TOPICS IN ART:
THE ART OF THE ANECDOTE:
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND MAKING MEANING

COURSE SYLLABUS

Basic Info:
“The Art of the Anecdote: conceptual frameworks and making meaning.”

ARTH 161 TOPICS IN ART
Spring 2016. ONLINE.
CRN: --
Level: Undergraduate
Type: Art History/Criticism
Pre-requisites: none
Credits: 3 Credit Hours
Instructor: Aja Mujinga Sherrard
Email: aja.sherrard@umontana.edu

Course Description: What can you get from a performance piece if you weren’t there to see it? From an ephemeral piece that disappears as it is made? From work that involves hidden, eased, or destroyed elements? From a symbolic action the artist took alone? As the world of art continues to expand into conceptual, ephemeral, and relational works, it can be hard to understand what has been created and how we can continue to assign it value. In this class, we are going to look at the creation of meaning as a new medium, and the anecdote or the fact of it as a means of understanding artwork by such artists as Marina Abramović, Adrian Piper, James Luna, Andy Goldsworthy, Rirkrit Tiaravanija, Ai Weiwei, and many others.

Course Objectives: Upon completing this course, students will have a strong understanding of Conceptual art, and the ability to use the framework of conceptual art to better understand ephemeral, relational, and social practice works. Students will familiarize themselves with the works of innovative and diverse artists as well as performing some of their own research. Students will also develop and improve their skills in observation, description, analysis, and transmission of ideas. In particular: they will become comfortable expressing their ideas through writing.

Required Text: All assigned readings will be made available to students across the website. Readings will include critical reviews of included artists and artworks alongside other relevant essays.

Course Requirements: Students are expected to read all assigned materials, actively participate in discussion forums, and complete all assignments by their due date.
**Attendance:** There are no excused absences in this class.

**Grading:** Student grades will be calculated according to their weekly writing assignments (25% of the grade), participation in class forums (25% of their grade), midterm research paper (25% of your grade), and final project (25% of their grade). Students will also receive a short evaluative feedback to each writing assignment, in depth feedback on the midterm and final, and a final written evaluation.

**Students With Special Needs:** It is not at all out of the ordinary for various students to have unique needs and learning styles. Students with disabilities or unique needs should contact me as soon as possible to discuss potential strategies or solutions.

**Academic Misconduct and the Student Conduct Code:** All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/Index.cfm/page/1321.

**Withdrawal Policy:** Specifics available at this web address: http://www2.umt.edu/catalog/acpolpro.htm

**Assignments:**

- **WEEKLY WRITING ASSIGNMENTS 1-10:** Roughly 2-4 paragraphs each, these short written assignments will address your readings or the discussion topic at hand. The description of each specific assignment will be made available the week it is assigned. Each weekly writing assignment must be completed by Monday of the following week and proofread before being handed in.

- **MIDTERM RESEARCH PAPER:** You must discover an artist that meets the criteria we’ve established as practicing “The Art of the Anecdote.” In 6-10 pages, describe and contextualize their work, focusing in at least one particular piece in detail and citing a minimum of three legitimate sources. Imagery optional.

- **FINAL PROJECT:** Propose/Record a conceptual piece of your own. Describe the elements and context of the work, addressing the specific details of process, tools, location, audience, duration, media, and documentation alongside any other relevant factors. Establish the necessary background information to give the piece context. 6-10 pages. Include at least one image to support the proposal. Additional materials, such as a short film, short audio file, or transcript may be included in addition to the image.

**Course Outline:**

**WEEK 1 – Introductions/ What is Art?**
- Essay: “What is Art” by Dissanayake
- Weekly Writing #1

**WEEK 2 – Defining “Conceptual Art”**
- Readings on early conceptualism
"Notes on ‘African Conceptualism’" by Okwui Enwezor
Weekly Writing #2

WEEK 3 – The Crisis of the Object
“The Work of Art in the age of Mechanical reproduction” – Baudrillard
DADA: Duchamp’s “Fountain”
Weekly Writing #3

WEEK 4 – Tearing into the Infrastructure
Fred Wilson, “Mining the Museum”/ “My Life as a Dog”
Will Brown, “Illegitimate Business”
Weekly Writing #4

WEEK 5 – Theft and Transgression
Robert Rauschenberg, “Erased de Kooning Drawing”
Weekly Writing #5

WEEK 6 – Vanishing Objects
Andy Goldsworthy: “Rain Shadows” and other works
Allan Kaprow: “Happenings”
Weekly Writing #6

WEEK 7 – Presence as Medium
Marina Abramović, “The Artist is Present”
Rirkrit Tiaravanija, “Pad Thai”
Weekly Writing #7

WEEK 8 – Identity play
James Luna, “The Artifact Piece”
Cindy Sherman, “Untitled Film Stills”
RESEARCH PAPER

WEEK 9 – Identity play part 2
Stacy Tyrell, “Bakra Bluid”
Erica Lord, “The Tanning Project”
RESEARCH PAPER

WEEK 10 – POST RESEARCH PAPERS
Read classmate projects

WEEK 11 – FORUM: Peer review of Research Papers
Text Alone
Guerrilla Girls “Posters series”
Adrian Piper “Calling Card”
Weekly Writing #8
WEEK 12 – New Rituals
Beli Liu, “Mending”
John Peña, “Letters to the Ocean”
Weekly Writing #9

WEEK 13 – Radical presence
Coco Fusco, “Two AmerIndians Visit the West”
Ai Weiwei, “Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn”
Weekly Writing #10

WEEK 14 – Movements/ collaborations
Frank Warren, “Post Secret”
Cleve Jones, “The Names Project” (Aids quilt)
(memes)
FINAL PROJECTS

WEEK 15 – Post Final Projects
Read classmate projects

Week 16– FORUM: Peer review of Final Projects

**This syllabus may be subject to change at any point. Pay attention to classroom announcements and email notices to stay up to date**