HONR 279C: African American Art Theory: Exploration/Expressions of Identity

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Office hours: Tuesday 11-1pm
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Course Description:

Over the last three hundred years African American art history has centered on the struggle to define identity in context to the Western Art tradition. In this class we will look at how African American artists have used their work to represent, reinvent and subvert racial identity. By examining changes in modes of expression, formal concerns, and pictorial themes we will explore the impact of black aestheticism in American art.

We will also make connections between the artwork being created now with what was during past generations. Through readings, lectures, group projects, guest artist presentations, studio visits, field trips, and video presentations, students will be given the opportunity to experience a multi-layered and interactive visual art perspective.

The first half of the semester will begin with a historical overview. Students will receive a rich and complete understanding of the social forces that shaped the works of American artists of African ancestry. During the second half of the semester, we will primarily focus on contemporary African American artists that are defining the tradition. We will examine techniques and means in which they are exploring identity and how this is affecting and transforming the contemporary art scene.

Goals:

This course is designed to familiarize students with the roots, main currents, forms, styles, content, aesthetics, and ideological dimensions of African American art. Also we will explore the extent these elements have expressed and captured the spirit of the black experience.

Class Objectives:

• Students will strive to understand the hardships and accomplishments of black artists over the last three hundred years.

• All students will have a general orientation to African American Art history and relevant factors that have influenced it.

• Students will learn the relevance of African American artists in context of Western Art history.

• Students will learn how contemporary black artist are redefining how the public views Afro-American culture.
It is my hope that students will gain a clear understanding of the need for a multicultural perspective, understanding the roles and functions of art within society, and how African American artists have continually explored constructions and definitions of their identity. Students will be encouraged to question theoretical, ideological, and aesthetic assumptions by critically analyzing how, and to what degree, black cultural themes are being visualized.

Requirements:
Please note that the texts serve only as a summary of course content - effective note taking, concentration and regular attendance are a must to achieve a satisfactory grade. Beyond assigned readings from texts, students will be given supplementary assignments.

Required Text:
African American Art—Sharon Patton
*The Other Side of Color—David C. Driskell
The Piano Lesson—August Wilson
The Ground on Which I Stand—August Wilson
*Black Art and Culture in the Twentieth Century—Richard J. Powell

Reference Text:
Modern Negro Art—James A Porter
Two Centuries of Black American Art—David C. Driskell
Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America—David C. Driskell, David Lewis, and Deborah Willis

Additional Support Text:
Free Within Ourselves—Regina Perry
African American Art and Artists—Samella Lewis

Attendance:
Because this is a lecture class it is imperative that each student attend and are fully participate in class discussions. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. If a student is more than five minutes tardy, it is at my discretion to mark one absent for the day. In other words, please be on time. Three unexcused absences will result in an immediate drop in letter grade. After five, the student will receive a failing mark for the class.

Grading:
Class Participation and Quizzes- 20%
Mid-term Examination (Multiple Choice, Slide Examination and Short Essay) -30%
Tanner Paper- Four pages-10%
Write a paper discussing how Tanner fits into both African and Western Art Tradition.

Post-Black Paper 10%

Final Group Project-30%

Utilizing video and digital photo, document and interview a contemporary Afro-American artist. Create a presentation about how they tie into the Afro-American continuum.

Class Schedule
(Schedule subject to change)

Aug.30th—
Syllabus-
Introduction-
Packet and text-
Talk about UM

Patton pp 19-35

Week 2
Sept.4th - Slavery, Architecture, and Subversion—The beginnings of Afro-American Art
Sept.6th Quilting, Hip-Hop and Soul Food
Patton pp35-45 and 69-71-Bring in Music or Soul Food Recipe

Week 3
Sept. 11th the first recognized Afro-American Fine Artists
Patton pp 45-49

Sept. 13th Exhibition of Talent (Duncanson, Bannister and Edmonia Lewis)
Patton pp 72-98

Week 4
Sept.18th Henry O. Tanner, the first Black International Artist
Patton pp 99-103
Sept. 20th Independent Class— First Final Project work session

Week 5

Sept.25th Tanner Paper work session—Read WEB Dubois/Alain Locke Essays

Sept.27th (Tanner Paper Due) Harlem Renaissance #1 (Double Consciousness and General Concepts)
Patton 105-120

Week 6

Oct 2nd Harlem Renaissance #2 (Artists of the Harlem Renaissance)
Patton pp.120-156

Oct 4th Harlem Renaissance #3 (Artists and Conclusion, WPA)
Romare Bearden Essay

Week 7

Oct. 9th Social Realism and Black Muralists
Patton pp 168-175

Oct.11th Black Abstract Artist and Cultural Crisis
Toward a Black Aesthetic/Hoyt Fuller Essay

Week 8

Oct.16th Militant Black Artists/Afri-Cobra (1960's)
Read “The Ground on Which I Stand”—August Wilson

Oct. 18th The Piano Lesson and August Wilson

Week 9

Oct.23rd Review for Exam finish Patton

Oct. 25th Mid-Term Examination
Sharon Patton 80’s Essay

Week 10

Oct.30th Basquiat Movie Assignment (Miramax Film, 1996)

Nov.1st Basquiat Movie Assignment
Week 11

Nov. 6th Black Folk Art

Nov. 8th Adrian Piper and Black Conceptualism

Week 12

Nov. 13th New Media Artist Afro-American Style (Adrian Piper, David Hammonds, Sanford Biggers and William Pope L.)

Nov. 15th Joe Turner’s Come and Gone at Howard

Week 13

Nov. 20th Independent Assignment (Prepare for Final Assignment)

Nov. 22nd Independent Assignment (Prepare for Final Assignment)

Week 14

Nov. 27th Zoë Charlton Lecture

Nov. 29th Flex class

Week 15

Dec. 4th
Final Project workday

Dec 6th
Final Project workday

Week 16th

Dec. 11th Evaluation and Documentary Review