

Course Syllabus

In recent years, various practices of contemporary art have decisively shifted from the individual object to the actual experience, conditions, and situation of viewing. Regardless of whether artists are making objects, time-based videos, or installation work, now more than ever they are focusing on the *mis-en-scene* of the gallery or other site itself. More and more, artists seek to control conditions of reception by creating works, which offer themselves not simply as objects, but as environments, extended discourses, architectural spaces, and time-based immersive experiences. Even traditional paintings are often presented as "installations" sequenced with a particular grammar and syntax seen as necessary to their reception. Artists today are also concerned about issues of public display, mapping the conditions of reception into the structure of their artworks, and to a lesser degree into their exhibitions.

This course will focus on how and why art is conceptualized and practiced today as artists focus more than ever on the moment of reception. How do site and context, presentation and display, viewing and reception affect artistic production as it continues to move from the ostensibly private domain of the *studio* to the *public sphere*, whether that of the *gallery, museum, art festival, urban arena, performance, or outdoor site*. How does this shifting emphasis change the artist's central role either with or without the collaboration of a curator, the strictures of a site or institutional space? How do discursive structures and strategies shape much of contemporary art practice, both as implicit conditioning assumptions and explicit modes of artmaking and display? How is this situation related to the larger society and to our information consumption habits and desires? Will or could it ever change?

The class will be structured around issues and investigations that will be presented in lectures with accompanying readings and discussion. The first part of the course will provide a historical and critical context. Topics investigated will include selected histories of site-specific sculpture and installation, earthworks and land projects (i.e.; Smithson, Heizer, Turrell, Christo/Jeanne-Claude, Gordon Matta-Clark etc.), performance, conceptual art and ephemeral works in the public sphere (i.e. Happenings, Fluxus, mail/correspondence art, self-publishing etc.).

We will also look at more recent artistic and curatorial practices including issues involving the use of sound and moving image within the gallery (e.g. Janet Cardiff, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Doug Aitken); the deliberate expansion of the work from the single art object to a syntactical condition governed by interrelationships between objects and sites; the notion of discursive systems in general in art; and the differences between various genres of exhibition and gallery display, including the internet and the role of networked art.

Classes will incorporate off-site meetings in local galleries and museums, lectures by visiting artists and a possible field trip scheduled during Spring Break. During the final part of the course students will work together curating their own projects in different sites and writing about each other's production.

This course, cross-listed in Art History and Critical Studies, is part of this year's pilot curriculum for Curatorial Studies.

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Course Requirements

First assignment	20% of grade
Attendance, class discussion and participation	30% of grade
Final Project and Presentation	50% of grade

Attendance is mandatory at all classes; more than three absences will result in an automatic drop (if early in course) or fail (if after the drop deadline).

Course Readings and Text

There will be required readings each week, and all students will be expected to complete them and come to class prepared for active discussion. Each student will be asked to prepare and present the weekly readings at least once during the course, by summarizing main points, providing a thoughtful response, and helping to lead class discussion. Photocopies of most reading assignments will be handed out in class. It is also recommended that students buy the following useful and text, from which a number of readings will be drawn:

Peter Selz and Kristine Stiles, Theories and Documents of Modern Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings. Berkeley, U.C. Press 1998

Other recommended books, catalogues, and journals will be on reserve or available through the instructors.

Writing Assignment

All writing assignments must be proofread, spell-checked, and typed rather than hand-written. If you are a non-native speaker of English or need special assistance with your writing, please let us know.

Final Projects and Presentations

Students will team up in groups of 2-3 to create final projects, to be presented to the class in 20 minute oral presentations during the final four class sessions. Details concerning the nature of this assignment will be outlined in a separate hand-out; however, all projects will include both the presentation of art and written commentary on it, with a public component.

Office Hours

Office hours for Karen Moss and John Weber will be variable, by appointment. Please make appointments for both Karen and John via email, at kmoss@sfai.edu;, and jweber@sfmoma.org. Appointments with Karen can also be made by phone at 749-4550. Karen's office is located at the back of the Walter and McBean Galleries; you may leave messages for her at the front desk, but please do not disturb others working in the gallery offices.

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Course Schedule

Jan. 24

Class One: Site Conditions and Discursive Structures in Contemporary Art

The first meeting of On Site will introduce a number of the themes to be covered in this class by surveying a number of situations in recent art, including the nature of site specificity in different contexts; the introduction of moving images and real-time artworks into the formerly static environments of the gallery and museum; notions of public art; and the situation of art in museums and in the increasingly wide-spread international festival environments. Always, we will try to keep an eye simultaneously on the effects that various specific sites of encounter have on artists' practices and audience reception, as well as on the institutional pressures and operational needs of various venues. The role of the curator will also be examined where appropriate.

Topics and issues:

- The Beuys Block in Hessian Landesmuseum Darmstadt
- Big shows and institutional structures: Documenta, Venice, Whitney Biennial
- Gehry's Bilbao Museum
- *Wrapped Reichstag*
- *The Telephone Call* (Janet Cardiff) and the notion of immersive structures and forms

Recommended events:

January 26: Artist in Person, Fred Wilson Lecture: "The Silent Message of the Museum", Berkeley Art Museum Theater, 3 pm, FREE with museum admission

Jan. 31

Class Two: Visits to *The Annlee Project* at SFMOMA, the Swedish Show and Charles LeDray at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

We will meet at SFMOMA in the right hand corner of the Atrium promptly at 1:00 and proceed to the Annlee installation on the 4th floor. (Note: Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Annlee* project, an 8-hour film of Annlee reciting Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is playing in the Wattis Theater if you get there early.) After considering the *Annlee* work and also noting Sarah Sze's installation, *Things Fall Apart*, we will head to the Center for the Arts shows. Between Jan. 31 and Feb. 7, please try to see Wilson's retrospective show at the Berkeley Art Museum.

Topics and issues:

- The gallery condition/s as "site"
- Collaborative projects
- The artist as quasi-curator
- Exhibition as artform and institutional critique
- Discursive structure and social space
- Internal syntax within works of art

Reading:

"Talking at Pomona," by David Antin, 1972, handout from *Artforum*.

"Sign of the Times," by Philip Nobel, *Artforum*, January 2003, pp. 104-111

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Feb. 7

Class Three: “Installations” and “Objects” in various contexts

We will continue discussion of the works and exhibitions viewed the previous week, focusing on the nature of site-specificity, questions of audience, reading and contextuality, and the structure of different genres of art works as present in different site situations. Work by the following artists and others will serve as additional reference points for discussion:

Topics and issues

- Rachel Whiteread (site specific pieces, gallery show, Venice Biennale installation, public art),
- Barry McGee (street graffiti; gallery shows; Venice Biennale installation; museum show)
- Matthew Ritchie (gallery painting/online projects)
- Richard Serra (public art and Tilted Arc; gallery/museum shows; private commissions; Documenta/Muenster/Venice installations);
- Felix Gonzalez-Torres (stacks, candies, language....)

Reading:

“One Place After Another,” by Miwon Kwon, in Space, Site, Intervention, situating installation art, ed. Erika Suderberg, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000, pp. 38-64.

“Tilted Arc, Enemy of the People?” by Robert Storr, *Art in America*

“The Size of Non-Size,” by Douglas Davis, in Artculture, Essays on the Post-Modern, 1977, Harper and Row, pages 28-43.

Feb. 14

Class Four: Happenings, Fluxus, Intermedia: Live and Event-based Performance

Topics and issues

- Introduction to happenings, Fluxus and other live or event-based performances
- John Cage’s pivotal influence, happenings by Alan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, Wolf Vostell and others
- Dick Higgins’ theories of intermedia
- Score-based events by artists associated with Fluxus (Alison Knowles, Nam June Paik, Yoko Ono, Ben Vautier & others)

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What is the importance of these performative practices of the late 1950s & 1960s avant-garde and what is their significance today? What was the reception to this work when it was presented in its original site and context and how has it become historicized?

Reading:

Kristine Stiles, Chapter 8, Introduction to Performance Art, in Selz & Stiles, Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art, Berkeley: U.C. Press, 679-686.

Kaprow, Allan. “Guidelines for Happenings,” in Selz & Stiles, 709-714

Dick Higgins, Statement on Intermedia

George Maciunas, Fluxus Manifesto

Hannah Higgins, preface and intro to The Fluxus Experience, Berkeley: UC Press, 2002.

Hendricks, Jon. Fluxus Codex. Detroit: Gilbert & Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, 1988.

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Feb. 21

Class Five: Micol Hebron exhibition and visit, discussion and video screenings

Karen and John will be out of town this week for the College Art Association conference and students will meet at the Walter and McBean Galleries with artist Micol Hebron. A recent graduate of UCLA's MFA program, Hebron has quickly become noted for her performances and video installations addressing issues of sexuality, the construction of identity, daily behavior and social ritual, and the use and configuration of power in social relationships. Her McBean Gallery project, inspired by the "Not in My Backyard" (NIMBY) mentality that typified cultural censorship of the 1980's in the United States, incorporates video projection and live feed video to explore issues of politics, gender, race, and censorship. She will also discuss definitions and mis-perceptions of the term site-specificity in terms of her own work and that of other artists.

Reading:

Xeroxes to be distributed in advance of class.

Feb. 28

Class Six: Outside the Gallery, Earthworks, Architecture, and beyond

This class will consider artists, work, and attitudes originating in the late 1960s and 1970s, seeking to move art out of the gallery environment and into natural environments on the one hand, and into urban situations on the other. Discussion will center on the work of Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Christo and Jeanne-Claude (in longer perspective), Gordon Matta-Clark, Walter de Maria, Donald Judd's Marfa installations, and James Turrell's Roden Crater. We will consider the parallel life and afterlife of projects sited in remote locations, examine how such works fit into other art world practices, economies, and issues (or don't!), and raise the question of what it means for the artist to pursue such projects, what sacrifices may be entailed, and how such projects have been financed.

Reading:

"The Spiral Jetty," by Robert Smithson, 1972, in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Stiles/Selz, 1996, U. of California Press, pages 531-533.

"A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," by Robert Smithson, excerpted in *Art in Theory, 1900- 1990*, ed. Harrison and Wood, pages 863-868.

"Sun Tunnels," by Nancy Holt, 1977, in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Stiles/Selz, 1996, U. of California Press, pages 536-540.

"Michael Heizer: A Sculptor's Colossus of the Desert," by Michael Kimmelman, New York Times, at:

<http://www.bebeyond.com/LearnEnglish/DailyReadings/Arts/DesertSculptor.htm>

"Earthwords," by Craig Owens, in *Beyond Recognition*, 1992, U. of California Press, pages 40-51.

"The Immobile Cyclone: Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty," by Angelika Pagel on US Park Service Site:

<http://www.nps.gov/gosp/tour/pagel.html>

Roden Crater site: <http://www.rodencrater.org/>

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Class Six: Outside the Gallery, Earthworks, Architecture, and beyond, continued

Recommended events:

Lecture by James Turrell at CCAC Wattis Institute, SF Campus, Feb. 28, 7:00 p.m. (check their website for accurate information on this one!).

Note: there is an SFAI lecture by Richard Tuttle at the same time; for the purposes of our class, the Turrell lecture is more significant; however, students are free to choose which they wish to attend.

Whatever Happened to Installation Art? Capp Street 20th Anniversary Symposium at SFMOMA, sponsored by CCAC Wattis Institute, March 1, 10 am - 5 pm. **Highly recommended. Seating very limited, buy tickets early!**

Mar. 7

Class Seven: Installations, Architecture, and Immersive spaces

In contrast to works conceived to exceed the scale and scope of the gallery site, this class will focus on works from the late 1980s to now which assume the gallery as a backdrop, yet seek to transform it into a single work. We will focus on installations by Ann Hamilton, Mike Nelson, Gregor Schneider, Glen Seator, Jessica Stockholder, Ernesto Neto, Dan Graham, Kara Walker, Sarah Sze, and other artists whose work seeks to function as a single aesthetic environment experienced by the viewer from within its boundaries. We will also consider hybrid installations that can be disassembled into individual components, such as Robert Gober's rooms for Dia Foundation and LA MOCA, Jenny Holzer's museum projects, and more. A rereading of Miwon Kwon's article at this point is recommended.

Topics and issues

- Installation as event and commodity
- Role of the curator as executive producer
- Mary Jane Jacob's *Places with a Past* exhibition in Charleston
- Why has every exhibition has turned into an "installation"?

Reading:

"The Reverie of Labor," by Chris Bruce, from Ann Hamilton, Sao Paulo • Seattle, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, 1992

Additional reading to be assigned later

Mar. 14

Class Eight: Internet works, Extended participatory structures

Since the advent of the Internet, it has been possible for artists to go directly to the public in a manner that is qualitatively unlike previous artist-run situations (e.g. the alternative space, the artist-run space, the self-help gallery, etc.). This class will examine the nature of networked space and consider its use as an art medium. We will ask for several students to volunteer to find and present sites of interest; this will be considered an alternative to presenting reading for one of the classes. Each student should present at least 2 sites and come prepared to demo them efficiently, while discussing what they think the artist/collective is doing in the site, and what they find compelling in it.

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Class Eight: Internet works, Extended participatory structures, continued

In preparation for this class, all students should spend some time on www.rhizome.org surveying artists' projects in the artbase.

Topics and issues:

- Student presentations of internet works
- Problems of interactivity and technology-based works
- Net formalism in early net art
- *010101: Art in Technological Times* and *Telematic Connections*, and the role of institutional spaces in exhibiting networked projects
- Artists' websites, Rhizome, ädaweb, Museums, galleries, and the Net

Reading:

Excerpts from *010101: Art in Technological Times* and *Telematic Connections* catalogues
Transcript of lecture by David Ross

Mar. 21 and Mar. 29—Spring Break no classes.

April 4

Class Nine:

Alison Knowles visit and discussion—tentative

April 11

Class Ten: Enshrining Ephemera: exhibitions of event-based work and performance

Topics and issues:

- The problematic nature of presenting ephemeral, non-static work in static gallery and museum contexts
- Liberating residual objects of performance from ossification: Issues of display and re-presentation, documentation and reception
- Case studies of recent exhibitions that have attempted to resolve this dilemma:
John Cage: Rolywholyover: A Circus and Out of Actions (MOCA, Los Angeles)
In the Spirit of Fluxus and Joseph Beuys, Walker Art Center; Scream Against the Sky, Guggenheim Museum; Yes: Yoko Ono, SFMOMA and others.

Reading:

Excerpts from following catalogues and other exhibition materials:

Armstrong et. al. In the Spirit of Fluxus. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, ex. cat. 1993.

Hendricks, Jon, and Munroe, Alexandra, Yes Yoko Ono. ex. cat., 2001.

Lazar, Julie et. al. John Cage: Rolywholyover: A Circus, MOCA, 1993.

Munroe, Alexandra. Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky. New York: Abrams, 1996.

Events:

April 12, 2 pm lecture by Atom Egoyan on his installation work and show at SFMOMA, in the Wattis Theater.

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April 18

Class Eleven: Real Time Work

Since the advent of inexpensive computer editing systems and digital video cameras in the early mid-1990s, video has played an increasing role in publicly funded festival exhibitions and has entered the commercial gallery system and its attendant art economy fitfully. This class will examine video installations and other real time pieces and interrogate their relationship to static works in gallery space. We will pay particular attention to issues of reception and viewership in real time works.

Topics and Issues

- Narrativity in the gallery space
- Video in the group show and festival environment
- Video as a collectible medium, problems of format and archiving
- Viola, Hill, Pippilotti Rist, Wilson sisters, Steve McQueen, Paul Pfeifer, Doug Aitken
- Roxy Paine's art making machines

Reading:

To be determined....

Events of Interest:

Reel Sculpture show at SFMOMA: Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Atom Egoyan, Abbas Kiarostami

April 25

Class Twelve: Student presentations of their final projects

Details regarding the final project assignment will be covered in a separate hand-out. Three groups of students will present their projects and lead a class discussion. Students will assign readings in advance of their presentations.

May 2

Class Thirteen: Student presentations

May 9

Class Fourteen: Student presentations

May 16

Class Fifteen: Last presentations, final wrap-up and party

Course Assignments

First Assignment

Due in class Feb. 7th

The first assignment is to write a 2-4 page paper describing the current state of your work and linking it to the work of any other artists you are interested in and find relevant. You should talk about the pieces you are now actively engaged in making, and discuss them in whatever state of resolution, confusion, doubt, or hope they are now in. Please feel free to mention any artists who are of interest to you and relevant to the specific course material. The paper will be followed by a studio visit and short discussion from John and/or Karen.

Final Assignment

Due in class on a sign-up basis as the close of the semester

The final assignment will be to create and implement a project that possesses a public aspect, whether it is an exhibition, publication, or event/activity. All projects must be done collaboratively in teams of 2-3. There will be no exceptions to this. Why? Because no one functions as an artist alone. Dealing with other people is a necessity, not an option.

Some examples would include:

- Teams of 2 or 3 do a show of 3-6 other MFA students' work, with a governing curatorial idea, rationale, etc., that is made clear to viewers.
- You do a show of your own work together with a fellow student/curator who serves as curator or essayist.
- You create a project for a specific audience, outside a gallery context, but in an identifiably art mode.
- You create a publication, digital or paper, about some work, show, issue, etc., working together with other writers, designers, editors, etc.
- You create a public display that interrogates some aspect of art, history, culture.

All projects must be conceived in such a way that they can be presented to the class, so that the class functions as audience. There will be presentations with time for class response and discussion. Mechanisms that help you learn what other people respond to your projects are encouraged.

A short proposal or plan of your project, with collaborators identified, will be due in the last class before spring break.