

FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR **ART AND ACTIVISM**

RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE IN THE ARTS & HUMANITIES | MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
SPRING 2011 | RCAF 192 SECTION 003

PROFESSOR INFORMATION |

Dylan A.T. Miner, PhD
C230J Snyder Hall
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884-1323

DAY + TIME |

T 3:00 – 4:50

OFFICE HOURS |

T 11:00 – 12:40 + by appointment

'The dreaming collective knows no history.'

– Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

'Art is not a mirror held up to society, but a hammer with which to shape it.'

– Bertolt Brecht

'There cannot be radical social change, at least that which makes us happy, that is not also creative.'

– Mujeres Creando

'Art need no longer be an account of past sensations. It can become the direct organization of more highly evolved sensations. It is a question of producing ourselves, not things that enslave us.'

– Guy Debord, *Internationale Situationist*

'Here I am in Mexico: the centre of the world and the place where we Cherokees originated. Even so, if I want to make art that challenges, that influences, I must take one of the roads that leads to Rome—currently called New York (even if only participate in and celebrate its downfall).'

– Jimmie Durham, *A Certain Lack of Coherence*

COURSE DESCRIPTION |

For decades, artists and activists have used their own artistic practice to spark active social transformation. In this seminar, students will look at the specter of systematic change during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with a concentration on contemporary artistic practices. Focusing on the way that artists evoke their work/practice in evocative and agitational ways, the seminar will give students introductory access to the radical world of anti-capitalist art. Focusing on what Gregory Sholette calls *dark matter*, we will pay particular attention to the practices of artists and collectives commonly working at the margins of the mainstream (and capitalist) artworld. By directly engaging with these artists and their projects, the seminar will attempt to dispel the myth that all roads lead to New York, as Jimmie Durham appropriately recognized in 1993.

Divided into four sections (historical antecedents, theories, Midwest practices, and global trajectories), each week will take up a particular collective or collaboration. By focusing on collaborative practices, the seminar will move away from the naïve notion that the artist is an independent and solitary being. Foregrounded in avant-garde, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonial aesthetic practices throughout the hemisphere, the seminar will converge on collectives/collaborations throughout the greater Midwest, as well as those situated within global indigenities. Instead of offering an overview of art and activism, this seminar will initiate a conversation with complex aesthetic insurgencies contemporarily and historically circulating throughout the Americas. Quintessential to understanding and becoming involved in this dialogue is the students' awareness of how and why artists desire to construct a world based on horizontal and egalitarian social relationships.

Seminar sessions will consist of active conversation, student-facilitated dialogue, and occasional video teleconferencing conversations with artists.

OBJECTIVES |

Due to the interdisciplinarity of this seminar, the goals and objectives are likewise multiple. By discussing, analyzing, and (possibly) making art, students will accomplish the following:

- Investigate the history of art and visual cultures;
- Explain how and why we create meaning through art;
- Interpret the multiple meanings of art;
- Recognize the potential to transform the world through art.

The course will also help students meet general liberal learning outcomes, as outlined by the American Association of Colleges and Universities. These include, but are not limited to:

- Develop a robust *knowledge of human cultures and the natural world*;
- Improve *intellectual and practical skills*, such as inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, communication, visual literacy, and problem solving;
- Enhance *personal and social responsibility* through direct civic participation, ongoing intercultural competency, and continued ethical reasoning and action;
- Demonstrate *integrative learning* by synthesizing creative and analytical thinking across disciplinary fields.

DIGITAL ARTISTS-IN-CONVERSATION |

Colectivo Coryceps
 Justseeds
 Midwest Radical Culture Corridor
 Taller Tupac Amaru
 Temporary Services
 Other potential conversations...

TEXTS |

You are required to purchase the following books. Additional readings will be available for download from Angel.

1. Josh MacPhee. *Celebrate People's History: The Poster Book of Resistance and Revolution*. New York: Feminist Press, 2010.
2. Richard Noble, ed. *Utopias*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
3. Gregory Sholette. *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*. London: Pluto Press, 2011.
4. *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* #7.
5. Misc. PDFs and websites.

The following book is suggested:

6. TV Reed. *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to Seattle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. *Suggested*.

GRADING |

• writing 1	20%
• writing 2 (on <i>Dark Matter</i>)	20%
• class facilitation	20%
• weekly questions + sketchbook	20%
• participation	20%

ATTENDANCE |

As part of the Residential College in the Arts & Humanities, attendance is mandatory!! Although I will not be actively 'taking roll,' you will be obliged to actively make and discuss art within the workshop. Therefore, continued absences will alter your ability to comprehend the overall themes of the workshop.

Your presence in the workshop is needed for full participation credit. As such, your attendance may positively and/or negatively affect your final grade through multiple venues.

PARTICIPATION |

Active discussion is paramount to intellectual development. As such, twenty percent of your final grade is based on participation. You are expected to arrive to class (on time) having thoroughly read all of the assigned readings and prepared to critically/creatively discuss the material. You are expected to speak during each and every seminar, however quantity of participation is not a surrogate for quality. Your participation grade will take into consideration the frequency, as well as excellence, of your engagement in seminar discussions.

POLICY ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND INTEGRITY |

In agreement with Article 2.3.3 of the *Academic Freedom Report* which states that ‘the student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards,’ it is expected that students neither plagiarize nor copy from a peer’s intellectual or creative work. In addition, the RCAH adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in *General Student Regulations* 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades, and in the All-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades, which are included in *Spartan Life: Student Handbook + Resource Guide* (<http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/index.htm>). Students who engage in academically dishonest activities may receive a 0.0 on that given assignment or for the overall course.

POLICY ON ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES |

Students with disabilities that may interfere with completing your assigned course work may speak with me, as well as contact the *Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities* to establish reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor, call 353-9642 [voice] or 355-1293 [TTY].

SYLLABUS

READINGS + PROJECTS

SECTION 1 | THEORIES

WEEK 1 | JANUARY 10
Thursday

INTRODUCTION
Watch *Retooling Dissent*

WEEK 2 | JANUARY 17
Tuesday

DEFINING ART, UNDERSTANDING ACTIVISM
Read Noble, 1-37.
Reed, xiii-xxiii and 286-315

WEEK 3 | JANUARY 24
Tuesday

DARK MATTER
Read Noble, 38-75.
Scholette, 1-45.

SECTION 2 | HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

WEEK 4 | JANUARY 31
Tuesday

MEXICO LIGA DE ESCRITORES Y ARTISTAS REVOLUCIONARIOS
Read Noble, 76-111. TALLER DE GRÁFICA POPULAR
Williams, 'Evolution of a Revolution,' PDF.
Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America*, PDF.

WEEK 5 | FEBRUARY 07
Tuesday

EUROPE SITUATIONALIST INTERNATIONAL
Read Noble, 112-143.
Debord, *Report on the Construction of Situations*, PDF.
Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, PDF.

WEEK 6 | FEBRUARY 14
Tuesday

CUBA OSPAAL
Read Noble, 144-177.
Cushing, *Revolución!*, PDF.
Miner, 'Hasta la Victoria (Deportista) Siempre,' PDF.

WEEK 7 | FEBRUARY 21
Tuesday

AZTLÁN XICANO COLLECTIVES (SKYPE)
Read Noble, 178-199.
Noriega, 'Your Art Disgusts Me,' PDF.
Lipsitz, 'Not Just Another Social Movement,' PDF.
Romo, 'Points of Convergence,' PDF.
Due Writing 1

SECTION 3 | IN THE MIDWEST

WEEK 8 | FEBRUARY 28
Tuesday

NORTH AMERICA JUSTSEEDS (SKYPE)
Read Noble, 200-227.
MacPhee, 1-20. Familiarize yourself with entire book.
Which Side are you On?, PDF.
Web Justseeds.org. Pay particular attention to the blog.

SPRING BREAK

MARCH 07

WEEK 9 | MARCH 14

DETROIT VARIOUS
Read Selections from *Detroit: Imaginary Cities*, PDF.
Read Selections from *Shrinking Cities*, PDF.
Watch *Grown in Detroit* and *Detroit Lives*.

WEEK 10 | MARCH 21
Tuesday

CHICAGO TEMPORARY SERVICES (SKYPE)
Read Sholette, 94-115.
Art/Work, PDF.
Bloom, 'Making Art in Groups, Couples, and Other Configurations,' PDF.
Temporary Services, *Do-it-yourself Interview*, PDF.
Web Temporaryservices.org (contact section).

WEEK 11 | MARCH 28
Tuesday

MIDWEST MRCC (SKYPE)
Read *Call to Farms*, PDF.
Zorach, *AREA Chicago #9: Peripheral Vision*, PDF.
Web Midwestradicalculturecorridor.net

SECTION 4 | IN THE FOURTH WORLD

WEEK 12 | APRIL 04
Tuesday

TURTLE ISLAND POST-COMMODITY
Read To be determined.
Watch Misc. videos.
Web Postcommodity.com

WEEK 13 | APRIL 11
Tuesday

BOLIVIA MUJERES CREANDO
Read Miner, *Mujeres Creando*, PDF.
Styles, *Mujeres Creando*, PDF.
Watch *Mamá no me lo dijo*
Web Mujerescreando.org
Due Writing 2

WEEK 14 | APRIL 18
Tuesday

MEXICO MEXICO CITY + OAXACA (SKYPE)
Read *La Panadería (1994-2002)*, PDF.
Nevaer, *Protest Graffiti Mexico (Oaxaca)*, PDF.
Web Myspace.com/losartejaguar
Lapiztola.blogspot.com
Colectivocordyceps.org/

WEEK 15 | APRIL 25

Tuesday

COMING FULL CIRCLE
Read *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest #7*

WEEK 16 | MAY 02
May 02, 3:00-5:00

FINAL EXAMINATION
Due Weekly Questions/Sketchbook

NOTE

This is a working document. Additional readings and/or assignments may be inserted or altered as this seminar organically develops. These changes, if transpiring at all, will depend on the interests and needs of the class, as well as the time constraints of the academic semester.