

WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ABOUT CONTEMPORARY ART?

Fall 2015: Mary Ball Howkins and Mary Snowden

Lifelong Learning Collaborative

Course Description: Looking at contemporary art can be dizzying. There are so many mediums, techniques, and approaches that one is hard put to find commonalities, let alone a so-called movement. Our culture is both national and global, molded by outsiders and insiders who seem far apart, but can cross fertilize each other in amazing ways. Modernism and postmodernism are in the past but no one has attached a secure label to the present. Nevertheless the art world marches on. Shows are curated, critics write, museums purchase, but what are the criteria for picking one piece of art over another? Could you distinguish a current work of art from a past work when anything goes and no previous styles are off limits? What does contemporary mean? Come learn and talk about it with us. Let's try to make sense of what artists have to say about our current world.

Class meeting structure: each meeting, from September 29th on, will consist of one participant presentation on the work of a late 20th century artist, and one by another participant on a more recent artist whose work bears some visual and/or physical resemblance to the other's. Discussion of visual, content and media similarities and differences will follow, with the ultimate course goal of ferreting out new understandings and appreciations of what contemporary artists are exploring and how it relates to recent art movements. There will be some short lectures by the coordinators to elucidate more complex, obscure or interesting contemporary trends. Short readings may be given out from time to time for clarification of challenging contemporary issues. If you are passionate about a particular contemporary artist, we can arrange a short time for you to share your passion and knowledge with the class.

- Can good art be easily identified from bad in an era of anything goes?
- Is there one medium that dominates others?
- Do contemporary artists value art of the past?
- How do some contemporary artists make use of past art?
- When did Post-Modernism end?
- How have Modernism and Post-modernism asserted themselves in the contemporary area?
- How has the art world globalized?
- Is there a new art capital that had shifted away from New York?
- Can we develop an umbrella term for what artists are doing now?

MEETING SCHEDULE

with Artist Pairs

September 29th: **Introduction**, housekeeping; modernism to post-modernism to contemporary:
from freedom to chaos?

October 6th: **transitional artists:**
Gerhard Richter or Philip Guston
Snowden lecture

October 13th: **diversity**
Juan Munoz or Yinka Shonibare

October 20th: **diversity**
Cindy Sherman or Wangechi Mutu
Howkins lecture

October 27th: **irony**
Banksy or Kehinde Wiley

November 3rd: **appropriation**
Shadi Ghadirian
or Bill Viola or Hendrik Kerstens
Howkins lecture

November 10th: **new abstraction**
Mary Heilman or Amy Sillman
Snowden lecture

November 17th: **narrative**
Dana Schutz or Ryan Mosley

December 1st: **post-modern rebellions**
Simon Ling or Katharina Grosse

December 8th: **rebellion and post-class party**
Noah Purifoy or Doris Salcedo

Dear Contemporary Art folks,

Both Mary Snowden and I look forward to learning from your insights as we coordinate our fall sessions. **We will all work together to deepen our understanding of what is contemporary about contemporary art.** In that light we invite each of you to take a turn as a session leader. This means that you will have a chance to share your thinking and research on an artist's work, an artist that you select. We have chosen to pair artists in each session to foster some interesting discussion of similarities and differences evolving in contemporary art over time, and giving two of you an opportunity to share your research and insight in a designated class meeting.

We coordinators are here to help you with your chosen project. If you have no experience with PowerPoint, I am happy to arrange that for you or give any help in that area you may need. It's difficult to discuss art as a group without this technological aid. Here are some suggestions for preparing for your project.

- Choose a topic of special interest to you, one that arouses your curiosity.
- Pick your topic by our second class meeting, if not before.
- Don't think you have to cover every aspect of your topic.
 1. Focus on a small group of your artist's images, what they appear to convey and how they do that in a chosen medium.
 2. Base this on comments by critics and the artist, as well as your own insights when they occur.
 3. Does the work reflect our contemporary culture or world?
 4. Share only the most salient events in your artist's career
 5. There are many online articles on artists available, taking you beyond Wikipedia as a simple starting point. An artist's own website, or gallery website, can yield a great number of excellent resources for your research. Googling your artist's name can result in a mini gold mine of information. Many of you may want to focus on a particular moment in an artist's oeuvre so as to pare down a too large amount of information.
 6. In your presentation be sure to give a short introduction to focus our learning, as well as a short summary at the end so we all can remember the most important aspects of your artist's approach.
 7. Think of three questions you can pose to us to foster some discussion.
 8. The time limit for a presentation including discussion is 40 minutes.
 9. Be sure to rehearse your presentation aloud beforehand to make sure you are comfortable with the time limit.

If you have a personal art story to share, please let us know so we can give you a small amount of time to do that sharing. Also, if you read an article or book with exciting insights into the contemporary scene, let us know so you can share that as well.

You are our class heroes, sharing, presenting and inviting us all to learn with you. Please don't hesitate to ask us for whatever kind of help you may need.

Best wishes. Mary Ball Howkins and Mary Snowden



Gerhard Richter



Philip Guston



Juan Munoz



Yinka Shonibare



Cindy Sherman



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