Course Description

Climate change, with its attendant global warming, is widely seen as the primary threat to sustainable life. Contemporary artists from around the world are raising their voices to support action, a call that has culminated in ecocritical artistic practices that draw attention to the importance of environmental stewardship, as well as to unfolding climate emergencies with their causes and outcomes. The Arab World has experienced first-hand the devastating effects of climate change as populations suffer from rising temperatures, water shortages, pollution due to consumption culture, and disappearing ecosystems. Thus, many contemporary Arab artists have joined the fray to advocate for the necessary social and economic changes that will aid in the preservation of their homes and cultures.

The mobilization of heritage for the purpose of commenting on the ecological crisis in the Middle East has been a particularly potent strategy of Ecocritical Art for Contemporary Arab Artists. This engagement can take the form of large-scale, community-based projects, but can also be more subtle representations that focus on the overlapping realms of culture, tradition, environment, and modernization. This course will consider artists that participate in traditional building and making practices, utilize sustainable materials culled from the earth, create works within and in conversation with the environment, and involve local communities with the purpose of commenting on the tenuous and ever-loosening grip that Arab countries have on their natural environs and resources. It will also consider these practices in the context of contemporary artistic interactions with heritage as an equally fragile and disappearing entity in need of preservation.

More specifically, the course will begin by outlining the general theoretical and methodological questions of Ecocritical Art, Petromodernity, and Heritage Engagement. It will then move to apply those concepts to the work of selected Arab artists – like Dana Awartani, Manal Al Dowayan, Akeel Khreef, Khalil Rabah, Sama Alshaibi, and many others. The course will then culminate in an in-depth interaction with Rashad Salim’s ongoing project *Ark Re-imagined*, a multifaceted endeavor that begins by speculating on the structure and materiality of Noah’s Ark built with traditional Iraqi boat-making techniques and grows to encompass questions of ecological and cultural degradation, as well as rejuvenation.
Course Objectives
- To understand and contextualize contemporary theories and practices of Ecocritical Art from a global perspective
- To understand the particular ways that contemporary Arab artists engage with environmental issues
- To understand how contemporary Arab artists mobilize their claimed heritage as a means to comment on ecological crises occurring in the region
- To understand how contemporary Arab artists engage with environments and communities through multi-platform projects, as well as through singular art objects.

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.

There will also be other resources (short videos, weblinks, etc.) posted to canvas under the relevant class date as introductory or supplemental materials.

Course Requirements and Grading
Course Participation – 10%
3 (1-page) Reading Summary Papers + Discussion Questions – 10%
4 Group Discussion Posts + 1 Presentation – 30%
1 Final Group Project + Abstract + Presentation + Individual Report – 50%

Course Participation (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 Fall 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!

3 (1-page + 3 discussion questions) reading summary papers (10%)
You will choose one reading from the selected day (see syllabus). You will then produce a one-page summary on the reading and provide three discussion questions. There will be three of these to complete.

4 Group Discussion Posts + 1 Presentation (30%)
Posts (20%) + Presentation (10%)
In groups, you will complete four discussion posts wherein each member of the group will find an artist from a different region that engages with that week’s themes. You will then explain in a 200-word post how your chosen artist engages these themes. Additionally, you will post at least 3 different online resources that relate to your chosen artist (these can be links to the artist’s website, links to online articles or videos, etc.). Each group will conduct one in-class presentation (20 mins) wherein the group will teach on one or more of the artists. Each group member must participate in the presentation. If you are not in class when your group presents you will not receive credit (10% of the grade).
**1 Final Group Project + Abstract + Presentation + Individual Report - (50%)**

Final Group Project Report (20%) + Abstract (10%) + Presentation (10%) + Individual Report (10%)

In groups, you will complete a final project using Rashad Salim’s Ark Reimagined as inspiration. You will produce a proposal/abstract outlining your plans for the project, you will present the project to the class, and write an individual report detailing your contribution. Your group will then turn in a comprehensive ‘portfolio’ document. Further details will be posted/discussed in class.

***More detailed descriptions of each assignment will be posted to canvas***

**Course Policies**

**Latework**

Please endeavor to turn your assignments in on time. This is important for keeping the class on track, especially in light of how the assignments are structured. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, **no latework will be accepted**.

**Attendance**

Your attendance in class is required as part of your Class Participation grade (10%). 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. At the end of the semester, I will assess your participation grade based on your attendance record, your engagement in class, your level of communication with me, and your willingness to work with your group.

**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 **twice** during the semester as needed. You cannot use this option to participate in your group presentation.

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**Course Schedule**

1. **January 18th – Introduction to the Class! What is Ecocritical Art? What is the relationship between Heritage and Ecology?**

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2. **January 25th – Landscapes (Land Art, Environmental Art)- Ecocritical Art in Context**

   **Sign up for Groups!**

   **Film Screening:** Troublemakers: The Story of Land Art [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4096620/](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4096620/)

   **Reading:** Selections from *Land Art and Environmental Art*

3. **February 1st – Becoming Planetary - Ecocritical Art as Contemporary Practice**

   **Reading Summary #1 Due in Class**


4. **February 8th – The Role of Heritage in Contemporary Ecocritical Art**
   **Reading Summary #2 Due in Class**
   **Reading:** Berin Golonu, “Activism Rooted in Tradition,” from Third Text; Irit Carmon Popper, “Art-Heritage-Environment: Common Views Art Collective Engagement with Bedouin Minority in Israeli Desert Region” from Arts; David C. Harvey and Jim Perry, “Heritage and Climate Change: The future is not the past,” from The Future of Heritage as Climates Change (Optional Reading: Werner Kraub, “Heritage and Climate Change: A Fatal Affair,” from The Future of Heritage as Climates Change; Sarah Sutton, “The Value of Cultural Heritage to Cultural Climate Diplomacy,” from The Arts and Humanities on Environmental and Climate Change)

5. **February 15th – Ecocritical Art in Contemporary Arab Art – An Introduction**
   **Reading Summary #3 Due in Class**
   **Guest Lecture: Dr. Elizabeth Rauh, Assistant Professor of Art History at the American University in Cairo**

6. **February 22nd – Desert and Sea (Dana Awartani, Khalil Rabah, Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim)**
   **Group One & Two Presentation**
   **Group Discussion Posts Due to Canvas by February 22nd at 11:59pm**

7. **March 1st – Water and Food (Michael Rakowitz, Sama Alshaibi, Manal AlDowayan)**
   **Group Three & Four Presentation**
   **Group Discussion Posts Due to Canvas by March 1st at 11:59pm**

March 8th – Oil and Industry (Monira al Qadiri, Ahmed Mater, and Ala Younis)
**Group Five & Six Presentation**
**Group Discussion Posts Due to Canvas by March 8th at 11:59pm**

8. March 15th – Spring Break! Enjoy!

9. March 22nd – Trash and Consumption (Sophia al Maria, Hassan Sharif, Maha Mullah)
**Group Seven & Eight Presentation**
**Group Discussion Posts Due to Canvas by March 22nd at 11:59pm**

10. March 29th – No In-Person Class – Setting the Stage for The Ark Reimagined, Exploring Iraq’s Rivers and Marshes
11. April 5th – The Ark Reimagined Introduced
Guest Speaker: Rashad Salim, Artist and Director of Safina Projects
Reading: Rashad Salim and Hannah Lewis, “The ‘Ark Re-Imagined,” from the Journal of Contemporary Iraq and the Arab World

12. April 12th – The Ark Reimagined, Group Workshop Day
To Prepare for class today: Bring in ideas for your final project and how you will contribute
**Group Abstracts Due at the end of class**


15. May 3rd – Group Presentation Day
**Final Group Projects and Individual Reports Due to Canvas by May 10th at 11:59pm**

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

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. [Insert specific sanction or academic penalty for specific academic integrity violation].
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 Blackboard 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.