

# *Cultural Identity and Art*

TARTS 405a – Spring 2015

Instructor: Beverly Naidus, Associate Professor, UWT [bnaidus@uw.edu](mailto:bnaidus@uw.edu)

Office: Whitney 001

Office Hours: T/Th 5:10-6 pm

Class Meeting Time: 3:05–5:10 pm      Classroom: Whitney 004

## Course Summary

Through reading, discussion, making art and the analysis of contemporary media and art, we will examine the concept of cultural identity, how to celebrate the buffet of our multicultural landscape and how many aspects of contemporary society play upon fears of difference via scapegoating and stereotyping. We will discuss current critical theories about race, including studies about the construction of “Whiteness” and a post-colonial framing of identity. We will examine “otherness” in terms of ethnicity, religion, class, geography, sexual orientation, age and ability. We will make art pieces that explore both personal and collective stories about cultural identity and fear of difference, and look deeply at contemporary art that discusses the same.

## Course Objectives

- To explore a conceptual approach to art making
- To develop formal skills and fluency with visual grammar
- To experience hands-on collaborative art processes
- To be exposed to a wide variety of contemporary art forms including digital imaging, photo-collage, photo-text work, culture jamming, site-specific installations, and artists’ books
- To develop facility with the terms *INTENTION*, *AUDIENCE* and *CONTEXT* when discussing the goals of an artwork
- To become familiar with a variety ways of understanding cultural identity and discourse about “otherness” as they relate to art and to contemporary society
- To apply critical thinking in relation to the course topic

## Course Requirements

- Reading and discussion of articles and view highlighted on this syllabus and on Canvas
- Journal – this will contain photos, collages, sketches, proposals, stories and notes about readings and from discussions. All ideas for art projects or in relation to the topic of cultural identity, racism, fear of difference are expected to be in the journal. The journal will be graded twice – once at midterm (10%), and again at the end of the quarter (20%). **Using the journal daily will assure the best learning and creative experience and assessment.** See more about what is required in the journal at the end of this syllabus.

- Assigned mixed media art exercises – *Cultural Heritage* project, *Media Literacy/Culture Jamming* Project, *Fear of Difference/Celebration of Diversity* Photo/Text Project or Site-Specific Installation focused on experiences of prejudice, fear of difference or cultural heritage
- A collaborative community-based project that explores some aspect of cultural identity in relation to community (this is ungraded but required)
- Class participation is essential and unexcused absences will affect grades. It will be difficult to make up the work outside of class. **Missing more than two class meetings will definitely take its toll on your work and affect the strength of your journal.**

### Classroom Behavior

Food and drink are acceptable as long as you do not disrupt the class or bother your neighbors. **No food or drink is allowed on the computer side of the art studio.** Please turn off all electronic devices including cell phones and pagers when you come to class. **Texting and doing any internet activity other than research is off-limits during class time.** All phones should be put away and journals should be used for all note taking. Please be respectful and attentive when others are speaking in class. Arriving late or leaving early should never happen except on rare occasions; if you must arrive late or leave early, please do so in as unobtrusive a way as possible.

### Grades and Self-evaluation

Students will share their journals, documenting their work during the first 5 weeks of class on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, in a private conference with the instructor. A self-evaluation statement is required as part of that review and is due via email by April 30th. The self-evaluation should reflect on participation in class discussions, the art process in relation to collaborative and individual work, and the insights culled from writing, reading and research (questions to be answered are listed in the syllabus). Students are required to share their studio projects during group feedback sessions and to participate in the discussions about their work.

All assignments are assessed according to the following criteria:

1. Familiarity with visual grammar in relation to the student's intention
2. Ability to be inventive both with content and form, and to take risks
3. Attention to craft and process (work created the night before the due date is usually painfully obvious and graded accordingly)
4. Responsiveness to suggestions to strengthen projects

Grades will be weighted in the following way: **Midterm Journal: 10%, Final Journal: 20%, Cultural Heritage Project: 20%, Culture Jam/Subvertisement: 10%, Photo-Text project investigating cultural identity, fear of difference: 20%, Oral Presentation: 10%, Participation: 10%**

Grades will be given according to the grade point system. Please refer to this website for information about the grading scale: [http://www.washington.edu/students/genocat/front/Grading\\_Sys.html](http://www.washington.edu/students/genocat/front/Grading_Sys.html)

3.5-4 = **OUTSTANDING** work, significant extra time spent in developing work, risks taken, unity of concept and handling of materials to create an imaginative visual statement that challenges conventional thinking and image making

2.5-3.4 = **ABOVE AVERAGE** work, solid concepts and skillful handling of materials, exploration of

conceptual ideas evident with thought provoking results

1.5–2.4 = AVERAGE work, competent execution of ideas but not pushing conventions, craftsmanship acceptable with no outstanding qualities, overall investment fulfills requirement but no risk-taking apparent, no evidence of extra time invested to strengthen technical and conceptual issues

.5–1.4 = BELOW AVERAGE, little involvement in exploration of ideas or misunderstanding of assignment with little attention to craftsmanship

0 = FAILING, no attempt to articulate ideas and total lack of regard for craftsmanship

The following factors will be considered when determining a final participation grade: amount of effort expended throughout the course, amount of progress made in creative development, development of focused and productive work attitude, lateness, absences, and attendance. Development of a critical language is essential to your constructive participation in group feedback sessions and discussions. Evidence of this skill in the discussion of your work and other's work is expected and will be considered in your final grade.

### Supplies

Blank-page, hard cover journal (8"x 10" MINIMUM, with or without spiral binding), pencils, erasers, glue stick, digital camera (they can be borrowed from media services) or traditional film camera. You are strongly encouraged to get access to Adobe Photoshop or Gimp (free online) for this course. You can download a 30-day trial copy online at [adobe.com](http://adobe.com) or you can purchase a copy with an education discount at the UW Bookstore. It's also possible to use free shareware, [paint.net](http://paint.net), or to download an older version of Photoshop (go to the computer labs on the campus to learn how to do that).

You will be required to use a computer for creating some of the projects in class. Aside from the Mac computers and scanners in our classroom, you are welcome to work with the lab technicians in the Multimedia Lab in the basement of Cherry Parkes. Any students with mild or severe technophobia should schedule time with me or the lab technicians AS SOON AS POSSIBLE so we can figure out a strategy that will ease you through the process of learning Photoshop and working with the computers. In some rare cases, students will be given permission to complete assignments without using a computer.

### Dropping this class

If you choose to drop the course, you are responsible for reporting the change to the registrar's office. If you stop coming to class and do not contact the registrar, you will end up receiving a failing grade even if you attended only once.

### Support Services

The Counseling Center offers short-term, problem-focused counseling to UW Tacoma students who may feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities of college, work, family, and relationships. Counselors are available to help students cope with stresses and personal issues that may interfere with their ability to perform in school. The service is provided confidentially and without additional charge to currently enrolled undergraduate and graduate students. To schedule an appointment, please call 692-4522 or stop by the Student Counseling Center (SCC), temporarily located in Cherry Parkes 206. Additional information can also be found by visiting

[http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/studentaffairs/SHW/scc\\_about.cfm/](http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/studentaffairs/SHW/scc_about.cfm/)

The University of Washington Tacoma is committed to making physical facilities and instructional programs accessible to students with disabilities. Disability Support Services (DSS) functions as the focal point for coordination of services for students with disabilities. In compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, any enrolled student at UW Tacoma who has an appropriately documented physical, emotional, or mental disability that "substantially limits one or more major life activities [including walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working]," is eligible for services from DSS. If you are wondering if you may be eligible for accommodations on our campus, please contact the DSS reception desk at 692-4522, or visit [http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/studentaffairs/SHW/dss\\_about.cfm/](http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/studentaffairs/SHW/dss_about.cfm/)

## Calendar

**March 29** - Introductions. Review course syllabus and goals. How do we define cultural identity? Discuss some definitions. Meditation about cultural identity. *Where did you grow up? Where did your parents and your grandparents grow up? Do you have a regional identity? How many generations back do you know about? Do you know where your ancestors originated? If your family immigrated to the U.S., do you know why? Are there immigration, migration or displacement stories that have been handed down? Where have your cultural identities become layered due to ethnicity, sexual orientation, geographical region, able-ism, body image, social values and/or economic class? Have you ever felt like an "other," felt excluded or oppressed? Have you ever avoided or feared people because they appeared or spoke or looked differently than you do (did)?* Partner with another classmate. Collage using stereotypes exercise.

**Homework:** Write in your journal a story about your cultural heritage. You can write about particular ancestors, migration stories, the buffet that represents your identity or your lack of knowledge about your heritage. If your sense of cultural heritage is unclear due to adoption or other factors, you can use regional, generational or class identities to help you define your personal cultural identity. **Bring into class a photo of an ancestor or relative and a small object or a photograph of a larger object that symbolizes some aspect of your cultural tradition or your family history.** Read: [http://www.art.ccsu.edu/marshallc/research/Deconstruct\\_ArtProcess/cul\\_id\\_article/JCRAE%20Marshall.pdf](http://www.art.ccsu.edu/marshallc/research/Deconstruct_ArtProcess/cul_id_article/JCRAE%20Marshall.pdf) <http://imaginingamerica.org/2014/08/14/exploring-cultural-identity-through-the-arts/> Make notes for discussion in class.

**March 31** - Discussion of visual grammar and various functions of art. Slide show may include work by the following artists: Pat Ward Williams, Fred Wilson, William Pope L., Betty Lee, May Sun, Young Soon Min, Lily Yeh, David Avalos, Daniel Martinez, Border Arts Workshop, Taller Boriqua, David Bacon, Amalia Mesa-Bains, Carmen Lomas Garza, Coco Fusco, Dawoud Bey, Guillermo Gomez Pena, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Jolene Rickard, Lorraine O'Grady, David Bacon, Celia Alvarez Munoz, Alison Saar, Delilah Montoya, Kay Walkingstick, Yolanda Lopez, Patricia Rodriguez, Rupert Garcia, James Luna, Glenn Ligon, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, Gu Xiong, Hung Liu, Dread Scott, Barbara Carrasco, Jason S. Yi, Juan Sanchez, Milton Rogovin, Art Spiegelman, Edgar Heap-of-Birds, Jimmie Durham, Joe Sacco, Emma Amos, Sonia Boyce, David Wojnarowicz, Mark Niblock-Smith, Catherine Opie, Brian Jungen, Elizabeth Catlett, Robert Gwathmey, Charles White and Roger Shimomura. Choose one of these artists for your oral presentation.

Photoshop demo. Begin work on Cultural Heritage project. Scan photo and object, and begin digital collage.

**Homework:** Work on digital collage piece. Write about it in your journal. Read selection from *Home Grown* (dialog between bell hooks and Amalia Mesa-Baines)

**April 5** – Work in class on Cultural Heritage piece. Continue discussion of Cultural Identity in relation to place, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.

**Homework:** Finish Cultural Heritage piece. Bring first draft to class on a USB drive. Read more of *Home Grown*.

**April 7** – Feedback session for Cultural Heritage piece (rework). Discussion of multiculturalism and issues of race.

[http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the\\_history\\_of\\_american\\_slavery/2015/06/animated\\_interactive\\_of\\_the\\_history\\_of\\_the\\_atlantic\\_slave\\_trade.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the_history_of_american_slavery/2015/06/animated_interactive_of_the_history_of_the_atlantic_slave_trade.html)

**Homework.** Collect magazine advertisements or photograph images of ads that reveal cultural prejudices or fear of difference. Bring what you have collected to class. : Read *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack of White Privilege* (on Canvas) and <http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/white-privilege-explained/>

**April 12** – Media Literacy workshop. <http://www.upworthy.com/meet-the-17-year-old-who-blew-the-lid-off-racial-profiling-with-his-ipod?c=reccon1> and <http://mic.com/video/1/how-fashion-solved-its-diversity-problem/stream/> Begin *culture jamming* assignment. Discuss white privilege.

**Homework:** Read excerpts from Tim Wise's *White Like Me. And By the Color of their Skin*

[http://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/403/by\\_the\\_color\\_of\\_their\\_skin](http://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/403/by_the_color_of_their_skin)

Work on transforming ad, scan, distort image and/or change text.

**April 14** – Continue working on culture jam project and begin discussion about gender identity and otherness. Look at Southern Poverty Law Center website and hate group maps.

**Homework:** Read and reflect upon these two articles [http://mic.com/articles/113310/why-the-u-s-army-doesn-t-need-racial-thursdays-a-special-day-for-racism?utm\\_source=policymicFB&utm\\_medium=main&utm\\_campaign=social](http://mic.com/articles/113310/why-the-u-s-army-doesn-t-need-racial-thursdays-a-special-day-for-racism?utm_source=policymicFB&utm_medium=main&utm_campaign=social)

**April 19** – Feedback on culture jamming piece. Discuss community, collaborative project. Discuss reading.

**Homework:** Read and reflect upon <http://multiasianfamilies.blogspot.com/2015/03/what-are-you-thats-none-of-your-business.html?m=1>

and <http://atlantablackstar.com/2015/03/18/in-these-times-of-racial-strife-a-white-professor-explores-the-prevalence-of-white-fragility/> make notes in Journal. Finish culture jamming exercise.

**April 21** – Watch: Cracking the Codes.

Discuss ways to bring content of course into the campus community.

**Homework:** Read and react to <http://blacklivesmatter.com/a-herstory-of-the-blacklivesmatter-movement/> and [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-beccio/racism-hurts-native-ameri\\_b\\_5812452.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-beccio/racism-hurts-native-ameri_b_5812452.html) and <http://www.quora.com/Why-does-racism-against-Asians-go-ignored-and-unpunished-in-the-United-States> and

[experience-subtle-racism/](#)

**April 26** – Discussion of readings. Work and feedback session.

Homework: Write midterm self-evaluation and send via email by 10 pm on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Prepare journal for review. Bring USB drive with drafts for both projects: Cultural Heritage and Culture Jam.

### Self-evaluation Questions

- 1) How have the discussions about cultural identity, fear of difference and white privilege helped you to develop your opinions on this topic?
- 2) What are some aspects of the reading that have opened your eyes to new ways of thinking about these topics?
- 3) In what ways are the art projects helping you connect with the issues of cultural identity and fear of difference?
- 4) What aspects of the media literacy workshop were useful to you?
- 5) What do you feel has been one of the most important things you have learned about your creative process so far this quarter?

**April 28** – class canceled – instructor at conference. Watch this video featuring the actor/performer, Roger Guenveur Smith, make notes on it and work on your journal in preparation for midterm conference. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dviAdGM4vaA>

**May 3** - Midterms conferences. Spike Lee film.

Homework: Read: <http://citylimits.org/2016/03/22/why-is-nycs-art-scene-so-white/>

**Photo-text project:** The photo-text project involves a SERIES of photos. A series means a minimum of four photos that have a conceptual and aesthetic relationship to each other. Rhythm, composition and the rest of visual grammar is involved in this project.

You will need to think about different ways to exhibit a series - will you put them on the wall in a line, and if so, where? Will you put them in a book (NOT A PHOTO ALBUM, PLEASE, unless the project is specifically focused on the ways that photo albums create identity or if the project is satirizing the form)? Will you make your own book form in such a way that highlights the theme of the photos or will you use a found book that again suits the content of your piece? Will you put the photos on objects and display them three-dimensionally? Will you project them? Put them in a slide show? If so, where will you project them?

You can use text inside the image itself or outside the image.

It is ideal if you think about a public site for this work - it is not just for our classroom.

Think about your goal or intention for the piece: are you raising troubling or confusing questions? Are you illustrating an experience you've witnessed or had yourself? Are you exploring a nightmare? Do you want your work to be provocative? Do you want your work to create dialog?

Think about your audience. Try and imagine them confronting your image in public space. What is the best context for you to find this particular audience?

Start working on this NOW. Do not wait. Get a camera, and start shooting images. Let the images tell you where you need to go. Do NOT wait for inspiration to hit. You need to be generating images first, and then ideas will flow.

Free cameras are in the media center for those of you who don't have them. They will help you figure out how to use them.

Homework: Watch: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=ibVIVzGI9y0#](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ibVIVzGI9y0#)

May 5 – Slide show on photo-text series dealing with cultural identity and/or racism. Discuss final project. Discuss collaborative project and form groups. Bring in ideas for photo-text series for discussion.

Homework: prepare oral presentations.

### **Oral Presentation Criteria:**

- Present a few examples (minimum of 5 images, maximum of 10) of the artist's work that deals with cultural identity issues and discuss the meaning of the work and questions that you may have about it. Research should be from books or journals.
- A good place to find journal articles is via JStor or Project Muse - both search engines are easily accessible via the library electronic journals (go to the UWT library home page) - you will need to login to access them. There are many other search engines available via the library web page.
- You can also email the artists and ask them questions directly. Tell them that you are student in my class. Getting your information only from the artist and his/her website is not sufficient. You need to read interpretations about the artist's work written by others.
- If you discover that not much has been written about the artist you have chosen, then you will need to change artists. So it will be good to begin looking for articles several weeks before your presentation, just in case you have little luck finding material.
- After reading three articles by art writers or critics, summarize what you think that these writers feel are the intentions of the artist's work. It is fine to share quotes from these writers.
- Offer us a rough bio about the artist - it would be good to know where and when the artist was born, where or if s/he went to school, what class background the artist has, whether s/he teaches somewhere and what you think or what s/he says provoked him or her to be an artist who is dealing with the topics s/he is dealing with.

- The majority of your presentation should focus on the artwork itself (several different projects, if possible), and you should make a good effort to explain the artist's intentions through your discussion. In your conclusion, suggest a question that the class might want to respond to regarding the work.
- Presentation format can be in power point or you can just project scanned images of the artist's work on the large screen. Do NOT put the text of your presentation on the screen, only the title, date and medium of the works shown and then read biographical information, discussion regarding the content and intentions of the work and quotes from your notes instead.
- PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT THERE YOU HAVE IMAGES OF ART ON THE SCREEN FOR US TO LOOK AT WHILE YOU ARE SPEAKING.

May 10 - Oral Presentations. Work on collaboration.

May 12 - Oral Presentations. Work on collaboration.

May 17 - Oral Presentations. Work on collaboration.

May 19 - Presentation of Collaborative project and discussion.

May 24 - Work Session. Bring in 1<sup>st</sup> draft of final projects for feedback.

May 26 - Work Session.

May 31 - Final critique of projects. Final projects must be printed and hung publicly.

June 2 - Tour of campus projects. Turn in your journal.

June 7 - Final projects due. Return journals. Closing discussion.

### \*How to Make a Strong Journal

Your journal is your open book exam – it's how I learn about what you've learned, what you're questioning, where you are taking risks. You need to make images (with any medium) at least 2 times per week. Follow these guidelines:

1. Make notes that are REFLECTIONS about the class discussions, readings and videos - not just what was said, but how do YOU feel about them. If you disagree with the dominant opinions in class, but aren't clear why, write about that. If you feel lost, write about that. The great thing about journals is that you are writing for yourself, and developing your voice. If your buttons get pushed, and you are feeling shy to respond, the journal gives you a venue in which to shout, cry, whine, argue or rally support. It is one of the most important tools I can offer you in this course, and journaling can truly help you the rest of your life, if you allow its power in, even in a small way.

2. Make a collage based on some of the ideas expressed in class or in the readings, at least twice a week. Bend your journal to your will, take risks, don't be afraid to make ugly, royal failures and lose your

inhibitions. BRAINSTORM all your assignments in the journal – don't just think about them – do sketches, crude or otherwise.

3. Although the journal project is not scrap booking, you may think this process is similar. Some people HATE scrap booking, so do an anti-scrapbook (what would that look like?). Play with materials, collect things relevant to the course content or images you're working with.

4. If you come to class bored, you can always open your journal and slip away into its pages. I never complain when students are working in their journals during class time.

5. Use your journal as a place to dream about the world you would love to live in.

6. Remember to write down notes to the readings. If you haven't had time to read all the articles listed in the syllabus, read them now. Put in your thoughts about what your reading. Don't self-censor.

7. **But remember THIS journal is not your diary.** If you need a place to tell your innermost personal thoughts about your current life challenges (other than those related to the class topic), get another journal for that (OR you can create special pages that are hidden, pockets or envelopes in this journal that are off limits for anyone to read, including me).

8. **Finally, your journal is an important part of your grade, and is truly an open-book exam.** If your projects in Photoshop aren't going well, you can vent in the journal. If you have ideas for site-specific installations, and other forms, you can diagram them in the journal. If you are worried or excited about the collaborative project write about it there. USE it everyday if possible. Make it a discipline. You will be amazed at how it blossoms for you.

## Bibliography

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## Websites

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- <http://www.artforchange.org/>
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- <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2013/01/25/racism-still-exists-the-power-of-art/>
- <http://civa.org/civablog/why-do-you-make-art-about-whiteness/>
- [http://museum.icp.org/museum/exhibitions/white/white\\_press.html](http://museum.icp.org/museum/exhibitions/white/white_press.html)
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