Biennale gardens), the *arsenale* (a sixteenth-century warehouse space now used to host sections of this contemporary art exhibition), and other temporary venues located throughout the city as we investigate not only the art but also the unique spaces in which we encounter it. Through this exciting event, we will explore connections between art and globalization, as well as the changing character and shape of this event *over time*, taking into account political and aesthetic shifts in Italy and beyond. We will consider the history of various countries' presence (and absence) at the Venice Biennale with a view toward how this biennale compares to other international contemporary art fairs such as those now held in São Paulo, Istanbul, Havana, New York, Münster, and Kassel, and Kochi.

Beyond a focus on the history of the Venice Biennale, the course will introduce some of the key concepts of contemporary art as they have been developed in the past three or so decades. We will seek to come to an understanding of the complexity of the contemporary art world, a network based on local customs and productions but defined by global art exhibitions, markets and magazines. Instead of the modernist assumption that art has a geographic center, usually located in Europe or the United States, we will explore the Biennial's attempt to present a more decentralized vision of contemporary art's communicative potential. Diverse nations and cultures, their images and their issues, will be described and analyzed so that the multiplicity of today's international discourses can be assessed. This will entail a consideration of contemporary art's relation to theories of modernism and postmodernism, the historical development of the project of globalization, and the expansion of the art world to a much greater geographical region than ever before. The increased significance of photography, site and context specific installations, performance art and dance, moving image installations, and other techniques of media in artistic production will provide the framework for an examination of various characteristics of contemporary art.

### Requirements

1. Attend all class meetings, make several class presentations, and write a 1500-word term paper. Satisfactory completion of all assignments and examinations is necessary to pass the

course.

2. Each class meeting one or two members of the class will be asked to present a 10-minute PowerPoint Case Study presentation. Each Case Study will feature one artwork exhibited at or alongside this year's Venice Biennale that encompasses some of the issues central to the class readings. You do not need to construct an argument or thesis about the artwork in question for this short presentation.

3. During seminar sessions, you will be expected to come to class having read the assigned texts, and prepared to speak about them. Lively, informed discussion is our goal, and you are asked to contribute your own unique perspective to our conversations. How effectively you intervene in class discussion will be part of your grade. Class attendance is mandatory, as are all reading assignments, class presentations, and the final paper.

4. The class will be divided into groups, each of which will take turns leading class discussion during seminar meetings. This will include preparing brief oral presentations about the readings, offering questions to stimulate discussion, and, if necessary, bringing in images that serve as a focal point for analysis. Presentations should explicate the most important issues raised in the readings, and include information on how the approaches articulated depart from those of previously studied authors.

5. Each student will write a 1000-word paper focusing on a particular artwork included in the Biennial, reading the formal dimensions of the work carefully and placing the artwork in its historical framework in terms of the genre in which it operates, the debates that it takes part in, the issues that it seeks to communicate, and context from which it originates. The central argument(s) must be clearly stated and supported.

6. The final sessions will include presentations of research. Each student will present a fifteen-minute-long version of his or her research paper to the seminar in the most professional manner possible. Following each presentation, the student presenting will field questions from the other members of the seminar.

7. On July 20, the final draft of the paper will be handed in to me. To grade the paper, I will not only evaluate its inherent merits (e.g., how well it is written, how clearly stated, original and supported the central arguments are, etc.), but also assess how well the issues and questions raised following the seminar presentation have been addressed.

8. In general, a grade of "C" indicates adequate mastery of the material and merely competent written and oral presentation; a "B" shows additional effort, with full understanding of the data and concepts, clear and well-produced written work and regular class participation; an "A" is reserved for those students producing superior work, which includes a full comprehension of materials accompanied by thoughtful, well-written papers that go beyond the assignment and exceptional class participation.

9. Qualified students with disabilities needing appropriate academic adjustments should contact me as soon as possible to ensure your needs are met in a timely manner.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Students taking this course will be able to recognize the key components of a Biennial exhibition, as well as the relationship between this type of international exhibition and the contemporary phenomenon that is commonly referred to as globalization. Students will also learn the ways in which art shapes ethics and values in a global context, and come to an understanding of the elements of those values that continue to be operative. Students who successfully complete the course will be able to discuss cultural concerns relevant to the analysis of the relationship between art and society, as well as cultural concerns relevant to the analysis of contemporary art more generally, including changing notions of artistic subjectivity, the nature of the art object, the profound impact of technology on cultural and social practices, the ways in which artists respond to the dramatically changing notions of space, time and dimension, and evolving perspectives on the role and subjectivity of the spectator. The accounts of the readings that are a course requirement will teach students how to read closely and articulate the central theses of a text. The final paper will teach students how to analyze form, conduct research, and construct an argument using art historical forms of evidence, in particular visual information.

### **Course Materials**

All of the readings will be distributed prior to or at the beginning of the course, and will remain on Dropbox for the duration. There will be some additional readings to be determined as we move through this year's biennale since the catalogue and early press are not yet available.

### **Schedule and Value of Tests and Paper**

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| 1. Class presentations (including case studies and reading reports) | 40% of grade |
| 2. Class participation  | 20% of grade |
| 3. Paper, due July 20   | 40% of grade |

### **Lecture/Seminar Schedule and Readings**

(The schedule of lectures is provisional and subject to revision.)

**Tuesday, June 11, 9:00am-12:00pm:** "The 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale"

- 1) Reviews of the biennial (to be accumulated as they become available).
- 2) David Joselit, "Globalization, Networks, and the Aggregate as Form," in H. Foster, et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, Third Edition, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 2016), 51-60.

**Tuesday, June 11, 1:00-3:00pm:** site visit to the Giardini

**Thursday, June 13, 9:30-11:30am:** “The Venice Biennale”

- 1) Joel Robinson, “Folkloric Modernism: Venice’s Giardini Della Biennale and the Geopolitics of Architecture”
- 2) Rafal Niemojewski, “Venice or Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial,” *The Biennial Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, et al. (Hatje Cantz, 2010), 88-103
- 3) Caroline Jones, “Biennial Culture: A Longer History,” *The Biennial Reader*, 66-87

Reading presentations:

**Tuesday, June 18, 9:00am-12:00pm:** “Biennial Culture”

- 1) Elena Filipovic, et al., “Biennialogy,” *The Biennial Reader*, 12-25
- 2) Okwui Enwezor, “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form,” *The Biennial Reader*, 426-445
- 3) Geraldo Mosquera, “The Marco Polo Syndrome: Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism,” *The Biennial Reader*, 416-425

Case study: #1 & #2

Reading presentation:

**Tuesday, June 18, 1:00-3:00pm:** site visit to the Arsenale

**Thursday, June 20, 9:30-11:30am:** “Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity”

- 1) Giorgio Agamben, “On Contemporaneity,” (2007)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSSgVPS\\_gms&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSSgVPS_gms&feature=youtu.be)
- 2) Peter Pál Pelbart, “What is the Contemporary?” *Afterall* No. 39
- 3) Hans Belting, “Contemporary Art as Global Art,” *The Global Art World*, ed. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 38-73
- 4) Joan Kee, “Moves in the Field,” *Field Notes*, 1 (Summer 2012), 30-33 [www.aaa.org.hk](http://www.aaa.org.hk)

Case study: #3

Reading presentation:

**Tuesday, June 25, 9:00am-12:00pm:** Circulation

- 1) Alberto Toscano, “Logistics and Opposition,” *Mute*, 3:2 (2011)
- 2) Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” *e-flux journal*, 10 (November 2009)
- 3) David Joselit, from *After Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013)

Case study: #4 & #5

Reading presentation:

**Tuesday, June 25, 1:00-3:00pm:** site visits to Biennale off sites/national pavilions

**Thursday, June 27, 9:30-11:30am:** The PostColony

- 1) Anthony Gardner, "Whither the Postcolonial?" in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, eds. Hans Belting et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011),
- 2) David Clark, "Contemporary Asian Art and the West," in *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jonathan Harris (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011)
- 3) Jean Fischer, "The Syncretic Turn: Cross-cultural Practices in the Age of Multiculturalism," *New Histories*, ed. Milena Kalinovska et al. (Boston, MA: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996)

Case study: #6

Reading presentation:

**Tuesday, July 2, 9:00am-12:00pm:** "Images and the Experiential Turn"

- 1) Erika Balsom, "Original Copies: How Film and Video Became art Objects," *Cinema Journal*, 53:1 (Fall 2013), 97-118.
- 2) Dorothea Von Hantelman, "The Experiential Turn—On Performativity" (2014)  
<http://www.walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn/>
- 3) Lane Relyea, "Your Art Word: Or, The Limits of Connectivity," *Afterall*, 14 (Autum/Winter 2006), 3-8.

Case study: #7 & #8

Reading presentation:

**Tuesday, July 2, 1:00-3:00pm:** "The Role of Culture"

- 1) Michael Peter Smith, "The Global City: Whose Social Construct is it Anyway?" *Urban Affairs Review*, 33:4 (1998)
- 2) Pamela Lee, "Boundary Issues: The Art World Under the Sign of Globalism" (November 2003)
- 3) Isabel Graw, from *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (Sternberg Press, 2009), 9-79

Case Study: #9

Reading presentation:

**Thursday, July 4, 9:30-11:30am:** "Diasporic, Counter and Public Spheres"

- 1) "Global Tendencies. Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition," roundtable organized by Tim Griffin and including James Meyer, Catherine David, Martha Rosler, Okwui

Enwezor, Francesco Bonami, Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Yinka Shonibare, *Artforum* (November 2003)

- 2) Monica Juneja, "Global Art History and the 'Burden of Representation'," *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture* (2011)
- 3) Chin-Tao Wu, "Worlds Apart: Problems of Interpreting Globalised Art," *Third Text*, 21:6 (November 2007), 719-731

Case study: #10

Reading presentation:

**Tuesday, July 9, 9:00am-12:00pm:** "History and the Real"

- 1) Hal Foster, "Real Fictions," *Artforum* (April 2017),  
<https://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=201704&id=67192>
- 2) Susan Leeb, "Not Quite Embracing Failure: History in Contemporary Art," *Texte zur Kunst*, 76 (December 2009)

Case study: #11 & #12

Reading presentation:

**Tuesday, July 9, 1:00-3:00pm:** "The Spectator"

- 1) Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act--How Style Evolves in the Creative Mind" (1957), in Pontus Hulten, et al., eds., *Marcel Duchamp Work and Life / Ephemerides on and about Marcel Duchamp and Rose Sélavy 1887-1968* (MIT Press, 1993), n.p.
- 2) Michail Bakhtin, "Art and Answerability" (1919), *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (University of Texas Press, 1990), 1-3.
- 3) Jacques Ranciere, *The Emancipated Spectator* (Verso, 2009), 1-23.

Case study: #13

Reading presentation:

**Thursday, July 11, 9:30-11:30am:** "The Local, the Global, and the Non-place"

- 1) Mark Augé, "From Places to Non-Places," *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), 75-115
- 2) Arjun Appadurai, "The Production of Locality," *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 178-198, 204.
- 3) Walter D. Mignolo, "Globalization, Civilization Processes, and the Relocation of Languages and Cultures," *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson et al. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1998), 32-53
- 4) Charlotte Bydler, "The Global Art World, Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art," *The Biennial Reader*, 378-405.

Case study: #14

Reading presentation:

**Tuesday, July 16, 9:00am-12:00pm:** final presentations

**Tuesday, July 16, 1:00-3:00pm:** final presentations

**Thursday, July 18, 9:30-11:30am:** final presentations

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