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.*

Aug. 30  Introductory discussion and presentation of illustrative materials

Sept. 6  “But Is it Art?”
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.

Sept. 13  Controversial Monuments and Memorials, ca. 1842-2004
Sources online concerning the World War II Memorial, dedicated Memorial Day.

Sept. 20  Misunderstanding Modernism and the Avant-Garde
Opinion pieces by Thomas Hart Benton, Forbes Watson, and Edward Steichen on Constantin Brancusi’s *Bird in Flight* {controversy in 1926-28}. Online.


*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
{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 Musem, 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.


*   *   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.


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.

Oct. 25  **Transforming and Politicizing the American Museum**
Barry Hyams, *Hirshhorn: Medici from Brooklyn* (1979), pp. 155-59, 166. FAL 2-hour reserve; and media item online.
Opinion pieces about the exhibition of “Helga paintings” by Andrew Wyeth at the National Gallery of Art in 1986. Online.
Opinion pieces about the *Sensation* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1999. Online.

Nov. 1  **Feminism Stirs the Party**

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


Online. Fine Arts N1 Ar67.


Opinion pieces about the photography of Sally Mann. Online.


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


[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.]

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


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


