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### ARTH 503.01: Critical Theories in the Visual Arts I

Hipolito Rafael Chacon

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**Syl-F21-AH503-01-HRC**  
**ARTH 503.01, CRITICAL THEORY IN THE VISUAL ARTS I**

“Theory, that capitalized catch-all term which is meant to cover all the various ways of studying the arts so as to make the student feel as smart as the artist.” Clive James

**Term:** Fall 2021

**Course Information:**

School of Art

ARTH 503, Section 01, **CRITICAL THEORY IN THE VISUAL ARTS I**

CRN 71765

3 credits

**Professor Information:**

H. Rafael Chacón, Ph.D.

Office hours: By appointment only, Fine Arts 305B, [hrafael.chacon@umontana.edu](mailto:hrafael.chacon@umontana.edu).

**Meetings:**

Fine Arts 304, Monday & Wednesday, 12 - 1:20 PM.

**Course Objectives & Description:**

This course is an exploration of art criticism as a particular kind of discourse about art. We aim to be not just consumers of criticism--students of influential writings on everything from easel paintings to social media--but also producers of critical thinking, discussion, and writing. This course combines theory and practice by providing the opportunity to take a position on criticism and to cultivate skills as critics and teachers of contemporary art and culture. The changing dynamics of art criticism cannot be understood in isolation from the larger debate about the nature of contemporary experience which encompasses many disciplines. In studying the evolution of criticism, we should note that art critics have addressed other issues: philosophy, religion, psychology, politics, history, museum studies, etc., making this a very interesting field.

**Course Format:** Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, this discussion course will be taught in a hybrid fashion, primarily face-to-face but with the option of going to Zoom. We plan to meet out of doors as much as feasible early on; when we meet in the Fine Arts building, we shall follow strict social distancing protocols. All handouts, for example, will be electronic. Depending on the development of the Delta Variant in our community, we may need to be online using Zoom. If you are not familiar with the Zoom, platform, please talk to me a.s.a.p.

The success of this course rests on the quality of our discussions. Since it is a seminar, we shall all take part in leading the discussions whether f-t-f or virtual. Your grade relies in large part on class participation, which may count for more if it has been exceptionally good or less if exceedingly poor. Improvement over the course of the quarter will be registered in the final grade. Note that the syllabus is arranged by topic. We shall allow the discussions and debates to develop lives of their own; we are on a tight schedule and I shall avoid carrying over unfinished work into the next session. Don't panic if that occurs as there is some flexibility in the schedule.

**Policies:** We shall use Moodle as our course management tool. If you are not familiar with Moodle, please let me know right away. **THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE. PLEASE CHECK MOODLE REGULARLY FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES.**

**Requirements and Grading Policies:** You will be expected to engage the ideas discussed in class, to stay abreast of the readings, to share your thoughts and ideas, and participate fully in all class activities.

**Attendance/Absence Policy:** I expect at least 85% attendance and occasional participation to earn a "C" and 95-100% participation with consistent and thoughtful contribution to class discussion for an "A".

**Excused Absences:**

What warrants an excused absence? Technological issues with Zoom do not. The following do: a death in the family, a court or legal issue (for example: jury duty, parole meeting, court date, incarceration), an appointment for public benefits or entitlements that cannot be scheduled at any other time, or a severe health issue.

What is a severe health issue? Being contagious (with COVID, flu, or pink eye, for example), an incident that requires a visit to the emergency room, quarantining, or hospitalization, or having a medical condition requiring an immediate appointment that cannot be scheduled at any other day/time. Upon returning to class, the student must show documentation regarding the exact date of the absence (except in the case of family death). Absences due to a severe health issue can be excused only if, upon returning, the student brings a signed note from his or her attending health care provider (physician or RN, not a member of the secretarial staff) stating that the student was ill the day of the absence and sought medical attention. The note must include: the exact date of class missed and the actual signature of the attending physician or RN and his/her contact information.

**Texts and Readings:** The readings are mostly articles and excerpts from journals, anthologies, and other books. These are posted on Moodle. Good class participation depends on your ability to prepare in advance of the discussion. Understanding the readings is crucial. Since many of the texts may be initially difficult, give yourself plenty of time to read them. Read them twice if necessary. Focus on the main thrust of the argument and take notes, and, by all means, bring your thoughts and questions to class.

**Introductions:** Each student will be responsible for introducing the day's topic and framing the readings in such a way as to stimulate discussion. This is done by giving a brief introduction to the class and handing out any of the following discussion aids: an outline of the salient points or key questions for discussion, an abstract of the author's biography, a brief analysis of the text in question, etc. When it's your turn to present, please send me the text a day ahead so I can post it on Moodle. Everyone will do this at least twice during the semester. In addition, each student will keep a journal in which you will write short critical essays on the texts or responses to discussion questions.

**Midterm Examination and Term Paper:** There will be a take-home Midterm Examination at midsemester worth 50 % of your grade. The exam will be in the form of a series of essay questions

which may be revised for the final grade. **Exams will be due at the start of class and please note that I DO NOT ACCEPT LATE PAPERS without prior consent.** Your term paper is a longer critical essay (or “research paper”) on a topic of your choosing; it will be due on at the end of the semester.

**Grades:**

Class Participation (attendance, intros. & journals)	25 %	100 pts
Midterm Exam	50 %	200 pts.
Term Paper	25 %	100 pts.
Total	100%	400 pts.

**Other Important Information**

**COVID Guidelines:**

Mask use is required at all times in the classroom.

If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please do not come to class and immediately contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.

If you are required to isolate or quarantine, you will receive support in the class to ensure continued academic progress. We shall continue providing course materials during your quarantine or isolation via Moodle and Zoom.

UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to Curry Health Center.

Where social distancing (maintaining consistent 6 feet between individuals) is not possible, specific seating arrangements will be used to support contact tracing efforts.

Class attendance and seating will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts.

Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom.

If we need to turn to Zoom, class sessions could be recorded and I shall notify you of that.

**Credit/No Credit Option and Drop/Add Forms:** This course is offered for a traditional grade. I shall convert it to credit/no credit only if there is evidence of an emergency, health crisis, or extreme personal situation in which the student cannot possibly finish the course assignments in the normal fashion. The possibility of failing the class or earning a low grade and lowering your overall GPA does not rise to that standard. I do not sign drop/add forms after week 10 of the term.

**Access/Special Needs/Disabilities:**

If you have any access concerns, special needs, and/or learning disabilities, medical conditions, and/or physical impairments that may impede the successful completion of this course, please contact the office of Disability Services for Students (DSS) at x. 2243 (Lommasson Center 154) and speak with me as soon as possible.

**Academic Misconduct and the Student Conduct Code:**

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at [www.umt.edu/SA/VP/SA/Index.cfm/page/1321](http://www.umt.edu/SA/VP/SA/Index.cfm/page/1321).

### **Cell Phones and Electronic Devices:**

Students may use electronic devices but must first make the request to me in writing. I-pods, laptops, or other recording devices for note-taking may be used only after you have received explicit written permission from me.

Research consistently shows that students who use electronic devices for note-taking rather than traditional handwriting learn less and perform more poorly in college-level courses. See:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/memory-medic/201303/why-writing-hand-could-make-you-smarter>

<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/05/to-remember-a-lecture-better-take-notes-by-hand/361478/>

### **Syllabus**

#### **PART 1. MODERNISM**

##### **Week 1 Origins**

###### **M, August 30 Introduction**

###### **W, September 1 Genius**

Jaucourt, in Nelly S. Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer, trans., (Indianapolis, 1965), 278-282.

Saint-Lambert, in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory; 1648-1815*, (2000), 587-590.

###### **Week 2 The French Philosophes and Art**

###### **M, September 6**

###### **NO CLASS Labor Day**

###### **W, September 8**

Diderot, Denis, "Art" from the *Encyclopédie* (1751-76), in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory; 1648-1815*, (2000), 581-587

###### **Week 3 Reason and Criticism**

###### **M, September 13**

Montesquieu, Baron de, essays on "Taste" and other issues from the *Encyclopédie*, in Nelly S. Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer, trans. (Indianapolis, 1965), 340-44, 353-57.

###### **W, September 15**

Kant, Immanuel, selections from *Critique of Judgment* (1790), in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory; 1648-1815*, (2000), 780-788.

###### **Week 4 Romanticism and Realism in Early Modernism**

###### **M, September 20**

Balzac, Honoré de, "The Unknown Masterpiece," 223-254.

###### **W, September 22**

Baudelaire, Charles, *The Painter of Modern Life*, trans. J. Mayne, (New York), 1-40.

###### **Week 5 British Formalism**

###### **M, September 27**

Bell, Clive, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis," in *Art*, (London, 1931), 3-30.

Fry, Roger, "Art and Life," in *Vision and Design*, (London, 1920), 1-15.

**W, September 29**

Greenberg, Clement, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, (New York, 1985), 21-33.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," in Frascina, 35-46.

**Week 6 American Critics**

**M, October 4**

Barr, Alfred H., *Cubism and Abstract Art*, (New York, 1936), 10-46.

**W, October 6**

Schapiro, Meyer, "The Nature of Abstract Art," in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries*, (New York), 185-212.

**Week 7 Abstract Expressionism**

**M, October 11**

Rosenberg, Harold, "The American Action Painters," (1952) in *The Tradition of the New*, (New York, 1965), 23-39.

**Midterm Examination assigned.**

**W, October 13**

**NO CLASS Work on Examinations**

**Week 8 Work Week**

**M, October 18**

**NO CLASS Work on Examinations**

**W, October 20**

**Midterm Exams due at the start of class. Please note that I DO NOT ACCEPT LATE PAPERS without prior consent.**

**Week 9 Marxist Criticism**

**M, October 25**

Kozloff, Max, "American Painting during the Cold War" in Frascina, 107-24.

Cockcroft, Eva, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," in Frascina, 125-33.

**Midterm Exams returned for revisions.**

**W, October 27**

**Minimalism and Conceptual Art**

Rose, Barbara, "ABC Art," in Gregory Battock, ed., *Minimal Art* (New York, 1968), 274-97.

Fried, Michael, "Art and Objecthood" in Battock, 115-47.

**Term Paper assigned.**

**PART 2. FROM MODERNISM TO POST-MODERNISM**

**Week 10 Postmodernist Roots**

**M, November 1**

Benjamin, Walter, "The Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," (1938), in Berel Lang and Forrest Williams, eds., *Marxism and Art*, (New York, 1972), 281-300.

Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972), 7-34.

**Revised Midterm Exams due at the start of class.**

## **W, November 3 The Year 1968**

### **Week 11**

#### **M, November 8 Pop Art**

Alloway, Lawrence, "The Long Front of Culture," (1959), in Gablik and Russell, 41-43.

McHale, John, "The Plastic Parthenon," (1967), in Gablik and Russell, 47-53.

Gablik, Suzi, and John Russell, eds., *Pop Art Redefined*, (New York, 1969), 9-20.

#### **W, November 10 Feminism**

Spencer, Ana Garlin, "Woman's Share in Social Culture," (1912), in Miriam Schneir, *Feminism: The Essential Writings*, (New York, 1972), 268-85.

Foucault, Michel, "The Subject and Power," (1982) in David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram, eds., *Critical Theory: The Essential Readings*, (New York, 1992), 303-19.

### **Week 12**

#### **M, November 15**

Nochlin, Linda, "Why have there been no great women artists?" (1971), 194-205.

#### **W, November 17**

Duncan, Carol, "The MoMA's Hot Mamas," *Art Journal* (Summer 1989), 171-78.

Frueh, Joanna, "Towards a Feminist Theory of Art Criticism," in Smagula, 50-64.

### **Week 13 The Simulacrum**

#### **M, November 22**

Baudrillard, Jean, "Simulacra and Simulations," in Smagula, 100-07.

Linker, Kate, "From Imitation to the Copy to Just Effect: On Reading Jean Baudrillard," in Smagula, 108-15.

**Term papers due at the start of class.**

#### **W, November 24**

**NO CLASS Thanksgiving Break**

### **Week 14 New Paradigms**

#### **M, November 29 Relational Aesthetics**

Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics*, (1998), (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002) 1-11.

**Edited Term Papers returned.**

#### **W, December 1 Non Art**

De Duve, Thierry, "The Invention of Non-Art: A Theory," *Artforum*, March 2014, 270-275, 308-309.

**Revised Term Papers due at the start of class.**

### **Week 15**

#### **M, December 6**

Baudrillard, "Requiem for the Twin Towers," *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays* (London and New York: Verso, 2002) 35-48.

#### **W, December 8 Wrap-up**

**Postscript:** There is no final examination in this class. We shall only meet during our finals slot if discussions run over.