

Eco-art: Art in Response to the Ecological Crisis

Spring 2007 - TCXG 402 A

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Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday 12:45-1:45 pm

Class Meeting Time: Monday/Wednesday 10:30 am-12:45 pm Classroom: WG 308

COURSE SUMMARY

We live in a time when the environment that supports human life is in peril. Most of us find ways to ignore this reality on a day-to-day basis. To hold this information too close to our hearts would make it difficult to do the practical business of daily living. But as creative people we need to process and respond to this crisis in order not to become totally numb. We need to sort out how this ecological emergency is impacting our lives and those of our neighbors. We also need to imagine a future where our grandchildren can live in better harmony with each other and the natural world.

There is a contemporary art practice that some people call “eco-art.” This multi-faceted movement addresses the environmental crisis in a number of imaginative ways. Some of these artists see themselves as activists; their work acting as a lobbying force while it reveals the hidden (and not so hidden) realities of a polluted world. Some of these artists see their work as an opportunity for the public to reconnect with nature in new (old) ways and to heal from the alienation caused by living in a consumerist society.

In this course we will be exploring what it means to be a socially responsible artist and how an artist can both critique the dominant culture and create visions for the future. If we are aware of the environmental crisis, is it enough to recycle and live simply, or are there other ways we can use our artistic voices and imaginations to express our concerns about the world we live in?

We will experiment with different perceptual and conceptual approaches to art making and develop some aesthetic strategies for engaging an audience in particular environmental concerns. We will examine more carefully our senses of place: in the natural world, our local communities, and in the society as a whole.

Course Goals

- 🕒 To explore a conceptual approach to art making
- 🕒 To strengthen formal skills
- 🕒 To experience hands-on collaborative art processes
- 🕒 To be exposed to a wide variety of contemporary art forms including site-specific installations, culture jamming, photo-text work, performance art, community-based art and street art.
- 🕒 To become familiar with a variety ways of understanding the ecological crisis using the lenses of art and writing
- 🕒 To encourage critical thinking in relation to the art making process and our understanding of the world we live in

Course Requirements

- ⌚ A journal for examining your environmental concerns through drawings, research notes, collage, photos– much of this based on a weekly walk, AND reflections on discussions and readings
- ⌚ Four mixed media exercises based on the Four elements: Air, Water, Earth, and Fire (Energy) – and you will choose one that you expand upon for 20% of your grade, the others will be 10%
- ⌚ A collaborative project that explores different environmental issues and the ways that they are related to one another. This project will explicitly interact with the community.
- ⌚ An oral presentation about an eco-artist's work
- ⌚ Class participation is essential and unexcused absences will affect grades. Class participation is essential and unexcused absences will affect grades. Attendance is extremely important in studio art classes. It will be difficult to make up the work outside of class, and your insight and participation during discussions are a critical part of the class. We all learn from each other's perspectives; and if you miss class, you will miss learning from these insights. Missing more than three class meetings during the quarter, regardless of the reason, will have a negative effect on your class participation grade.

Classroom Behavior

Food and drink are acceptable as long as you do not disrupt the class or bother your neighbors. Please turn off all electronic devices including cell phones and pagers when you come to class. Please be respectful and attentive when others are speaking in class. Arriving late or leaving early should never happen except on rare occasions; if you must arrive late or leave early, please do so in as unobtrusive a way as possible

Grades and Self-evaluation

Students will turn in a midterm portfolio documenting their work during the first 5 weeks of class (due April 30th). That portfolio will be graded. A self-evaluation statement is required as part of that portfolio. The self-evaluation should reflect on participation in class discussions, understanding of the art process in relation to collaborative and individual work, and the insights culled from writing, reading and research.

Each student must schedule one ten-minute meeting with instructor during late October to discuss student's progress.

Students are required to share their studio projects during group feedback sessions and to participate in the discussions about their work.

All assignments are assessed according to the following criteria:

1. Familiarity with visual grammar in relation to the student's intention
2. Ability to be inventive both with content and form, and to take risks
3. Attention to craft and process
4. Responsiveness to suggestions to strengthen projects

Work created with little attention or care will be graded accordingly.

Grades will be weighted in the following way: Elements Exercises: 20% Midterm Journal: 10%, Final Journal: 10%, Collaborative Work: 20%, Extended Elements Project: 20%, Oral Presentation: 10%, Participation: 10%

Supplies

Blank page, hard-cover journal (8x10 inches or larger), scavenged materials including old magazines, found objects, glue stick, cutting tool, and digital camera (they can be borrowed from media

Miscellaneous

If you choose to drop the course, you are responsible for reporting the change to the registrar's office. If you stop coming to class and do not contact the registrar, you will end up receiving a failing grade even if you attended only once.

If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a temporary or permanent disability, contact Lisa Tice, Manager for Disability Support Services (DSS) in the Mattress Factory Bldg, Suite 206. An appointment can be made through the front desk of Student Affairs (692-4400), through Student Services (692-4501), by phoning Lisa directly at 692-4493 (voice) or 692-4413 (TTY), or by e-mail ltice@u.washington.edu. Appropriate accommodations are arranged after you've conferred with the DSS Manager and presented the required documentation of your disability to DSS.

The Center for Teaching, Learning & Technology offers academic and technical support for students at all levels of expertise - review, upper division, graduate and TA. For your writing, reading, study skills and public speaking needs, please make an appointment online at <http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/ctlr/> or visit KEY 202. For multimedia or video projects, please visit the Multimedia Lab located in MAT 251. For student software training, please register at www.tacoma.washington.edu/CTLT/training/student/index2.cfm

March 26th – Introductions. Review course syllabus and course goals and readings. Discuss Journal requirements. Show slides. Walking meditation exercise.

Homework: 1. Email me a short description about yourself (where you live, where you grew up, what you are studying, what job(s) you have, and what most concerns you about the environment today) and 2. Take a walk in your yard, neighborhood, local park, etc. Bring your journal, pencil, and a camera. Make notes about the time of day, temperature, smells, vegetation, animal life (including people), noises, and your physical and emotional state. Walk in silence (Turn off or don't bring your cell phone or music) and breathe deeply. Try and be mindful of your breathing – is it shallow, is it fast, is it deep and slow? After a few minutes of quiet, slow walking, find something you never noticed about the landscape and record it with doodles, sketching, rubbings, and/or photos. You will be doing this exercise every week. You can take the same walk every week or choose different walks. It's up to you. Read pages 1-69 of Starhawk's **The Earth Path**. Pages 50-69 are particularly helpful in understanding the task of observing nature and journaling.

March 28th – Guest artists. The Beehive Collective and the Rising Tide. Visit their sites beehivecollective.org and risingtide.org Introduction to Eco-theory: Conservationism, Environmental Activism, Social Ecology and Deep Ecology. How do we define “the environment”? What is the difference between ecology and environment? What does it mean to make art about the environment and sense of place? Broad definitions of eco-art.

Homework: Bring in 50-100 “natural” objects and 50-100 “factory-made” objects. Do another walk, make notes and draw and/or take photos. Begin brainstorming for Air exercise and start researching some aspect about air/wind issues. Read Air chapter in **The Earth Path**. Make notes in journal.

April 2nd – Ecoart slide presentation. Site-specific exercise (depending on the weather) or Media Literacy exercise. Guest Speaker, Susan Platt, 12:50-1:50.

Homework: Start working on Air piece. Read the **Ecology of Everyday Life** on e-reserve. Make notes

April 4th – Site-specific exercise (depending on the weather) or Media Literacy exercise.

Homework: Collect advertisements that use some aspect of the environment or ecology to sell their product. Deconstruct these ads and put them in your journal with your notes.

April 9th – Bring in Air exercise for discussion. Discuss **Ecology of Everyday Life**.

Homework: Work on Fire/Energy Piece. Read Starhawk's chapter on Fire in **The Earth Path**. Make notes. Research where local energy comes from, what alternative energy projects are being explored locally, global warming, the concept of peak oil, mixed reviews about biodiesel, etc.

April 11th : Look at more work of eco-artists. Discuss goals of oral presentations.

April 16th - Feedback on Fire/Energy exercise.

Homework: Begin work on Water. Read Starhawk's chapter on Water in **The Earth Path**. Research one aspect of water: what comes out of your tap, bottled water, the state of Commencement bay, what's happening to local ground water, etc.

April 18th - Begin collaborative, community-based, site-specific projects using primarily scavenged materials. Share story about a current environmental issue that you have experienced rather than something you have just read about. Each student will take five minutes to share their story – each student listening with no cross talk. After the whole group has spoken, the group will discuss how the issues are related. Then students will make a skill inventory, listening the current creative skills of each student. Students will then brainstorm the form and content of an artwork, thinking about intention, audience and context.

Homework: Read introduction and first chapter to **Lure of the Local** for discussion – on reserve.

April 23rd – Bring work on Water to class. Discussion of Lucy Lippard's **Lure of Local**. – How does Lippard discuss sense of place? Who has it and who doesn't? How does one enhance a sense of place?

Homework: Begin work on Earth. Research ecological problems in relation to soil, agriculture, genetically modified seeds, pesticides, organic food, etc. Read Starhawk's chapter on Earth in **The Earth Path** and make notes in journal.

April 25th – Presentations on eco-artists. Collaborative project brainstorming.

Homework: Read first chapter of Brian Tokar's **Earth for Sale**.

April 30th – Midterm meetings (one on one). Video screenings.

Homework: Finish Earth exercise.

May 2nd – Bring work on Earth exercise to class.

May 7th – Presentations on eco-artists. Discuss **Earth for Sale**. Collaborative project work session.

May 9th – Presentations on eco-artists. Collaborative project work session.

May 14th – Collaboration meeting (instructor away).

May 16th – Install collaborative projects.

May 21st - **Important Due Date:** feedback on individual final projects - **Patricia Bullit** – visiting artist during lunch hour

May 23rd - work session – **Magdalena Gomez** – visiting artist lunch hour

May 28th – **Memorial Day Holiday – No class**

May 30th - Final projects due for group discussion as well as portfolio/journal/self-evaluation.

June 4th - Class feast with ecological theme. Return journals and wrap up discussion.

Writings about Ecology

Bookchin, Murray, **Urbanization without Cities**, Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992

and **The Philosophy of Social Ecology**, Black Rose Books, 1996

Diamond, Irene and Orenstein, Gloria, **Reweaving the World**, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990

Heller, Chaia, **The Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature**, Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1999

Kolbert, Elizabeth, **Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature and Climate Change**, NY: Bloomsbury Books, 2006

Louv, Richard, **Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder**, Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2006

McEwen, Christian and Statman, Mark, **The Alphabet of the Trees: A Guide to Nature Writing**, Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 2000

Mies, Maria and Shiva, Vandana, **Ecofeminism**, Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publications, 1993

Shiva, Vandana, **Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge**, Boston: South End Press, 1997

Steingraber, Sandra, **Living Downstream: A Scientist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment**, Vintage, 1998

Tobias Michael and Cowan Georgette, **The Soul of Nature** Continuum Publishing 1994

Tokar, Brian, **Earth for Sale**, Boston: South End Press, 1997

Websites:

<http://www.rachel.org> and <http://www.rachel.org/relatedSites/>

<http://www.breathingearth.net/>

<http://www.organicconsumers.org/>

<http://thearchdruidreport.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.grist.org/>

Dystopic and Utopic Science Fiction (Recommended for inspiration)

Atwood, Margaret, **Oryx and Crake**, New York : Nan A. Talese, 2003

Butler, Octavia, **Parable of the Sower**, NY: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993

Callenbach, Ernest, **Ecotopia**, Berkeley, Calif: Banyan Tree Books: distributed by Bookpeople, 1975

Piercy, Marge, **Woman on the Edge of Time**, New York: Knopf, 1976

Starhawk, **The Fifth Sacred Thing**, NY: Bantam Books, 1993

Well, H.G., **The Prophetic Novels of H.G.Wells**, NY: Dover, 1960

Contemporary Eco-Art

Beardsley, John, **Earthworks and Beyond**. New York: Asseville Press, 1989

Gablik, Suzi, **The Reenchantment of Art**, NY: Thames & Hudson, 1991

Kester, Jeff and Wallis, Brian, **Land and Environmental Art**, Phaidon, 1998

Lippard, Lucy R, **The Lure of the Local: Sense of Place in a Multi-centered Society**, NY: New Press, 1997 and **Overlay**, NY: Pantheon, 1983

Matilsky, Barbara C. **Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artists' Interpretations and Solutions**, New York : Rizzoli International, 1992

Sonfist, Alan, ed. **Art in Land: A Critical Anthology of Environmental Art**, New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc, 1983

Spaid, Sue, **Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies**, Contemporary Art Center, 2002

Websites:

<http://www.greenmuseum.org> and other links from that site

<http://wead.dreamfish-creative.com/artists.html>

http://www.chrisjordan.com/current_set2.php?id=7

<http://www.alivinglibrary.org/treeentrance.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljbI-363A2Q>

<http://greenmuseum.org/c/aen/links.php>