

Queer and Feminist Art & Literature

ENGL 264 | MDST 270 | CRIS 265 02

FALL 2021

TUESDAY/THURSDAY 2:35–3:50PM

WRIGHT MUSEUM OF ART - LOGAN SEMINAR ROOM (2ND FLOOR)

GOOGLE CLASSROOM CODE: YHLMSTP

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Wright Museum of Art 203

Course Description

This course is a survey of queer and feminist art and literature from 1970 to the present, primarily but not only from the United States. We will explore how fictional representations and artistic interventions re-frame, interrogate, or try to dismantle structures of marginalization, in order to build a more just and inclusive world. Throughout the course, we will pair writers including Kathy Acker, Gloria Anzaldúa, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Cathy Linh Che, bell hooks, Erica Jong, Audre Lorde, Patricia Lockwood, and Carmen Maria Machado; with artists including Eleanor Antin, Lynda Benglis, Judy Chicago, Suzanne Lacy, Ana Mendieta, Yoko Ono, Adrian Piper, Cindy Sherman, Aliza Shvarts, Nancy Spero, Emma Sulkowicz, and Kara Walker. We will develop skills in analyzing both art and literature in order to answer questions such as the following. How did feminists interrupt a male-dominated art history and literary tradition to amplify previously unheard voices and unseen bodies? What is the relation between gender and sexuality? What is the relation between pornography and eroticism? What are the politics of representing sexual trauma? How does the representation of the female experience require new narrative and aesthetic forms? What is at stake in talking about “the” female experience in the singular?

The course culminates in an exhibition designed by the students and installed in the Wright Museum of Art, focusing on the work of Donna Ferrato. Since moving to New York in 1979, the internationally recognized activist and photographer Donna Ferrato has had a career that has, documented,

engaged, and propelled two generations of the feminist movement. This exhibition provides a survey of her work as a lens through which to see how that movement has evolved, from the first domestic violence shelters to #MeToo, from sex clubs to courtrooms deciding the future of reproductive justice.

Because of the focus of this course, our readings will often engage difficult themes such as sexual violence in explicit and sometimes graphic ways. Much of the material can be upsetting. So, too, may be our class discussions, because difficult material can produce conversations whose trajectories are not knowable in advance. Careful attention to the material and to each other as we participate in the co-creation of knowledge will be our rule. However, even this cannot make a guarantee against surprises. Please read through all of the syllabus now so you know what lies ahead. I urge you to come talk with me about any concerns you may have about participating fully in this class before the course drop deadline.

Course Readings

Almost every reading for this course is available online or as a PDF on Google Classroom. I also ask you to buy, rent, or loan hard copies of the following four novels:

- Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984) [978-0802127624]
- Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* (1982) [978-0520261297]
- Zeyn Joukhader, *The Thirty Names of Night* (2020) [9781982121495]

I realize the amount of digital readings means lots of folks will be bringing tablets or laptops to class. As long as you're just looking at the readings, go for it. But I also know there's a lot of research that says having screens on in class distracts from both your learning and the learning of your classmates, so we'll also be having dedicated "no screens" time in class when our discussion doesn't require reference to the readings. Please be prepared to put your machines to the side.

In addition to our readings, we will have a mandatory screening of *Watermelon Woman* in class on Tuesday, August 31 and of *Paris is Burning* on Tuesday, October 26.

Course Requirements

Grade Determination

Your grade for this course consists of participation, ongoing "captioning" of artists' artworks, a group manifesto project, a zine project, and a final museum exhibit created as a whole class.

- Discussion Participation: 20%
- Exhibit Captions and Discussion Worksheets – 30% (6 Total, 5% Each)
- Group Manifesto and Reflection: 20%

- Zine Project and Book Report: 15%
- Final Museum Exhibit: 15%
 - Presentation of object: 5%
 - Individual caption: 5%
 - Thematic label (with group): 5%

Attendance & Participation

The success of this discussion-based seminar depends upon your participation and preparation. Please come to class having read the material and prepared to talk about it. Contributing to discussion means both listening to others and building on what they have said; it means both leaning in and leaning back to facilitate a community process of knowledge formation. Participating can mean commenting on the text or commenting on someone else's contribution. It can mean asking follow-up questions of someone or synthesizing the comments of those who have contributed before you. It also means participating in group work, where we are teaching each other in a more intimate context. In our classroom community, we want to hear everyone's voice, and we want to support everyone to participate. If you are finding it difficult to join discussion, please come visit office hours so we can brainstorm strategies for you to jump in.

Absences

If you're going to be absent for a good reason, please let me know 48 hours ahead of time. More than one absence will make it much harder for you to develop the skills and knowledge you need to succeed in this course; more than two absences will directly lower your grade by 1/3.

Exhibit Captions & Discussion Sheets

On select days throughout the semester, you will be asked to read up on an artist (or artists) and their artwork at an exhibition website online, then select one of their artworks to present to class. You will upload a picture of the artwork and a caption to the appropriate forum on Google Classroom. The caption should include basic facts about the artwork (artist name, title, medium, and year) and then a 250-word reflection on the artwork's form and intended audience and goals. Look below for an example. You do not have to prepare a spoken presentation, but you should be familiar enough with your object that you can discuss it when prompted.

Alternatively, on weeks where we are reading novels instead of looking at visual art, you will have a discussion sheet to fill out. It is fairly simple and instructions are in Google Classroom. The purpose of this assignment is to (1) focus you on something specific in the text that you may ruminate upon and (2) indicate what interests you in the text so we may focus our class time on what you want to explore.

You will need to complete 6 captions or discussion sheets throughout the semester and will have 11 opportunities to do so; that means you can take 5 days "off" of your choice.

Captions and worksheets are due at 9am the day of class.

Example Caption

Guerilla Girls, *Dearest Art Collector* (1986). Ink on paper.

This artwork by the art and activist group Guerilla Girls is one of their first, featuring what appears to be a handwritten letter to an unnamed art collector notifying them that their collection does not contain “enough art by women.” The handwriting sets up a contrast between the informality of the writer and the formality of the receiver, critiquing “official” art institutions and power brokers for their exclusion of women. The irony is that the kind of personal, heartfelt communication associated with a handwritten letter is unlikely to be taken seriously by the elite institutions to which it is addressed. Moreover, the pink paper and the flower doodle at the top intentionally feminize the letter, as if inviting the judgment that it not be taken “seriously” and thereby showing the fraught association of “seriousness” with masculinity. In turn, it forces readers to confront their own prejudices and biases for at first dismissing the letter because of its appearance before realizing the importance of its content.

Created in 1986, the artwork is clearly a part of a feminist moment of addressing museums and galleries for their exclusion of female artists. However, its message resonates today, just as its iconography and its associations—the feminine connotations of pink paper and informal handwriting—have not lost their gendered meanings. However, in today’s digital world, where handwriting is even less common, additional meanings emerge. If created today, the letter would likely be read as an indictment of technology and its own masculine associations, in addition to the art institutions to which it is addressed.

Group Manifestos

On the Thursday of 5th week, we will be reading a selection of queer and feminist manifestos. These documents are not only important in the specific interventions they made into the political landscape of their time, but also because they are often the result of careful group deliberation and consensus-making. For some feminist collectives, the process of writing together was itself political, because it aimed to find ways of collaborating and building movements together in non-hierarchical and non-violent ways. That’s why, to really understand these documents, I want us not only to read them but think about practicing consensus-making ourselves.

Toward that end, we will divide into small groups and I will ask you to meet and draft a manifesto together. The manifesto itself can take any form you please. It will most likely be about or related to gender and sexuality, but I will leave the specific topic open to you. Your goal is to develop a process in which everyone feels comfortable signing a name on a given document of stated beliefs or calls to action. The document itself will probably be about a page long.

After you draft the manifesto, each person will, individually, write up a 3–4 page reflection and analysis. This should include:

1. A description of your group process. How did you make decisions? What challenges did you face? Were there difficulties in distributing power equally? Why and why not?
2. A discussion of your manifesto or process in relation to at least one other manifesto assigned for the class. Perhaps you really agree or disagree with a point made in another manifesto assigned for the course. Tell me why.

The group manifestos will be due at the beginning of class on Thursday, October 7; someone from your group should post this signed document to the appropriate section on Google Classroom. Your individual reflection/analysis should be uploaded to Google Classroom before the start of class.

Zine Book Report

We will read three novels over the course of the semester. Pick one of those novels and make a zine about it. Think of the zine as an essay about the novel but in a different form. The aim is to think about how visual form re-frames or advances some of the political aims of the novel's writing.

You won't be able to re-tell the whole plot or provide a detailed analysis of the novel. But you can zoom in on a theme and think about how the novel is engaging it, such as: beauty norms, gender roles, re-writing history from a queer and feminist perspective, gender parody or drag, sexual violence, street harassment, trauma, intergenerational violence, or anything else that is of interest to you.

We will have a day devoted to zines on November 23, including an in-class workshop on how to make simple zines. Please use that day as a launching pad for your own production.

In addition to making a zine, please write up a 1-page report on what you were trying to accomplish and how you tried to accomplish it. Sometimes our creative efforts don't end up how we envisioned them. That's okay! But I still want to know what the original vision was. You will not be graded on artistic perfection, but on the critical thinking that is manifest in your production.

Your zine will be due the last week of class, on November 30. Before class, upload your reflection to Google Classroom.

Wright Museum Exhibit

Our teamwork and research together in this class will culminate in public-facing work at the end of the semester. The exhibition will focus around the photographs of Donna Ferrato, who documented feminist movements in New York from 1979 to the present.

Everyone will be responsible for captioning one photograph (50–100 words). You will present your object the week before Fall Break. The photographs will also form groups based on thematic similarities, and each group will work together to write an introduction to their theme (200 words).

The exhibits and videos will premiere the last day of class, in time for visitors over the break—such as relatives of seniors in town for graduation—to experience them.

Academic Resources

College-level analysis and writing pose challenges to all students. To help you meet these challenges, you may find it helpful to utilize some of the services provided by the college. Various professional staff and advanced students are committed to helping you address academic challenges in a variety of ways. Please let me know if there are any resources I can help you find to ensure your success in this class.

I strongly encourage you to visit the Writing Center website at <https://www.beloit.edu/writingcenter/> to learn about tutoring and mentoring options, guidance on study skills and time management, and one-on-one assistance to ensure that you are using the best possible strategies for success in your course work. The Writing Center has appointments available Sunday-Thursday 3-10pm. Try not to wait until the last minute—there is often a lot of work to be done after a session. At an appointment, you will bring in the assignment, related reading, and any previous work on which you've received feedback. Please try it out! It is so helpful to be able to sit down with somebody to dissect your assignment prompt, discuss the related reading, generate ideas and make a plan, revise drafts, and edit sentence-level issues. And you don't need to have writing done to find a session useful—sometimes it's great to have an appointment just to get started!

Accommodations

I aim to make this class accessible and inclusive by meeting the needs of each student. That means I'm happy to meet with you or respond to your e-mails if you have any concerns about the class. I just ask that you get in touch sooner rather than later so we can work toward solutions together as soon as possible. I also welcome requests for accommodation; just check out <https://www.beloit.edu/dss/enrolledstudents/accommodations/>.

Late Papers

Turning in papers on time allows me to provide feedback in a timely manner. However, I understand things come up in life and sometimes a couple extra days to work on a paper can make all the difference. If that happens, what's most important to me is that we stay in good communication so we have a plan on when you can turn in a paper and when I can return it to you. Please reach out to me sooner rather than later if you foresee a challenge.

Office Hours

I love talking with students and having the opportunity to think out loud with you in real time. That means the best time to discuss any questions you have with me is in class or during office hours. I am available over e-mail to answer brief clarification questions or to set up office hour appointments, but please come to office hours or set up an appointment to discuss anything more substantive. Please also schedule an office hour appointment at least 2 business days in advance. That means if you want to meet on Tuesday, you should be e-mailing to schedule on Friday.

Please also note that this syllabus gives you detailed information about due dates and readings. Read it and refer to it often. Answers to many questions are already provided here.

Please note I do not usually check e-mail after 5pm on weekdays and only rarely over the weekend. Please do not expect prompt replies at this time. However, I will make every effort to reply to your e-mail within 24 hours.

Reading and Discussion Schedule

1 Expanding the Canon

Tuesday, August 24: Introductory (no reading)

Thursday, August 26: Excluded Women

- Please read/view the following on Google Classroom/online:
 - Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971)
 - Essay on Lynda Benglis’s 1974 *Artforum* ad: <https://thenewinquiry.com/bend-it-like-benglis/>
 - Lucy R. Lippard, “Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power,” from *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (1984), pp. 341–58.

2 Creating Queer Histories

Tuesday, August 31: *Watermelon Woman* (viewing)

- Please read the “Film Techniques Glossary” on Google Classroom to prepare yourself for watching the film. We have more readings on Thursday, so I encourage you to get ahead since there is no work due in class today.
- We will watch the film in class

Thursday, September 2: *Watermelon Woman* (discussion)

- Before class, read:
 - Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer and Now,” from *Tendencies* (Duke University Press, 1993)
 - Heather Love, introduction to *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Harvard University Press, 2007)
 - José Esteban Muñoz, introduction and Chapter 1 from *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press, 2009)

3 Critiquing Art Institutions and History

Tuesday, September 7: Judy Chicago

- Exhibit Captions: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Table* (1974–79). Explore the Brooklyn Museum website for one hour. Select one of the components for your caption and be prepared to present on its meaning (for instance, telling us artists or ideas referenced in the component). https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/home

- Before class, read also: Nicolas Lampert, “The Living, Breathing Embodiment of a Culture Transformed” and “Public Rituals, Media Performances, and Citywide Interventions” from *A People’s Art History of the United States* (2013), pp. 224–241.

Thursday, September 9: Guerilla Girls

- Exhibit Captions due: Guerilla Girls. Read the “About Us” section of their website. Then, explore the “Projects” page, select one poster for your captions, and be prepared to present on who/what it addresses and what it is demanding from the viewer in its given setting or time. <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/projects>
- Before class, read also: T.V. Reed, “The Cultural Study of Social Movements,” from *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to Present* (2019), pp. 371–418.

4 Imagining a Feminist Canon

Tuesday, September 14: *Dictee*

- Read pages 1–89

Thursday, September 16: *Dictee*

- Read pages 90–end
- Complete discussion worksheet on Google Classroom before class

5 Sexuality and Making the Personal Political

Tuesday, September 21: Beauty Norms

- Read about the following artists and artworks. You may pick one to caption.
 - Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplant)* (1972): <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/mendieta-ana/>
 - Eleanor Antin, *Carving* (1972): <https://www.moma.org/artists/8183?gclid=CjwKCAiA27LvBRB0EiwA>
 - Cindy Sherman at MoMA: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1154?locale=en>

Thursday, September 23: Manifestos

- Read the following manifestos from our Google Classroom:
 - Valerie Solanas, “SCUM Manifesto” (1967)
 - Carl Wittman, “A Gay Manifesto” (1970)

- Radicalesbians, “Woman-Identified Woman” (1970)
 - “The Combahee River Collective Statement” (1978)
 - “Queers Read This” (1990)
 - Gloria Anzaldúa, “La Conciencia de la Mestiza” (1999)
- In lieu of a discussion worksheet, please choose one manifesto to be an “expert” on. This means you will read this manifesto more than once, and have a deep understanding of it. This could be the manifesto that resonates the most with you.

6 Slogans and Public Mourning

Tuesday, September 28: AIDS and ACT UP

- Read: Douglas Crimp, “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” *October*, vol. 43 (Winter 1987), pp. 3-16.
- Read the following poems from Google Classroom:
 - Paul Monette, “Worrying” and “Manifesto” from *Elegies for Rog* (1988)
 - Thom Gunn, “The Hug,” “Philemon and Baucis,” and “The Missing” from *The Man with Night Sweats* (1992)
 - Tim Dlugos, “Parachute” and “Sleep Like Spoons” (1990)
 - Timothy Liu, “SFO/HIV/JFK,” “Sodom and Gomorrah,” and “The Quilt” from *Vox Angelica* (1992)
 - Essex Hemphill, “American Wedding,” “For My Own Protection,” and “Heavy Breathing” from *Ceremonies* (1992)
 - Melvin Dixon, “Silent Reaper” and “Into Camp Ground” from *Love’s Instruments* (1995)
 - Reginald Shepherd, “Two or Three Things I Know About Him” and “Paradise” from *Angel, Interrupted* (1996)

Thursday, September 30: Black Lives Matter

- Read: Nicholas D. Mirzoeff, “#BlackLivesMatter Is Breathing New Life Into the Die-In,” *New Republic* (10 August 2015)
- Exhibit Captions: Read the survey of BLM on Google Classroom. Pick one artist mentioned in the article to explore further and caption one of their works.

7 Presentations

Tuesday, October 5: Individual Presentations in class

- Prepare a 2-3 minute presentation of your photograph

Thursday, October 7: Thematic Group Formation

- Group Manifestos due before class.
- Based on the presentations on Tuesday, we will break into groups for our final museum exhibition.

8 Fall Break: No Class 10/12 and 10/14

9 History and Fluidity, the Impact of Art

Tuesday, October 19: *The Thirty Names of Night*

- Read chapters 1–11.
- Discussion sheet due before class.

Thursday, October 21: *The Thirty Names of Night*

- Read chapter 12–24 (end).

10 Drag and Masquerade

Tuesday, October 26: *Paris is Burning* (screening)

- We will screen the movie in class.

Thursday, October 28: *Paris is Burning* (discussion)

- We will discuss *Paris is Burning* in class. Before class, read:
 - Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion,” from *Bodies That Matter* (Routledge, 1994).
 - bell hooks, “Is Paris Burning?” from *Black Looks* (Routledge, 1992).

11 From Sexual Liberation to Sexual Violence

Tuesday, November 2: *Sexile* by Jaime Cortez

- Download the graphic novella from Google Classroom. Read the whole thing before class.
- Group introductions to the Ferrato exhibit are due.

Thursday, November 4: Documenting Sexual Violence

- Explore the following artist pages. Pick one of their works related to sexual violence to caption:
 - Suzanne Lacy, including *Ablutions* (1970), *Three Weeks in May* (1977), and *In Mourning and in Rage* (1977): <https://www.suzannelacy.com/early-works>
 - Kara Walker, including *Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred b'tween the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart* (1994): <http://www.karawalkerstudio.com>
 - Yoko Ono, “Cut Piece” (1964) on https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/yoko-ono-cut-piece-1964/ (contains link to video on Vimeo).

12 *Blood and Guts in High School*

Tuesday, November 9: Self-shattering

- Read pp. 1–42 of the novel (“Inside high school”)
- Download and read from Google Classroom: Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” *October* 43 (1987): 197-222.

Thursday, November 11: Trauma and the limits of representation

- Read pp. 44–165 of the novel (“Outside high school” and “A journey to the end of night”)
- Discussion sheet due before class.

13 Re-imagining Domesticity

Tuesday, November 16: Faith Ringgold

- Watch Ringgold discussing “Quilting as an Art Form”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lia6SFTOeu8>
- Read interview with Ringgold on Google Classroom (with Melody Graulich and Mara Witzling)
- Exhibit Captions: Pick one of the works discussed in the interview OR pick another quilt work you find online.

Thursday, November 18: Martha Rosler and Mona Hatoum

- Read about Martha Rosler: <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/rosler-martha/>
- Listen to presentation from Mona Hatoum: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIQEtoRZjRQ&t=1929s>
- Pick one of the works mentioned in Hatoum’s presentation or at this online exhibit to caption: https://whitecube.com/artists/artist/mona_hatoum/
- Your individual caption for the Ferrato exhibit is due.

14 Zines

Tuesday, November 23: Zine Workshop

- Explore the Queer Zine Archive online. Pick one to caption and become an “expert.” <https://www.qzap.org/v9>
- In class, we will work on our zines.

15 Exhibit Construction and Workshops

Tuesday, November 30: Museum Set-Up

- Zine book report due. Please submit your reflection to Google Classroom and bring your zine in hard copy to class.
- No reading; we will spend class time on the museum exhibition set-up.

Thursday, December 2: Public Premiere!

- Groups will present their exhibit.