

History 421/American Studies 421/History of Art 421

Art Controversies in American Culture

Fall term 2004
Mondays 2:30-4:30
McGraw Hall 215

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This seminar will examine art and architecture that have generated major conflicts in U.S. history, mainly during the past century, and especially since the early 1960s. The primary issues will involve patriotism, religion, race, modernism, feminism, sexuality and obscenity, public art and memorials, “sacred space,” and the changing place of museums in American life as demonstrated by the controversial museum exhibitions *Sensation* (1999) and *The Art of the Motorcycle* at the Guggenheim in New York (1998). The role of media, art critics, corporate sponsors, and public opinion will be prominent along with censorship and First Amendment issues.

The readings include a mix of primary and secondary sources. Almost all of the required books are available at the Campus Store. Several that are out of print are on two-hour reserve in Fine Arts Library (FAL). Most of the primary sources have been scanned by the Fine Arts Library and can be read online. To access them, go to the Cornell Library Gateway. Click on Course Reserves. Fill in History 421 and login. All of the online material is located in the very first item on the reserve list. You can read the material online or download it. A few of the essays in journals will be found in the appropriate libraries as indicated on this syllabus.

Books recommended for purchase

Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?*

Senie, *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*

Dubin, *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions*

Walker, *Art and Outrage: Provocation, Controversy, and the Visual Arts*

Either Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America* or Doss, *Spirit Poles & Flying Pigs*

There are two options for written work in the seminar. One option is to write a series of three analytical essays (9-10 pages each) based upon selected issues raised by the weekly readings. These will be due by noon (in the instructor’s mailbox, McGraw Hall 451) on October 4th, November 8th, and December 8th. The third essay should run a bit longer (10-12 pages). The other option is to write a research paper. A list of suggested topics will be distributed, and a schedule will be indicated for selecting your topic and regularly consulting with the instructor. These essays will be due on December 10th. They will obviously require additional work, but Cornell students should have an opportunity to undertake a research paper in advanced courses.

The written work for this course will determine 50% of your final grade. Because the weekly discussions are so central to a seminar, your faithful attendance and

participation will determine 40% of your final grade. The remaining 10% will be based upon one oral report (6-8 minutes) as well as the agenda issue(s) based upon the next readings that you circulate on our list-serve every week 48 hours before each meeting for discussion. Basically, that means posting them by late in the day on Saturday.

There is a listserv for this course so that we can send messages and information to the entire group. Please note that if you wish to send a message to the instructor only, you should use his e-mail address, posted above. Each year there is at least one embarrassing moment when something not intended for the entire group nonetheless gets disseminated. *Que cela vous serve d'avertissement.*

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Aug. 30 **Introductory discussion and presentation of illustrative materials**

Sept. 6 **“But Is it Art?”**

Jane Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?* (Duke U. Press pb, 1994).

Arlene Croce, “Discussing the Undiscussable” (1994) and responses by Joyce Carol Oates and Homi Bhabha in Maurice Berger, ed., *The Crisis of Criticism* (NY, 1998), pp. 15-50. (Croce’s essay is in the coursepack. The two critiques of her essay are online. Why the separation? Copyright complications.) The Berger book is also on 2-hour reserve at the Fine Arts Library.

Arthur C. Danto, “De Kooning’s Three-Seater” (1987). (Coursepack)

Sept. 13 **Controversial Monuments and Memorials, ca. 1842-2004**

Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy, ed. Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster (Smithsonian Press pb, 1992), chs. 1, 5, 6, and 11.

Christopher A. Thomas, *The Lincoln Memorial and American Life* (2002), chs. 2 and 3. FAL 2-hour reserve.

Philip C. Johnson, “War Memorials: What Aesthetic Price Glory?” *Art News*, 44 (Sept. 1, 1945), 9-10, 24-25. Online and Fine Arts N1 Ar71.

Katharine Kuh, “Must Monuments Be Monumental?” *Saturday Review* (Sept. 2, 1961), 26-27. Online and Uris AP2 S25+. Olin AP2 S255+.

Sources online: “The Memory of Washington” (1873); “Roosevelt’s Disability an Issue at Memorial,” *New York Times*, April 10, 1995.

Sources online concerning the World War II Memorial, dedicated Memorial Day.

Sept. 20 **Misunderstanding Modernism and the Avant-Garde**

Gordon Hendricks, “Thomas Eakins’s Gross Clinic,” *Art Bulletin*, 51 (March 1969), 57-64. Online and Fine Arts N1 Ar61

{The Armory Show, 1913} Royal Cortissoz, “The Post-Impressionist Illusion,” *Century Magazine*, 85 (April 1913), 805-15; and Frank Crowninshield, “The Scandalous Armory Show of 1913,” *Vogue* (1940), 69-71, 114-16. Both online. Cortissoz also in *Century Magazine*, Olin AP2 C39.

Opinion pieces by Thomas Hart Benton, Forbes Watson, and Edward Steichen on Constantin Brancusi’s *Bird in Flight* {controversy in 1926-28}. Online.

Opinion pieces on the exhibition of cubism and abstract art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936. On-line.

Amy Robinson, "Refregier Paints a Mural," *Art News*, 48 (Oct. 1949), 32-34. Online. Also Fine Arts N1 Ar71.

Opinion pieces about Richard Serra's *Twain* in St. Louis (1985). On-line.

Walter J. Derenberg and Daniel J. Baum, "Congress Rehabilitates Modern Art," *New York University Law Review*, 34 (Nov. 1959), 1228-53. Course packet.

*Optional viewing in Uris Library later in the week of a documentary from the *Culture Shock* series: "The Shock of the Nude: Manet's *Olympia*." Time to be arranged. For those who cannot make the group showing, see FAL video #295, #4.

Sept. 27 **The Problem of Public Art in the 20th Century: Murals and Pigs**

{half the seminar reads} Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minnesota Press pb), pp. 3-71, 132-82, 214-37, 242-89.

{other half reads} Erika Doss, *Spirit Poles and Flying Pigs: Public Art and Cultural Democracy in American Communities* (Smithsonian Press pb), Intro. and chs. 1, 3-5 at least.

Gerald Nordland, *Controversial Public Art from Rodin to di Suvero* (Milwaukee Art Museum, 1983), exhibition catalogue in course packet.

Oct. 4 **The Debate Over Public Sculpture, 1966-88: "Must I Look at This?"**

Critical Issues in Public Art, chs. 10, 13, 15, and 16.

Casey Nelson Blake, "Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, and the Crisis of Public Art," in *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History* (1993), 246-89. Two copies on FAL 2-hour reserve, but read early.

Douglas Stalker & Clark Glymour, and others, "The Malignant Object: thoughts on public sculpture," *The Public Interest*, 66 (Winter 1982), 3-54. Course packet.

"Grand Rapids Accepts Calder Stabile," *New York Times*, June 16, 1969. Online.

* * **Fall Break** * *

Oct. 18 **Nationalism and Ideology Affecting Art: Dissent and Desecration**

Steven C. Dubin, *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions* (Routledge pb), chs. 2 and 5.

Bertram D. Wolfe, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera* (1963), pp. 302-38. Online and FAL 2-hour reserve.

William Hauptman, "The Suppression of Art in the McCarthy Decade," *Artforum*, 12 (Oct. 1973), 48-52. On-line. Fine Arts N1 A789.

Laurie Adams, "'Our Flag Was Still There': The People of the State of New York v. Stephen Radich," in Adams, *Art on Trial: From Whistler to Rothko* (1976), 141-68. Two copies on FAL 2-hour reserve, but read early.

Primary source documents from the Stephen Radich papers at the Archives of American Art (Smithsonian), mainly anti-communist and anti-Semitic hate mail that is quite incredible. Online.

Kathleen Vanesian, "Deja Wow: Red, White and Snooze," *Phoenix New Times*, April 4, 1996. Online.

Michael Kiefer, "Tempest in a Toilet Bowl," *Phoenix new Times*, June 6, 1996. Online.

Oct. 25 **Transforming and Politicizing the American Museum**

Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (1993), ch. 11, "Harlem on My Mind." Online and Uris 2-hour reserve, and media items online.

Barry Hyams, *Hirshhorn: Medici from Brooklyn* (1979), pp. 155-59, 166. FAL 2-hour reserve; and media item online.

Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century* (1999), pp. 229-34. FAL 2-hour reserve.

John Wilmerding, *Andrew Wyeth: The Helga Pictures* (1987). Browse in the volume. FAL 2-hour reserve.

Opinion pieces about the exhibition of "Helga paintings" by Andrew Wyeth at the National Gallery of Art in 1986. Online.

Opinion pieces about "The Art of the Motorcycle" exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, summer 1998. Online.

David Halle, "The Controversy Over the Show *Sensation* at the Brooklyn Museum, 1999-2000," in *Crossroads: Art and Religion in American Life*, ed. Alberta Arthurs and Glenn Wallach (2001), 139-83. FAL 2-hour reserve.

Opinion pieces about the *Sensation* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1999. Online.

Nov. 1 **Feminism Stirs the Party**

Dubin, *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions*, 125-49.

Arthur C. Danto, "Bad Aesthetic Times," in Danto, *Encounters & Reflections: Art in the Historical Present* (1990), pp. 297-312. 2-hour reserve in FAL.

Judy Chicago, *Beyond the Flower: The Autobiography of a Feminist Artist* (1996), chs. 3-4. FAL 2-hour reserve.

Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party* (1996). Browse. FAL 2-hour reserve.

Opinion pieces about *The Dinner Party* (1979) by Judy Chicago. Online.

Courtney Workman, "The Woman Movement: Memorial to Women's Rights Leaders and the Perceived Images of the Women's Movement," in *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape* (2001), 47-63. FAL 2-hour reserve.

Opinion pieces about *The Woman Movement*, 1997. Online.

Interview with Carolee Schneemann in *Interventions and Provocations: Conversations on Art, Culture, and Resistance*, ed. Glenn Harper (1998). Online.

Nov. 8 **Photographic and Other Provocations from the late 1980s**

Robert Hughes, *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America* (1994), pp. 155-204. FAL 2-hour reserve (or used copies at Campus Store).

Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts, ed. Richard Bolton (1992), images on 309-28. FAL 2-hour reserve.

Arthur Danto, *Playing with the Edge: The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe* (1996), pp, 23-126. FAL 2-hour reserve. *Read well in advance.

Ken Johnson, "Forbidden Sights," *Art in America*, 79 (Jan. 1991), 107-109. Online. Fine Arts N1 Ar67.

Sally Mann, *Immediate Family* (1992). Browse. FAL 2-hour reserve.

Rebecca Solnit, "Sally Mann," *Creative Camera*, 343 (Dec.1996/Jan. 1997), 38-39. Online.

Opinion pieces about the photography of Sally Mann. Online.

Annie Sprinkle, "Hard-Core Heaven," *Arts Magazine*, 66 (March 1992), pp. 46-48. FAL N1 ar63.

Nov. 15 **Performance Art and a Comparative Perspective**

John A. Walker, *Art and Outrage: Provocation, Controversy and the Visual Arts* (Pluto Press pb, 1999), pp. 1-67, 73-78, 98-164, 181-226.

Dubin, *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions*, pp. 149-58 and chs. 10, and 11.

[Please note that you will see a batch of material in the online index sequence marked session #10 relating to Karen Finley and the NEA Four, 1990-98. You may skip all that material.]

Nov. 22 **Controversies Involving Race, Ethnicity, and Religion (1990s)**

Dubin, *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions*, chs. 1 and 9.

Opinion pieces concerning "Back of the Big House" (1995-97). Online.

Richmond's Monument Avenue, ed. Sarah Shields Driggs and others (2001), 88-95 for the controversy over a monument to Arthur Ashe in the capital of the Confederacy (1993-96). FAL 2-hour reserve.

Opinion pieces about "Sigmund Freud: Conflict and Culture" (1996-98), at the Library of Congress. Online.

Opinion pieces concerning "Gaelic Gotham: A History of the Irish in New York" at the Museum of the City of New York (1996-97). Online.

Opinion pieces concerning "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art," an exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York (2002). Online.

Nov. 29 **Rapping Up and Reporting Research**

Dubin, *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions*, ch. 12.

Tom Wolfe, "The Worship of Art: Notes on the New God," *Harper's Magazine* (Oct. 1984), 61-68. Online and Olin AP2 H29+.

Michael Brenson, "Is 'Quality' an Idea Whose Time Has Gone?" *New York Times*, July 22, 1990 (online); and editorial, "Controversy vs. Quality," *Wall Street Journal*, May 21, 1990 (online).

Opinion pieces by Meg Greenfield (1997), John Garvey (1999), George Will (2001), and Michael Kimmelman (2002). Online.

