

ARTH 310 Contemporary Art: 1980 to the Present

Dr. [REDACTED]

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Final Exam Essays

This is Not a Final Exam

When you're so postmodern that you resort to making corny jokes and bad photoshops because you disliked writing essays even before the panopticon made you realize it's basically no different than prison labor and so you think 'fuck it' might as well have fun with it.

Essay I

Memory and History

Maya Lin (b. 1957)

Less is Memorial

The historic memorial is perhaps the oldest, conservative and most engrained art forms in existence. Millenia-old forms like obelisks and marble columns continued to be frequently incorporated into public monuments well into the 20th century. Much of modernist philosophy doubted the utility of the very notion of celebrating history in such a concrete monolithic way. Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that public monumental memorials were among the last art forms to evade assimilation into modernism. Finally, in the 1980s, Maya Lin boldly put an end to this with her design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982). Built in the center of Washington D.C., a city filled with iconic monuments and imposing statues, this trailblazing design of Donald Judd-like minimalism is contrasted and powerful in its striking simplicity. While controversial when first announced, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial quickly proved popular with the public as a place of remembrance and helped a grieving nation to heal.



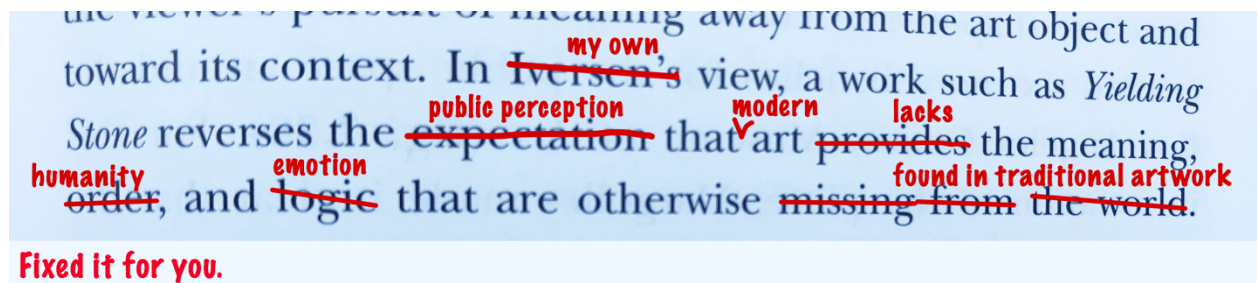
Rare interior view

Essay II

Culture, Body, Self

Gabriel Orozco (b. 1962)

A Rolling Stone Gathers No Más (que el Yo)



No other sentence from the Peter Kalb textbook made me shake my head in disagreement as much as the above. The original statement honestly read like something I'd expect to hear through grinning teeth on the stage of a beauty pageant if contestant were asked "What does modern art mean to you?" In a chapter that discusses art representing the concept of self, and on the same page that includes a beautiful description of Gabriel Orozco's *Yielding Stone* (1992) as being made of "strong but malleable [...] material in a state of constant mutability. Every time that it is touched, it changes." The metaphor behind Orozco's sculpture, a ball of the same weight as its creator, rolled through the street and collecting dirt along the way, literally hardened by

the marks and scars it recorded along its journey. I almost had to double check that I wasn't mistakenly reading a Shel Silverstein book illustrated by Joseph Beuys. Modern art is fascinating, but (I hope I'm not strangled by the ghost of Louis Althusser for saying this) it does rest heavily upon a lot of academic philosophy. Artists like Orozco brought a much-needed humanness to the forefront of the art world.



A scene from my Michel Foucault fanfiction

Essay III

Russia / China

Ai Weiwei

You Brake it, You Own it

Ai Weiwei successfully fused the twentieth-century modernism of the West, with the ancient traditions of Chinese art in the East. Through his artistic body of work, he introduced the modernist art and philosophy into China where a population of a billion people could be exposed to it. His most famous piece, the photographic triptych unceremoniously titled *Dropping a Han-Dynasty Urn* (1995), shows Weiwei shattering a two-thousand-year-old piece of pottery dated from the Han Dynasty period of Chinese history. This work unified China into the core modernist thinking while also bringing attention to the rapid changes taking place in contemporary China that razed the physical and anthropologic remnants of the past for the sake of building an industrialized and commercialized Chinese future. Weiwei intended this work to be shocking, not out of irreverence but because, like the shattered urn, these invaluable artifacts of Chinese culture cannot be pieced back together once they are lost.

Essay IV

Global Present / Youth Culture

Shirin Neshat

Another Conference of the Birds

One of the great injustices of the 20th century is covertly orchestrated coup d'etat by the United States and UK that led to overthrow the Shah and eventually resulted in the Iranian Revolution. What immense tragedy that such a rich cultural tradition was treated so callously in the name of reckless self-interest. From Achaemenid architecture, to Persian Sasanian art, to the profound philosophy of Islamic Sufism, Iran's history spans millennia and is filled with invaluable contributions to human achievement. It's impossible to imagine what it feels to be like Shirin Neshat, a native Iranian who returned to a country that had become an oppressive theocracy because its people had to resort to zealotry as the only way to end the foreign exploitation. Though her work advocates for change, the deep sadness this situation comes through in Neshat's artwork. Neshat herself is the subject of the photograph entitled *Rebellious Silence* (1994), in which her compulsory hijab feels more like a burial shroud as her defiant gaze pierces through, an effect deepened by the colorless composition of her pieces.



Kind of unironically proud of this one.

Some artist should definitely make an art gallery instillation out of laser printed watermarked stock photos from google image search.
Just saying.

Essay V

Metaphors, Narratives and Contemporary

Olafur Eliasson

This is Not a Pipe...but Maybe We can Still get a Buzz?

If you asked me to divide all of existence into two distinct categories, one answer I'd consider is "objects and experiences". The category 'Object' contains everything that exists physically, and "Experience' covers all the ways Objects interact with each other and exchange information. The arrival of photography and industrialized reproduction led the early modernists to seek out true objectivity in art; so much so that critics like Michael Fried compared instillations like *Specific Objects* to stage shows. The

modernists had broken down the object and used their art to explore what it really means to create an object, if it's even possible to create an original object, and what value these objects have when divorced from their authors. Eliasson did the same thing with experiences. Around half a century later, artists like Olafur Eliasson have pushed the idea of individuals engaging art spatially and temporally until it's distilled into a pure form of artistic personal experience and sensation. His installations like *Your strange certainty still kept* (1996) which uses light and an intricate pumping system to create an otherworldly wall of water droplets. This is almost the reverse of "Specific Objects," where the viewer himself has become the object.

Thanks for an entertaining and informative semester!

Grading these must get tedious. Let me try to suck up with postmodern humor.

Which legal defense did the e-cigarette industry lawyer used when they got sued for selling their products to children?



hoc non pipe