



ARTH 4814 – Theories of Contemporary Art Spring 2026

**Mondays and Wednesdays 3:30-4:50pm
ART 280**

Ala Younis, *Nefertiti*, 2008, installation

Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity

-Simone Weil (1909-1943)

letter to Joë Bousquet, 13 April 1942; Simone Pétrement *Simone Weil: A Life* (1976) tr. Raymond Rosenthal

Instructor: Dr. Tiffany Floyd

Email: Tiffany.Floyd@unt.edu

Office Hours: Mondays 2-3pm in ART 244 or by appointment

Course Description

This course will explore the theories and practices of Contemporary Art (roughly 2000-now) through five overarching themes: The Art World, The Artwork, The Archive, The Body, and The Posthuman. Through these themes we will explore the frameworks in which contemporary art functions and circulates, the ways contemporary artists engage with the objecthood of art in an increasingly digital world, and how the body persists as a primary mode of expression.

Course Objectives

- To understand the broad theoretical principles related to our five overarching themes, as well as the contextual circumstances that spurred their development
- To apply those principles to artistic practices beginning around 2000
- To discuss issues, themes, and debates related to our five overarching themes in relation to specific artworks and art-related events
- To synthesize class discussions and assigned readings in response to directed questions on artworks that we have not viewed in class
- To conduct individual analyses on an artist and their relation to issues brought up in class

Course Readings

All course readings will be posted on Canvas, organized by class day. There are no required textbooks for this course. Please prepare the assigned readings ***prior*** to their listed class day.

Course Requirements and Grading

Class 'Conversation Starters' – 10%

1 Documentary Film Response Paper – 15%

1 Exhibition Response Paper – 15%

- 1 Artist Response Paper + Presentation – 20%
- 3 Group Discussion Posts – 30%
- 1 Group In-Class Presentation – 10%

Class 'Conversation Starters' (10%)

This course is not structured as a strict lecture. Discussion, presentation, collective analysis, and other forms of participation will be fundamental to our learning throughout the Spring session. Thus, you are required to attend and participate. I will take attendance at the beginning of each class, and you are encouraged to speak up! To help track attendance and participation, you will have Class 'Conversation Starters' – short class prep assignments – to complete for most class meetings as listed in the syllabus. There will be 20 in all (0.5 pts for each). These assignments will be given as canvas quizzes and will be due before the start of each class. ***Receiving credit on your conversation starter is contingent on your presence in class.*** If you turn in your conversation starter but are not in class that day – you will not receive points.

1 Documentary Film Response Paper – 750-1250 words (15%)

You will be assigned to watch 1 documentary film outside of class. You will respond to this film using information from class discussions and readings. You will also think about the film's approach and address how it added to your understanding of Contemporary Art.

1 Exhibition Response Paper – 750-1250 words (15%)

You will respond to a current exhibition (TBD). You will be required to visit the exhibition. There will be a scheduled class visit that will include transportation from the Art Building to the museum and back, as well as the cost of the ticket.

1 Artist Response Paper + Presentation – 750-1250 words (20%)

You will choose an artist and write a paper responding to their practice, detailing how their work engages with topics discussed in class and in course readings. You will then do a presentation (either in class or in a recorded presentation) at the end of the semester.

3 Group Discussion Posts (30%)

Throughout the session, you will conduct a parallel online discussion. This assignment will require you to engage with a controversy that has emerged in recent years. You will provide a minimum 300-word response to a specific prompt and then will respond to one of your classmate's posts with a minimum 100-word response. To help facilitate this online discussion, you will be placed in groups.

1 In-Class Group Presentation (10%)

In groups, you will conduct one in-class presentation. For this presentation, each member of the group will choose an artist that engages with one of the course's overarching themes - The Art World, The Artwork, The Archive, The Body, and The Posthuman. You will then come up with a series of discussion questions with which to engage the class. You will have the entire class to do this presentation. See schedule.

More detailed descriptions of each assignment will be posted to canvas

Course Policies

Late work

Please endeavor to turn your assignments in on time. This is important for keeping the class on track, especially considering how the assignments are structured. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, ***no late work will be accepted***. If these circumstances cause you to miss a deadline, then **you will have 3 days from the deadline** to turn in your work for credit. Please communicate with me about missing assignments as soon as possible, do not wait until these 3 days have passed to let me know that you will be turning in your assignment. This extension *does not apply* to work due at the end of the semester or to your group presentation.

Attendance

Your attendance in class is required. I will take attendance in each class and will offer no excused absences for any reason. However, it is always good to communicate with me if you miss class. Your attendance grade will be assessed through the Class 'Conversation Starter' Assignments. ***If you miss a class, you can complete a make-up assignment = a one-full-page summary of one of the readings for the day that you missed (to be turned in the next class). *You must ALSO have completed your conversation starter for that day!****

Academic Integrity

Most of your assignments will be submitted to canvas and run through TurnItIn, a plagiarism detection tool that also scans for AI-generated material. Your work **MUST** be 100% your own and written without the use of AI software (be careful, even editing software – i.e. Grammarly – can change your work enough to be flagged by TurnItIn). If you are found to have plagiarized or to have used AI to generate your work, you will receive a **ZERO** on the assignment for the first infraction and you will **FAIL** the class for the second infraction.

Zoom Option

This is a face-to-face course and as such most of your participation must be in-class. However, you may take a Zoom option **ONCE** during the semester as needed. You **must** communicate with me at least one hour prior to class if you will be joining via Zoom and you **must** still submit your 'conversation starter' assignment prior to the beginning of class. During your zoom session, you will also be required to post notes in the chat box to demonstrate that you are participating in class. You **cannot** use your zoom option to participate in your group presentation.

Course Schedule

1. Monday January 12th – Who's Afraid of Contemporary Art? I am! Intro to the Course

2. Wednesday January 14th – Defining Contemporary Art in the New World Order

Deadline to Sign Up for Group – Sign Up On Canvas

Reading: Julian Stallabrass, "A Zone of Freedom?," from *Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction*
(Optional Reading: Terry Smith, "Our' Contemporaneity," from *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*)

3. Monday January 19th – No Class! – MLK Day Holiday

4. Wednesday January 21st – The Art World – Globalization

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #1: CFR Education, "What Is Globalization? Understand Our Interconnected World" + Harvard Online, "Pros and cons of neoliberalism"

Reading: Jonathan Harris, "Introduction: Globalization and Contemporary Art: Convergence of Peoples and Idea," from *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Optional Reading): Simon Sheikh, "The roads of rage and ruin: contemporary art and its publics after the global," from *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*)

5. Monday January 26th – The Art World – Markets and Money

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #2: The Art Assignment = "The Art Market and Taxes" + "Why Do Corporations Buy Art?" + "The Guerrilla Girls Get Shut Out at Frieze Art Fair"

Reading: Olav Velthuis, "Globalization and Commercialization of the Art Market," from *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present* (Optional Reading): Paul Costhwaite, "What a Waste of Money: Expenditure, The Death Drive, and the Contemporary Art Market," from *New Formations*)

6. Wednesday January 28th – The Art World – Biennials

***Discussion Post #1 due Wednesday January 28th at 11:59pm AND Discussion Post #3: Response due Friday January 30th at 11:59pm

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #3: Artsy, "Behind the Biennale: A Short History of the World's Most Important Art Exhibition" + The Whitney Museum of American Art, "Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet as It's Kept" + ICA Boston, "Simone Leigh: Sovereignty at the U.S. Pavilion {at the Venice Biennale 2022}," + "The Venice Biennale: Redressing the post-colonial balance through art"

Reading: Rafal Niemojewski, "Biennialization and its counternarratives," From *Biennials: Exhibitions We Love to Hate* (Optional Reading: Massimiliano Gioni, "In Defense of Biennials" from *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*)

7. Monday February 2nd – The Art World – Art as Activism

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #4: The Art Assignment "Should Art be Publicly Funded?" + Tateshots "Performance and Protest: Can Art Change Society? | How Art Became Active"

Reading: Andrea Giunta, "Activism," from *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present* (Optional Reading): Raqs Media Collective "Light from a Distant Star: A Meditation on Art, Agency, and Politics," from *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*)

8. Wednesday February 4th – Group 1 Presentation, The Art World

9. Monday February 9th – The Artwork – Dematerialization, The Internet

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #5: Tate, "What are internet artworks and how do we care for them?" Tate Shots, "Cory Arcangel – Computer Art"

Reading: Eva Respini, "No Ghost Just a Shell," from *Art in the Age of the Internet* (Optional Reading): David Joselit, "Conceptual Art 2.0," from *Contemporary Art: 1989 to Present*)

10. Wednesday February 11th – The Artwork – Dematerialization continued, Into the Digital

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #6: British Council Arts, "What is Digital Art?" + The Museum of Modern Art, "AI Art: How artists are using and confronting machine learning" + -Wired, "How This Guy Uses A.I. to Create Art"

Reading: Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," e-flux (Optional Reading: Melissa Gronlund, "Introduction: Beyond the Visible Image," from *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture*)

11. Monday February 16th – The Artwork – Return to Materiality, Formalism Redefined

Film Response Due at 11:59pm

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #7: MoMA, "This is Isa Genzken," TedTalk, "Sarah Sze: How we experience time and memory through art"

Reading: Anne Ellegood, "Formalism Redefined," from *Contemporary Art: 1989 to Present* (Optional Reading: Claire Bishop, "Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media," from *Artforum*, <https://www.artforum.com/print/201207/digital-divide-contemporary-art-and-new-media-31944>)

12. Wednesday February 18th – The Artwork – Return to Materiality Continued, The Lure of the Handmade

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #8: Tate, "El Anatsui – 'When you unite things, their power keeps growing,'" + DHG Dyeing House Gallery, "Portrait of Vanessa Barragão: recycling in textile art as a global manifesto" Christies, "Textiles in Contemporary Art," CBS This Morning, "Artist Bisa Butler on creating new narratives through "portrait quilts,""

Reading: Shu Hung and Joseph Magliaro, "Introduction," From *By Hand: The Use of Craft in Contemporary Art* and Polly Ullrich, "Workmanship: The Hand and Body as Perceptual Tool," from *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft* (Optional Reading: Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, "From Craftivism to Craftwashing," from *The New Politics of the Handmade*)

13. Monday February 23rd – Group 2 Presentation, The Artwork

14. Wednesday February 25th – The Archive – The Archival Impulse

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #9: Tate, "What are archives?," Then and Now, "Archive Fever: Derrida, Steedman, and the Archival Turn"

Reading: Sara Callahan, "When the Dust Has Settled: What Was the Archival Turn, and Is It Still Turning?" (Optional Reading: Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse")

15. Monday March 2nd – The Archive – Memory, The Substance of the Archive

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #10: Boca Raton Museum of Art, "World Premiere of Artist Whitfield Lovell's "Passages" National Tour," + Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, "Whitfield Lovell: Passages | The Artist," Missoula Art Museum "Roger Shimomura: Minodaka on My Mind,"

Reading: Jean Robertson and Craig McDaniel, "Memory," from *Themes of Contemporary Art*; (Optional Reading: Kathy Carbone, "Archival Art: Memory Practices, Interventions, and Productions," from *Art and Archives*)

16. Wednesday March 4th – The Archive – Archive as Subject, Photograph as Found Object

***Discussion Post #2 due Wednesday March 4th at 11:59pm AND Discussion Post #2: Response due Friday March 6th at 11:59pm

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #11: Tateshots, "Akram Zaatar – Photographs, YouTube and Memory," International Center of Photography, "2016 ICP Infinity Award: Art — Walid Raad

Reading: Akram Zaatar, "Photographic Documents/Excavation as Art," from *The Archive*; Sara Callahan, "Materiality," from *Art + Archive: Understanding the Archival Turn in Contemporary Art*

(Optional Reading: Okwui Enwezor, "Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument," from *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*)

17. Monday March 9th – No Class – Enjoy your Spring Break!

18. Wednesday March 11th – No Class - Enjoy your Spring Break!

19. Monday March 16th – The Archive – Exploring Histories

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #12: SFMOMA, "An interview with Fred Wilson about the conventions of museums and race," The Art Assignment, "Remake the Met"

Reading: Joan Gibbons, "The Ordering of Knowledge: Museums and Archives," from *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*

(Optional Reading: Joan Gibbons, "Revisions: The Reassembling of 'History,'" from *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, David Joselit, "Citizens of Information," From *Heritage and Debt*)

20. Wednesday March 18th- Group 3 Presentation, The Archive

21. Monday March 23rd — The Body – The Self, Identity and Post-Identity...?

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #13: The Art Assignment, "The Art History of the Selfie," Art 21, "Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Border Tuner*," Guggenheim Museum, "Kyung An on Do Ho Suh's 'Closet-I'"

Readings: Robertson and McDaniel, "Identity: Post Identity," Selections from the *Body in Contemporary Art*; Judith Roof, "Thinking Post-Identity" (Optional Reading: Ace Lehner, "From Self-Portrait to Selfie," from *Self-Representation in an Expanded Field*)

22. Wednesday March 25th -- Free Day to Attend the Exhibition – No Class

Exhibition Response Due at 11:59pm

23. Monday March 30th – The Body – The Disabled Body and Other Marginalized Bodies

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #14: Great Big Story, "Giving Artists With Disabilities a Space to Thrive," National Gallery, "How did Lucian Freud present queer and marginalised bodies?," Bloomberg Originals, "Marc Quinn and the Mutability of the Human Body | Brilliant Ideas Ep. 33"

Reading: Ann Fox, "Unexpected Anatomies," from *(Dis)Assemblages* (Optional reading: Ann Millett-Gallant, "Introduction: Enabling the Image" + "Sculpting Body Ideals," from *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*)

24. Wednesday April 1st – The Body – Abstracting the Body in the Changing Field of Identity Politics

Sign Up for Artist for Artist Response Paper

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #15: The Photographer's Gallery, "How Do You See Me? An Interview with Heather Dewey-Hagborg," "Complexity and Contradiction: Black Artists | The New York Times," "Art on 60 Minutes: Mark Bradford," "It's very hard to understand what our reality is." | Artist Julie Mehretu | Louisiana Channel"

Reading: Selections from Lex Morgan Lancaster, "Introduction," *Dragging Away: Queer Abstraction in Contemporary Art*, Megan O'Grady, "Once Overlooked, Black Abstract Painters are Finally Given Their Due," from *New York Times Magazine* (Optional Reading: Selection from *Going Dark: the Contemporary Figures at the Edge of Visibility*)

25. Monday April 6th – The Body – Living Matter, Bodily Substances

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #16: "Dan Rather Reports: DNA Artist (Heather Dewey-Hagborg)," Bloomberg Originals, "Marc Quinn and the Mutability of the Human Body | Brilliant Ideas Ep. 33"

Reading: Lydia Horne, "Bleeding Out: On the Use of Blood in Contemporary Art"

<https://www.artpapers.org/bleeding-out-on-the-use-of-blood-in-contemporary-art/>; Tora Holmberg and Malin Ideland, "Imagination laboratory: making sense of bio-objects in contemporary genetic art" (Optional Reading: Barbara Ursula Oettl, "The Artist's Body in the Age of Genomic Reproduction," from *Living Matter*)

26. Wednesday April 8th – Group 4 Presentation, The Body

27. Monday April 13th – The Posthuman – Envisioning the Posthuman

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #17: What does "POSTHUMAN" mean? Dr. Ferrando (NYU) - Course "The Posthuman" Lesson n. 1 + The MAIN DIFFERENCE between Posthumanism and Transhumanism - Dr. Ferrando (NYU), Concept n. 2

Readings: Giovanni Aloisio and Susan McHugh, "Envisioning Posthumanism" from *Posthumanism in Art and Science* (Optional Reading: Kevin LaGrandeur, "Art and the Posthuman")

28. Wednesday April 15th – The Posthuman – Ecocritical Art

***Discussion Post #3 due Wednesday April 15th at 11:59pm AND Discussion Post #1: Response due Friday April 17th at 11:59pm

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #18: The World Around, "Michael Wang presents Extinct in New York | The World Around," Smarthistory, "Endangered coastlines and lifeways," The Art Assignment, "How Climate Changes Art"

Reading: TJ Demos, "Contemporary Art and Politics of Ecology," from *Third Text* (Optional Reading: William Smith, "Climate Change Has Already Transformed Everything About Contemporary Art")

29. Monday April 20th – The Posthuman – Humanity's Others

***Class 'Conversation Starter' #19: Freethink, "The Cyborg Artist Who Hears Color," CBS Mornings, "Afrofuturism gains new momentum as artists reclaim black history," ABS News "Patricia Piccinini's hyperrealist sculptures," "Pierre Huyghe: Untitled (Human Mask), The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2017"

Reading: Justyna Stepien, "Unfolding Human/Nonhuman Animal Entanglements," from *Posthuman and Nonhuman Entanglements in Contemporary Art and the Body* (Optional Reading: Kim Toffoletti, "Feminism, Technology, and the Posthuman," from *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture, and the Posthuman Body*)

30. Wednesday April 22nd – The Posthuman – Artificial Intelligence, Non-Human Creativity
***Class 'Conversation Starter' #20: Inside Edition, "This Robot Can Paint Human-Like Portraits," Leonel Moura, "Leonel Moura art," TedTalks, "Art in the age of machine intelligence | Refik Anadol"
Reading: Leonel Moura, "Machines that Make Art" from <https://www.leonelmoura.com/>; Bojana Romic, "Negotiating Anthropomorphism in the Ai-Da Robot," from *International Journal of Social Robotics* (Optional Reading: Marian Mazzone and Ahmed Elgammal, "Art, Creativity, and the Potential of Artificial Intelligence," from *Arts*)

31. Monday April 27th – Group 5 Presentation, The Posthuman

32. Wednesday April 29th – Presentation Day!
Artist Response Due at 11:59pm

33. Monday May 4th – Finals Week - No In-Person Class

34. Wednesday May 6th– Finals Week - No In-Person Class

The instructor reserves the right to alter this syllabus over the course of the semester

Summary of Course Deadlines:

Discussion Posts:

Discussion Post #1 – Wednesday Jan 28th at 11:59pm (Response Due Friday Jan 30th at 11:59pm)
Discussion Post #2 – Wednesday March 4th at 11:59pm (Response Due Friday March 6th at 11:59pm)
Discussion Post #3 – Wednesday April 15th at 11:59pm (Response Due Friday April 17th at 11:59pm)

Response Papers:

Film Response Paper Due February 16th at 11:59pm
Exhibition Response Paper Due March 25th at 11:59pm
Artist Response Paper Due April 29th at 11:59pm
Artist Response Paper Presentation due April 29th at 5pm

Group Presentations:

Group One: Wednesday Feb 4th in class
Group Two: Monday Feb 23rd in class
Group Three: Wednesday March 18th in class
Group Four: Wednesday April 8th in class
Group Five: Monday April 27th in class

*****The instructor reserves the right to alter this schedule with clear and timely notification.**

Course Disclaimer

Content in the arts can sometimes include works, situations, actions, and language that can be personally challenging or offensive to some students on the grounds, for example, of sexual explicitness, violence, or blasphemy. The College of Visual Arts and Design is devoted to the principle of freedom of expression, artistic and otherwise, and it is not the college's practice to censor these works or ideas on any of these grounds. Students who might feel unduly distressed or made uncomfortable by such expressions should withdraw at the start of the term and seek another course.

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

The "unauthorized" use of any person or technology that assists in a student's assignment, project, or paper is considered cheating under the UNT Student Academic Integrity Policy (UNT Policy 6.003). Unless a professor or instructor gives explicit "authorization," AI cannot be used to complete assignments, projects, or papers. Doing so will result in a "cheating" violation. AI should not be used to assist in writing papers, searching for sources, or creating citations. Citations provided by AI are fabricated by mimicking existing bodies of work. In most cases, AI will pull direct quotes from existing sources to answer queries and make-up information about the source. AI can be used ethically to help you develop an outline for a paper, generate ideas, and learn a citation style.

ADA Accommodation Statement

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

The Use of Artificial Intelligence

In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like [Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini, even Grammarly to a certain extent] is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the Student Academic Integrity policy.