

## ANTH 215 - ART, LANGUAGE, AND SOCIETY

Professor: Valentina Pagliai  
Oberlin College

M W 12:00-1:15pm

Office: King 320a  
Phone: (440) 775-8372 office  
(440) 250-9676 home  
Office Hours: T 3:00-4:30pm, W 1:30-3:00pm  
(Or by appointment)  
E-mail: [valentina.pagliai@oberlin.edu](mailto:valentina.pagliai@oberlin.edu)

**Web Page:**

<http://www.geocities.com/~vpagliai/215spring03/index.htm>

**Course Description:** What is art? The attempt to answer this question raises several issues, and can be approached from several points of view. This course features a multifaceted approach to the anthropological study of Art, by including contributions from linguistic and cultural anthropology, and archaeology, as well as the voices of the artists themselves. It guides you toward an understanding of the multiple roles of art forms in society, by exploring various art genres and showing their connection to the construction of social identities and to the structuring of political power. Moreover, it expands and rethinks definitions of art and language, encouraging a discussion of how such definitions can influence our ways of approaching and experiencing art.

**Course Goals:**

- 1) To come to a more deep and complex understanding of art, encouraging reflection on the ways we think about what is art and what is not.
- 2) To encourage the students to apply an anthropological and ethnolinguistic way of thinking on a non-traditional anthropological subject.
- 3) To review basic conceptualizations of art and its place in society, as well as concepts related to the study of the art forms.
- 4) To provide to the students different points of view, showing them that “voices of authority” are not necessarily unquestionable.

**Required Textbooks:**

- 1) Marcus, George E. & Fred R. Myers (eds.) 1995 *The Traffic in Culture: Reconfiguring Art and Anthropology*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (M&M)
- 2) Bauman, Richard 1986 *Story, Performance and Event*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (RB)
- 3) Basso, Keith 1979 *Portraits of the Whiteman: Linguistic Play and Cultural Symbols among the Western Apache*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (KB)
- 4) Fabian, Johannes 1996 *Remembering the Present: Painting and Popular History in Zaire*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (JF)
- 5) Additional Readings: Copies of the course's additional readings are in reserve and in e-res in the campus Library.

**Optional Textbook:**

- 6) Becker, Carol (Ed.) 1994. *The subversive imagination: Artists, Society and Social Responsibility*. New York & London: Routledge.

**Note:** All Readings and Assignments are to be done by the date they are listed on the syllabus. All videos listed will be shown in class.

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## **WEEK 1**

**M 2/3 -- Introduction to the course. Definitions of Language & the Language of Art. Definitions of Art and of its Place in Society.**

**W 2/5 -- Relativizing the Art World.**

Readings:

- 1) Sullivan, Nancy 1995 "Inside Trading: Postmodernism and the Social Drama of *Sunflowers* in the 1980s Art World." In M & M (Pp. 256-286)
- 2) Myers, Fred 1995 "Representing Culture: The Production of Discourses for Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings." In M & M (Pp. 55-84).

Reading Forward:

Tshibumba Kanda Matulu "The History of Zaire" in JF, pp. 17-46.

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## **WEEK 2**

**M 2/10 -- Aesthetic Systems: Who makes the rules? Who defines Art?**

Video: "Guerrillas in Our Midst" (35 min.)

**Discussion #1**

Readings:

- 1) Feld "From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis" in M & M pp. 96-122.
- 2) Mullin, Molly H. "The Patronage of Difference" in M&M pp. 166-186.

**W 2/12 -- Verbal Art and Performance.**

Readings:

- 1) RB "Introduction," pp. 1-10. Ch. 2, pp. 11-32.
- 2) Kapchan, D. A. 1995. "Performance." *Journal of American Folklore*, 108(430): 479-508.

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## **WEEK 3**

**M 2/17 -- HOLIDAY**

**W 2/19 -- Artist, Audience and Context.**

**Discussion #2. (20 minutes)**

Assignment #1 Due.

Discussion of the students' chosen projects (25 minutes)

Readings:

- 1) Trinh T. Minh-ha 1981 "Commitment from the Mirror-Writing Box." From *Woman, Native, Other*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. (Pp. 5-20)
- 2) Lynn M. Hart 1995 "Three Walls: Regional Aesthetics and the International Art World" In *M&M* (Pp. 127-150).
- 3) Boal, Augusto 1998 "Invisible Theater." In J. Cohen-Cruz (Ed.) *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology*. London and New York: Routledge. Pp. 121-124.

Reading Forward:

Tshibumba Kanda Matulu "The History of Zaire" in JF, pp. 47-78.

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**WEEK 4**

**M 2/24 -- Storytelling, Creating reality: Creativity and form.** An analysis of Zuni verbal art.

Readings:

- 1) Tedlock, Dennis 1983. From *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. "Introduction," "Prologue: When the White Mask is Worn," "The Poetics of Verisimilitude," "On Praying, Exclaiming, and Saying Hello in Zuni," "The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation in American Indian Religion," Pp. 3-28, 159-193, 233-246.

Skim through the following piece:

RB, Ch. 5, pp.78-106.

**W 2/26 -- Storytelling: Continued.**

**Art and Politics.** Three different definitions of art in its relation to society will be discussed: Gramsci's, Croce's and Marcuse's ones.

**Discussion #3** (20 min)

Reading Forward:

Tshibumba Kanda Matulu "The History of Zaire" in JF, pp. 79-99.

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**WEEK 5**

**M 3/3 -- Art and Politics. Continued:**

Readings:

- 1) Becker, Carol 1994 "Introduction: Presenting the Problem" & "Herbert Marcuse and the Subversive Potential of Art." In C. Becker (Ed.) *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society and Social Responsibility*. New York and London: Routledge. (Pp. xi-xix, 113-129).
- 2) Kuryluk, Ewa 1994 "A Plea for Irresponsibility." In C. Becker (Ed.) *The Subversive Imagination*. (Pp. 13-19)

**W 3/5 -- Performance, Resistance and Responsibility.**

**Discussion # 4** (40 min)

Readings:

- 1) Rosler, Martha 1994 "Place, Position, Power, Politics." In C. Becker (Ed.) *The Subversive Imagination*. (Pp. 55-76).
- 2) Sadri, Ahmad 1994 "Adjusting to the World According to Salman Rushdie." In C. Becker (Ed.) *The Subversive Imagination*. (Pp. 168-184)
- 3) Pagliai, Valentina 2002 "Poetic Dialogues." *Ethnology Journal*.

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**WEEK 6**

**M 3/10 -- Continued:**

**W 3/12 -- Involvements:**

Readings:

- 1) Escobar, Elizam 1994 "The Heuristic Power of Art." In C. Becker (Ed.) *The Subversive Imagination*. (Pp. 35-53).
- 4) Hauser, Eva 1994 "The Velvet Revolution and Iron Necessity." In C. Becker (Ed.) *The Subversive Imagination*. (Pp. 77-94).
- 3) Alter, Nora M. 1995 "Vietnamese Theatre of Resistance." In J. E. Gainor (Ed.) *Imperialism and Theater: Essays on World Theater, Drama and Performance*. New York and London: Routledge. (Pp. 1-16).
- 4) From J. Cohen-Cruz (Ed.) *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology*. London and New York: Routledge.
  - Knezevic, Dubravka 1998 "Marked with Red Ink." Pp. 52-61.
  - Barba, Eugenio, from "Letter from the South of Italy." Pp. 185-189.
  - Byam, Dale L. "Communal Space and Performance in Africa." Pp. 230-236.
  - Thiong'o, Ngugi wa from "The Language of African Theater." Pp. 238-244.
  - Peter, Hahdke "Theater-in-the-Street and Theater-in-Theaters." Pp. 7-10.

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**WEEK 7**

**M 3/17 -- Irony**

**Discussion #5: (50 min)**

Readings:

- 1) Bauman: Story, Performance and Event (Pp. 33-77).
- 2) KB, pp. 37-82, skim ch. 1.

**W 3/19 -- Identities. Expressions: Whose Art? Whose voices?**

Video: "A Passion for Remembrance" (80 min)

Assignment #2 Due **Friday 3/19** by 4:00pm

Reading Forward:

Tshibumba Kanda Matulu "The History of Zaire" in JF, pp. 100-122.

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**WEEK 8****SPRING BREAK**

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**WEEK 9****M 3/31 -- Identities. Language, Art and Identity.**Readings:

- 1) Kondo, Dorinne 1997 "The Narrative Production of Home in Asian American Theater." In *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater*. New York & London: Routledge. (Pp. 189-209).
- 3) Mercer, Kobena 1994 "Black Art and the Burden of Representation." In *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. New York & London: Routledge. Pp. 233-258.

**W 4/2 -- Identities: continued.  
Authenticity****Discussion #6:** (40 min)Readings:

- 1) Ward Churchill 1994 "Nobody's Pet Poodle. Jimmie Durham: An Artist for Native North America". In *Indians are Us? Common Courage Press: Monroe, Maine*. (Pp. 89-113).
- 2) Steiner, Christopher B. 1995 "The Art of the Trade: On the Creation of Value and Authenticity in the African Art Market." In Marcus & Myers (Eds.) *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*. University of California Press, Los Angeles. (Pp. 151-164)

Skim through the following article:

- 3) Papastergiadis, Nikos & Laura Turney (Eds.) 1996 *On Becoming Authentic: Interview with Jimmie Durham*. Cambridge: Prickly Pear Press. (Pp. 10-53)

Reading Forward:

Tshibumba Kanda Matulu "The History of Zaire" in JF, pp. 123-163.

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**WEEK 10****M 4/7 -- Authenticity: continued.  
Expressions. Gendered Art.**Readings:

- 1) Babcock, Barbara 1993 "At Home, No Women are Storytellers: Ceramic Creativity and the Politics of Discourse in Cochiti Pueblo." In S. Lavie, K. Narayan & R. Rosaldo (Eds.) *Creativity/Anthropology*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. (Pp. 70-91).
- 2) Cohen-Cruz, Jan 1998 "At Cross-Purposes: The Church Ladies for Choice." In J. Cohen-Cruz (Ed.) *Radical Street Performance*. Pp. 90-98.

**W 4/9 -- Presentation by Professor Barbara Hoffman (Cleveland State University).**

Reading Forward:

Tshibumba Kanda Matulu "The History of Zaire" in JF, pp. 164-184.

Assignment #3 due.

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**WEEK 11**

**M 4/14 -- Expressions: Continued.**

Video: Las Madres. (excerpts)

**Discussion #7:** (20 min)

Readings:

- 1) Caton, Steven 1990 "The Poetic Construction of Self." In *'Peaks of Yemen I Summon: ' Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe*. Berkeley: California UP. Pp. 109- 126.
- 2) Taylor, Diana 1998 "Making a Spectacle: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo." In J. Cohen-Cruz (Ed.) *Radical Street Performance*. (Pp. 74-84)
- 3) Caraveli, Anna 1986 "The Bitter Wounding: The Lament as Social Protest in Rural Greece." In J. Dubisch (Ed.) *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Pp. 169-192).

**W 4/16 -- Art, Language, and Power: women's expressions as political. Questioning and redefining art from a woman's perspective.**

Video excerpts: from "Righteous Babes" & "A Place of Rage" and/or others. (30 min)

**Discussion # 8:** (45 min.)

Readings:

- 1) Goldstein, Judith L. "The female Aesthetic Community." in M&M, pp. 310-325.
- 2) Vance, Carole S. "Four Essays on Art, Sexuality, and Cultural Politics" in M&M, pp. 330-337, 340-346, 348-356, 359-365.

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**WEEK 12**

**M 4/21 -- Memory.**

Readings:

- 1) FJ, "Preface" pp. ix-xv. "Prelude" pp. 3-15. "Introduction" pp. 187-191. "Genre and Popular Painting is Shaba" pp. 193-217. "Painting, Talking and Writing" pp. 219-246.

**W 4/23 -- Memory.**

**Discussion #9**

Readings:

- 1) FJ, "Beyond the Written and the Oral," "What Happened," "Images, Words, and Realities," pp. 247-316.

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**WEEK 13****W 5/1 -- STUDENTS' PRESENTATIONS**

Deadline to finish putting up your work in the department's display case.

**F 5/3 -- STUDENTS' PRESENTATIONS**

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**WEEK 14****W 5/8 -- STUDENTS' PRESENTATIONS**

**F 5/10 -- Final Review: Real art, fakes, high art, craft, ethnic art, authentic art, commodity.**

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**FINALS' WEEK**

FINAL EXAM: SAT May 17, 2pm to 4pm

**Course Policies:****Code of honor**

The Oberlin College Students' Code of Honor applies to the course.

**Readings** should be completed by the day they are listed on the syllabus; this will help you follow lectures and prepare for discussion.

**Assignments** are due at the beginning of the class session. All assignments should be typed. I will NOT accept assignments submitted by e-mail (exceptions must be previously authorized). More information about the *Assignments* will be distributed later on, during the course.

**Late Assignments**

Assignments must be turned in on time at the beginning of class. Assignments will be graded down 1 point for each day that they are late.

**Student's Project**

This includes the 3 Assignments and the Presentation to the class. It consists of an in depth study of a particular form of art (preferably not mainstream western art). Students can opt to work in pairs or small groups. Each group will have to discuss their choice of a topic by the end of the third week. Each group will have to present their project, some may also opt to display their project in the department's display case.

**Midterm & Final Exams**

Each of the two exams focuses on material in the segment of the course that immediately precedes it; however, the final exam may include comprehensive questions on all previous material. Make-ups will be given only for serious **documented** emergencies.

**Discussions:** Prepare yourself for discussion. You will have to write a 2 pages summary or essay on the topic to be discussed and turn it in to me at the end of the discussion. Further information, when needed, will be given in advance of each discussion.

**Participation** is fundamental, and should not be limited to the times officially reserved for discussion. Participation includes attendance.

**Grades:** will be given on a curve:

Midterm Exam	50 points
Final Exam	70 points
Assignment #1	15 points
Assignment #2	15 points
Assignment #3	40 points
Presentation to Class	40 points
Discussions	90 points (10 points each)
Participation	30 points
Total	<u>350 points</u>

**Final Note:** Although the syllabus will be followed as much as possible, it is intended as a guideline and circumstances may require a change to the schedule. Students are responsible for any changes announced in class.