

Conceptual Art

Spring 2009 Thursdays 12:30-4:20 Holman Hall 377

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Conceptual Art

Historical Background

Historically the height of the Conceptual Art movement is 1966 through 1972, however it has a lineage dating back 50 years to the early work of Marcel Duchamp and it is now considered the most influential artistic movement of the 20th Century. At the heart of Conceptual Art lies the question "What is Art?" Conceptual Art is a line of thinking that challenges the traditional status of the art object as product and refocuses artistic creativity in the process of art making, the ideas invoked and the meaning of cultural production. It is a practice that draws a natural relationship between the concept and the materials used.

Our Class

Amongst the approaches to art making that we will investigate and put into practice will be the readymade, public intervention, performance and ephemeral works, language and the use of signifiers. The course will require you to put aside any assumptions of what art is and to critically rethink what art can be. Ideally, Conceptual Studio will introduce you to contemporary art and it will establish a conceptual foundation that you may apply to future art classes. Conceptual Art is organized around structured assignments designed to assist you in developing a personal, non-medium-specific approach to art making, and even problem solving as you take on the assignments throughout the semester. Studio time will be accompanied by lectures presenting the history and theory of conceptual art.

Class Policy

Attendance is mandatory. Roll call will be taken at the beginning of each class. All reading responses and projects must be handed in on time. This course also requires AT LEAST 6 hours a week of outside studio time.

Course Objectives

- * To present an informed historical vision of contemporary art, new genres and postmodernism in Fine Art.
- * To help the student develop a personal creative process that is based upon one's ideas rather than directed by an assigned medium.
- * To help the student develop a further understanding of how culture, current events, and technological advancement are interwoven elements of human experience and artistic practice.
- * To help the student determine whether or not a work provides new directions or varies from the conventional.
- * To help the student make informed judgments concerning the aesthetic, and intellectual value of a work.
- * To evaluate the cultural significance of a conceptual approach to art making.
- * To present an introduction to the historical lineage of conceptual art making.

Course Work

- * Six art projects that will be assigned over the course of the semester
- * Weekly readings accompanied by write-ups and discussion
- * One research presentation and paper: Each student will be required to do one research presentation on a selected artist who has somehow expanded or changed the definition or interpretation of what art is
- * Active class participation during discussion and critique
- * Attendance of two artist lectures and two fieldtrips to art exhibitions.

Six art projects will be assigned over the course of the semester, each project will address one of the approaches to art making considered by the class text:

1. Introduction project: Constraints
2. The Ready Made
3. Intervention/Performance to address social or political issue.
4. Documentation or "Museum In Your Pocket."
5. Assumed Identity
6. The Artist Book, this is a semester long project that will be reviewed following midterm break and at the end of the semester.

Each project will require a 1-2 page written statement that describes your process: what ideas did you initially have, what decisions did you make, what was your approach to producing the project. Secondly, do you feel that the project was successful, if so why? And any other thoughts that you came away with. Finally, do you consider the end result to be art? Hard copies of your statement are due with the project, electronic copies should be posted on SOCS by the end of the same day.

Weekly readings will be accompanied by brief weekly "write-ups" (1-2 pages) and discussion. Bring a hard copy of your write-ups to each class to reference and hand in. Electronic copies should be posted to SOCS by the end of the same day. Write-ups should be between one and three pages and the content is to be your reflections and analysis of the readings, PLEASE DO NOT ONLY WRITE A SUMMARY.

Research presentation and paper must contextualize the work of the selected artist by describing the period s/he was/is working in, including any major socio-political events or technological breakthroughs as well as the stylistic lineage of artist and the work.

Three major works by the individual artist must be researched. Students must critique the individual's work and consider how the work has contributed to contemporary art. Critiques should serve as a basis for the class discussion, so students must prepare questions pertaining to the presentation that the class should address as a whole. Each presentation should be approximately 15 min. This presentation is the basis for the final research paper (5-7 pages.) Hard copy at start of class and SOCS posting by end of day on which it's due.

Course Text

REQUIRED TEXT: *Conceptual Art*, by Tony Godfrey, from Phaidon Press Limited, 1998

Occasional Class Handouts drawing from:

Believing is Seeing. Creating the Culture of Art, by Mary Anne Staniszewski, Penguin

Books *Ways of Seeing*, by John Berger, Penguin Books

Conceptual Art a Critical Anthology, edited by Alberro, Alexander and Stimson, MIT Press 2000

Others as assigned

Materials for the class will vary for each project and student. The initial required materials are a binder to store documentation (photograph / stills) and writing for each project, and a published book to manipulate through the semester.

Criteria for final grade

The six art projects will count for 50% of the final grade. The grading criteria for the creative projects is as follows:

1. Meeting all basic requirements of the assignments: 50%
2. Conceptual strength of the project: 15%
3. Focused development of the project from starting concept to ending presentation: 15%
4. Clarity and attention to detail reflected in written analysis: 20%

Weekly readings accompanied by written analysis and museum review, 15% of final grade

Oral presentation: Each student will be required to do one research presentation on a selected artist who has somehow expanded or changed the definition or interpretation of what art is, 10% of final grade

Research Paper: based on the research, outline and oral presentation students are to develop a research paper, 15% of final grade.

Active in class participation during discussion and critique, 10% of final grade

One grade drop for each week that a project is late.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1: January 22

Lecture/Discussion: Introduction to Conceptual Art

In-class reading: Sol Lewitt, Sentences on Conceptual Art

In-class studio: Begin Constraints

Week 2: January 29

Art Project Due/Critique: Constraints

Reading/Write-up Due: Believing is Seeing Chapters 2, 4, 9; Conceptual Art Chapter 1

Lecture/Discussion: Duchamp, Dadaism, Anti-Art Gestures

Viewing: Duchamp

In-class Studio: Begin Readymades, Introduce Artist Books

Philadelphia Fieldtrip: February 4 (afternoon & evening)

Measures of Time, Travel, and Space: Exploring Land Arts of the American West A Lecture by Chris Taylor Wednesday, February 4, 6 PM, Temple University, Engineering Architecture Building, 1947 N. 12th Street, Room 126, Philadelphia

Week 3: February 5

Reading/Write-Up Due: Conceptual Art Chapters 2, 3

Lecture/Discussion: Postwar, Early 60s

In-class Studio: Readymades

Select artists for Presentation/Research Papers

Week 4: February 12

Reading/Write-up Due: TBD

Philadelphia Field Trip Write-up Due

Lecture/Discussion: Land Art

In-class studio: Readymades

Anxious Ground exhibition gallery talk: February 18, 6pm

Week 5: February 19

Art Project Due/Critique: Readymades

In-class Studio: Intervention/Performance

Viewing: Yes Men

Week 6: February 26

Reading/Write-up Due: A savage Performance, The Ethnographic Burlesque, Fusco Responds,
The History of Intercultural Performance

Gallery Talk Write-up Due

Lecture/Discussion: Performance Art

In-class Studio: Intervention/Performance

Week 7: March 5

Reading/Write-up Due: Conceptual Art Chapter 6, Believing is Seeing Chapter 6, 7, 8

Lecture/Discussion: Politics, Museums and Photography in Conceptual Art

In-class Studio: Intervention/Performance

Spring Break

Week 8: March 19

Art Project Due/Critique: Intervention/Performance

In-class Studio: Collection/Museum

Week 9: March 26

Reading/Write-up Due: Conceptual Art Chapter 9, 10

Lecture/Discussion: Words & Photos in Conceptual Art

In-class Studio: Collection/Museum, individual review of Artist Books

Student Presentations (4)

Week 10: April 2

Reading/Write-up Due: Conceptual Art Chapter 8, Ways of Seeing Chapters 2, 3

Lecture/Discussion: Women in Conceptual Art

In-class Studio: Collection/Museum

Student Presentations (4)

Week 11: April 9

Art Project Due/Critique: Collection/Museum

In-class Studio: Begin Identity/Narrative

Week 12: April 16

Reading/Write-up Due: Keith Smith, Conceptual Art Chapter 11

Research Paper 1st Draft Due
Lecture/Discussion: Current Trends in Conceptual Art
In-class Studio: Identity/Narrative
Student Presentations (5)

Week 13: April 23
Reading/Write-up Due: TBD
Lecture/Discussion: Current Trends cont.
In-class Studio: Identity Narrative
Student Presentations (4)

Week 14: April 30
Art Project Due/Critique: Identity/Narrative
In-class Studio: Artist Book

Final: May 5-8 TBD
Art Project Due/Critique: Artist Book
Research Paper Due

SUBJECT TO CHANGES
CHANGES POSTED ON SOCS

Sentences on Conceptual Art

by Sol Lewitt

1. Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.
2. Rational judgements repeat rational judgements.
3. Irrational judgements lead to new experience.
4. Formal art is essentially rational.
5. Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically.
6. If the artist changes his mind midway through the execution of the piece he compromises the result and repeats past results.
7. The artist's will is secondary to the process he initiates from idea to completion. His wilfulness may only be ego.
8. When words such as painting and sculpture are used, they connote a whole tradition and imply a consequent acceptance of this tradition, thus placing limitations on the artist who would be reluctant to make art that goes beyond the limitations.
9. The concept and idea are different. The former implies a general direction while the latter is the component. Ideas implement the concept.
10. Ideas can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical.
11. Ideas do not necessarily proceed in logical order. They may set one off in unexpected directions, but an idea must necessarily be completed in the mind before the next one is formed.
12. For each work of art that becomes physical there are many variations that do not.
13. A work of art may be understood as a conductor from the artist's mind to the viewer's. But it may never reach the viewer, or it may never leave the artist's mind.
14. The words of one artist to another may induce an idea chain, if they share the same concept.
15. Since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the artist may use any form, from an expression of words (written or spoken) to physical reality, equally.
16. If words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature; numbers are not mathematics.
17. All ideas are art if they are concerned with art and fall within the conventions of art.
18. One usually understands the art of the past by applying the convention of the present, thus misunderstanding the art of the past.
19. The conventions of art are altered by works of art.
20. Successful art changes our understanding of the conventions by altering our perceptions.
21. Perception of ideas leads to new ideas.
22. The artist cannot imagine his art, and cannot perceive it until it is complete.
23. The artist may misperceive (understand it differently from the artist) a work of art but still be set off in his own chain of thought by that misconstrual.
24. Perception is subjective.
25. The artist may not necessarily understand his own art. His perception is neither better nor worse than that of others.
26. An artist may perceive the art of others better than his own.
27. The concept of a work of art may involve the matter of the piece or the process in which it is made.
28. Once the idea of the piece is established in the artist's mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly. There are many side effects that the artist cannot imagine. These may be used as ideas for new works.
29. The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course.

30. There are many elements involved in a work of art. The most important are the most obvious.
31. If an artist uses the same form in a group of works, and changes the material, one would assume the artist's concept involved the material.
32. Banal ideas cannot be rescued by beautiful execution.
33. It is difficult to bungle a good idea.
34. When an artist learns his craft too well he makes slick art.
35. These sentences comment on art, but are not art.

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constraint use of force to influence or prevent an action || the state or quality of being compelled to do or not to do something || restricted liberty || the sense of being ill at ease.

In mathematics, a constraint is a restriction of the feasible solutions in an optimization problem.

Theory of constraints

In the theory of constraints, it is any factor that limits the performance of a system with respect to its goal. In a for-profit business, this would be the factors that limit the ability to make money.

Constraints are physical or systemic limits on capacity. To take a simple example: a chain has 5 links, each link capable of holding a maximum weight of 5, 7, 4, 8 and 6 tons respectively. The maximum weight the chain can hold is clearly 4 tons – the limit imposed by the weakest link. In this case, all 5 links have *limits* to their strength, but the 3rd link is the *constraint* because it is the greatest restriction on the system.

Most things have

- * at least one constraint, otherwise its performance would be infinite
- * very few constraints, otherwise it would be unstable and cease to exist