



The Selfie Stick: Self-Portraiture and Photography of the United States after the 1980s

Fall 2018
AMS 311S Unique 31099
Instructor: Natalie Zelt

DESCRIPTION

Self-portraits are a pervasive aspect of everyday life in the United States today. Millions of people have chosen to turn the camera around and picture themselves. What are the stakes and histories of rotating the camera lens? How have artists used the camera and photographs to highlight and challenge the politics of identity in contemporary culture?

In this undergraduate seminar we will consider self-portraiture and the photograph from a different select position each week. Paying close attention to the politics of the camera in relationship to representation, students will examine the myriad ways artists have used the camera and pictures in an effort to depict and sometimes to define themselves. This class is not a chronological survey or comprehensive history, rather a litany of jumping off points and positions from which students might begin to grapple with the intersections of self-making, identity formation and photography of the United States.

Each of the artworks we will study address these questions in different ways

- What is a self-portrait?
- What is a photograph?
- What is an American?

Each week we will spend time looking closely at an artwork, reading a scholarly text, and putting them in conversation.

This course carries **Writing Flag**, which means it is designed to get students to grapple with ideas and issues raised in the course through writing. You can expect to write throughout the semester and complete a substantial writing project. You will receive feedback and have opportunities for revision. A large portion of your final grade will be derived from writing-based projects, so please become acquainted with the resources at the University Writing Center. The folks there are pretty amazing.

Course Goals

- Students will practice close looking with visual texts in the form of artwork.

- They will learn to write carefully and persuasively about cultural forms including artworks and exhibitions.
- Students will learn to be self-conscious of what they see, how they see, who gets to see, and how those images impact understandings of the world and their discipline.
- Students will be prepared to research the work of various artists, argue for their relevance and contextual position and in relation to student's chosen field of research.

Course Policies

Weekly Assignments: You will have weekly assignments. These assignments include looking at artworks, reading scholarly texts, and thinking about them. The majority of readings can be found on Canvas. You will be expected to come to class having read the texts and prepared questions and ideas for discussion. Weekly assignments will also include short presentations. You will be writing about art works weekly in your journals. I will review those journals throughout the semester. You will present on artworks and scholarly texts and provide discussion questions throughout the semester. The purpose of these presentations will be to provide brief background and context that is useful and facilitates conversation; it is not a simple verbal report. The way that weekly presentations and discussion questions help foster conversation will be taken into account into calculating your participation grade. Finally, this class is about visual things. Presentations may, and probably should, include visuals, which should be easily accessible from our classroom through Powerpoint or other organized digital formats.

Attendance and Participation: Attendance and active participation is crucial to both your grade and the development of our shared classroom community. Individual class attendance and group participation will be taken into account in calculating your participation grade. However, leaving your group in a lurch or missing more than 6 classes may result in a zero-participation grade. Sustained lack of group participation or missing more than 8 classes may result in failing the course. Excused absences may include religious holidays, school-related travel, and family emergencies, but in order for these absences to be excused, you must communicate with me and your group as far in advance as possible and provide appropriate documentation.

Community and Conversation: A seminar is a semester-long conversation that builds community over time. The success of this conversation requires that folks from different disciplines, experiences, and perspectives come together to engage with the ideas of the course with care and respect. This means adding your ideas to the mix, making space for others and trusting that ideas will be thoughtfully interpreted. A conversation has many sides. Ours requires that you be present, engaged, and actively listening to your colleagues. Our conversation requires that you approach your classmates, your instructor, and the community we are building with respect, openness, and compassion.

Late Work: The final project will not be accepted late. Late work for other major assignments will lose one letter grade per day past the due date. In general, I do not offer extensions except for unusual circumstances. However, unusual circumstances do sometimes occur. I encourage you to be as communicative as possible with me in the event that they present themselves to you.

Electronics: Presence is paramount in this seminar. Being present is more than being physically in a room. It requires active looking, thinking, and dialogue with your colleagues and instructor. Should you choose to take notes on a computer or tablet, do so responsibly. Notes are not as important as conversation. I will ask to you stop using your device, should it become clear that you are no longer present with us.

Communication: Clearly, conversation, a form of communication, is critically important to your success in this course. I encourage you to stay in communication with me and your group throughout the semester. Feel free to communicate with me if you are encountering difficulties with the course or are confused about assignments, materials or policies. I hold regular office hours and am able to schedule additional appointments. My preferred communication modes are email and Canvas. Be advised that I respond to emails once a day, usually in the afternoon.

What is a Syllabus?: A syllabus is a living document. It contains crucial information, but also grows and changes with the conversation, the needs of the course, and the issues of the times.

University of Texas Honor Code: The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Documented Disability Statement: If you require special accommodations, you must obtain a letter that documents your disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Present the letter to me at the beginning of the semester so we can discuss the accommodations you need. No later than five business days before an exam, you should remind me of any accommodations you will need. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd>.

Assignments and Grading

Participation

30%

Participation is integral to this small seminar. In addition to regular attendance you are expected to come prepared to actively discuss and engage with materials. You will keep a journal of your weekly in-class writings, which will be collected and reviewed periodically throughout the semester and turned in at the end. In addition you will present multiple times throughout the semester on assigned artists and scholarly texts.

Art in the World Review

10%

You will be asked to participate in one art program (exhibition, lecture, panel, symposium) on campus this semester and draft a short review (1500 words).

Response Essays

20%

Over the course of the semester you will be required to write two short response essays (1500 words each), due in hard copy at 2pm on Friday of the assigned week. These essays interrogate the week's

artwork and scholarly text. The essay should address how the artwork and readings facilitate a better understanding of each other. It should outline what important questions they raise concerning identity in the US and why they are important. Responses are not lists. They are essays with a thesis/central guiding argument.

Final Project

40%

Students will have the option to choose between two final projects. Each option is a research-based persuasive project that includes 2,000-3,500 word written portion, a proposal, a first draft, a final presentation and final revised essay.

Course Calendar

Course Structure

Most weeks will follow this basic structure:

Mondays: Prior to arriving to class, you are expected to have spent time familiarizing yourself with the week's series or artwork via resources outlined on the syllabus. One of those resources includes [DASe](#), a searchable image library available through the Fine Arts Library. We will spend the beginning of class looking carefully and briefly responding to a single artwork from that series in writing in your journals. Our colleagues will present additional information on the artist, series and context of the artwork. We will engage with issues raised by their presentation and through our independent close looking.

Wednesdays: We will engage with the assigned scholarly text. All students are expected to read the assigned texts carefully before arriving to class on Wednesday. Our colleagues will present additional information on the text. We will engage with issues raised by their presentation and our close reading of the text.

Fridays: We will put the week's artwork and scholarly text in conversation. We will grapple with ways issues arise or change when the two are put into conversation. We will consider what they accomplish and what they do not. We will ask, when put side-by-side, how they answer and engage with the questions: What is a self-portrait? What is a photography? What is an American?

Students will be divided into four groups at the beginning of the semester and group responsibilities will rotate weekly. For example, for Week 4 the members of Group A will be responsible for giving an artist presentation on Monday; the members of Group B will present on the scholarly text on Wednesday; the members of Group C will bring discussion questions on Friday; and the members of Group D will turn in a response paper in class on Friday. Then, everyone's responsibilities rotate for the next week. So Week 5: the members of Group D will be responsible for giving an artist presentation on Monday; the members of Group A will present on the scholarly text on Wednesday; the members of Group B will bring discussion questions on Friday; the members of Group C will turn in a response paper in class on Friday.

Introductions

Week 1: Greetings + Seeing

Wednesday, August 29: Greetings; UT ID Writing Exercise; Review Syllabus.

Thursday, August 30: 5:30pm opening reception for *Mimi Cherono Ng'ok: Love Song #9 (I knew you before I met you)* at the Idea Lab in the Gordon White Building

Friday, August 31: How to See Yourself...with a Camera...by 2016 at least.

- Nicholas Mirzoeff, "How to See Yourself," in *How to See the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2016): 29-69.

Keywords: Self-portrait, Performance, Gender, Gaze, Racialize

Week 2: Looking, Writing, Researching

Monday, September 3: No Class, Labor Day

Wednesday, September 5: News Flash: Art is not Scary

- Before class watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drzG8H1clng>
- In class: Practice Close Reading & Writing
- In class: A photograph is a thing: Photo Materials + Groups
- In class: Review "A Guide to Weekly Group Assignments"
- 5-8pm: *Dawoud Bey: Forty Years in Harlem*, Exhibition Opening and Book Signing
Christian-Green Gallery Jester Center A232A

Friday, September 7: Fine Arts Library Research Orientation

Issues of Identity and Power

Week 3: Sherman's March: The Looming Legacy of Cindy Sherman

Monday, September 10: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills*, 1977-1980

<https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/cindysherman/gallery/2/mobile.php>

Wednesday, September 12:

- Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16:3 (Autumn 1975), 6-18.
- Richard Dyer, "The Role of Stereotypes," *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London; New York : Routledge, 1993): 11-18.

Friday, September 14: Discussion and Responses

Material: Film Still

Week 4: Gazing at the Intersection

Monday, September 17: Carrie Mae Weems, *Kitchen Table Series*, 1990

<http://carriemaeweems.net/galleries/kitchen-table.html>

Wednesday, September 19:

- A.D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode: Notes Towards a New Definition," 1976 in *Photography in Print: Writings on Photography from 1816 to Present* Ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1981): 480-491.
- Adrian Piper, "The Triple Negation of Colored Women Artists," *Out of Order, Out of Sight* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 161-173.
- bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," *Black Looks* (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 115-133.

Friday, September 21: Discussion and Responses

Material: Photo narrative

Week 5: What Does a Camera Make?: Index and Race

Monday, September 24: Myra Greene *Character Recognition* (2006-2007)

<http://www.myragreene.com/characterrecognition>

Wednesday, September 26:

Selections from

- Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Introduction," in *Racial Formation in the United States* (3rd Edition, London: Routledge): 1-17. [Ebook](#)
- Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Shadow and the Substance: Race, Photography and the Index," *Only Skin Deep* (New York: International Center for Photography, 2003). 111-127.

Thursday, September 27: [Facing Racism Symposium at Blanton](#)

Friday, September 28: No class, Final Project Proposal Due (Groups still submit discussion questions and Response Papers (attached word doc) via email nzelt@utexas.edu)

Material: Ambrotype

Week 6: Picturing the Self, Picturing Belonging.

Monday, October 1: Njideka Akunyili Crosby

<http://www.njidekaakunyili.com/>

Wednesday, October 3: 4pm Njideka Akunyili Crosby Lecture in ART 1.102

- Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990): 222-237.
- Watch: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en
- Daisy Wyatt, "Things Fall in to Two Parts: Artist Njideka Akunyili tells a New Nigerian Story," *The Independent* <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/things-fall-into-two-parts-artist-njideka-akunyili-tells-a-new-nigerian-story-8887283.html>

Thursday, October 4: 11am Njideka Akunyili Crosby Q&A Trans-Media Performance ART 3.206

Friday, October 5: Discussion and Responses

Material: photomontage, mixed media

Week 7: Making History

Monday, October 8: María Magdalena Campos-Pons the series *When I Am Not Here/Estoy Allá* 1994-1997 images on canvas and/or DASE.

Wednesday, October 10:

- Selection from Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.
- Pages 65-74 from Okwui Enwezor, "The Diasporic Imagination: The Memory Works of María Magdalena Campos-Pons," in María Magdalena Campos-Pons: *Everything IS Separated by Water* (Indianapolis Museum of Art: 2007).

Friday, October 12: Discussion and Responses **Artist Visit?**

4:30-6pm María Magdalena Campos-Pons Talk in ART 1.102

Material: Polaroid 20x24

Week 8: Invisible White

Monday, October 15: Nikki S. Lee, the series *Projects* see via DASE or Google Images

Wednesday, October 17:

- Mitsuye Yamada, "Invisibility Is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman," *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga (Kitchen Table Press, 1981): 30-36.
- Dyer, Richard. "White." *Screen*. 29:4. (Autumn, 1988); pp. 44-64.
- George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the "White" Problem in American Studies," *American Quarterly*, 47: 3 (Sept. 1995): 369-387.

Friday, October 19: Discussion and Responses

Material: Snapshot, Disposable Point and Shoot

Challenging American Archetypes in Photography

Week 9: The American Indian

Monday, October 22: James Luna, *Take a Picture with a Real Indian* (1991-2011) google image.

- DEADLINE for "Art in the World Review"

Wednesday, October 24:

- Paul Chaat Smith, "Luna Remembers," in *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 88-102. [Ebook](#)

Friday, October 26: No class, Research Day

Material: Snapshot

Week 10: The American Family Album

Monday, October 29: LaToya Ruby Frazier, the series *The Notion of Family* (2001-2014)

<http://www.latoyarubyfrazier.com/work/notion-of-family/>

Wednesday, October 31:

- Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," *This Bridge Called My Back*. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, eds. (New York: SUNY Press, 2015, fourth edition): 210-218. originally dated to April 1977.
- Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Who is Speaking Thus?" In *Photography at the dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*, 169-183. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Deborah Willis, Introduction, *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (New York: The New Press, 1994): 3-26.

Friday, November 2: Discussion and Responses

Material: Gelatin silver print; documentary photograph

Week 11: The American Landscape

Monday, November 5: Laura Aguilar, *Nature Self-Portrait* series (1996) + *Grounded* series (2006-7) images on canvas and/or DASE.

Wednesday, November 7:

- Gloria Anzaldúa, "Preface to the first edition" + "The Homeland, Aztlán," + "La conciencia de la mestiza/Toward a New Consciousness," *Borderlands/La Frontera* fourth edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987/2007), 19-20; 23-35; 99-113.
- Selections from Martin Berger, "Landscape Photography and the White Gaze," in *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 43-58; 74-79 [Ebook](#)

Friday, November 9: No Class, Draft of Final Project Due

Week 12: Self-ish?

Monday, November 12: Kim Kardashian West, *Selfish*, 2015 on reserve at FAL

Wednesday, November 14

- Amelia Jones, "The Rhetoric of the Pose: Hannah Wilke and the Radical Narcissism of Feminist Body Art," *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998)
- Angelina Chapin, "Why Feminists Should Argue Over Kim Kardashian's Selfie," Huffington Post, March 14, 2016, (skim comments)
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/angelina-chapin/why-feminists-should-argu_b_9458672.html

Friday, November 16- Discussion and Potential to Submit 3rd Response Essay

Week 13

Monday, November 19- Research Day

Wednesday, November 21 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Friday, November 24 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Week 14: Feeling Myself

Monday, November 26: Mickalene Thomas, Afro Goddess series images on canvas and/or DASE.

Wednesday, November 28

- Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic as Power," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, (NY: Crossing Press, 1984): 53-60.
- Jennifer C. Nash, "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality," *Meridians*, vol. 11 no. 2 (2011): 1-24.

Friday, November 30: Discussion and Potential to Submit 3rd Response Essay

Week 15: Presentation week (5 Minutes)

Monday, December 3

Wednesday, December 5

Friday, December 7

Week 16

Monday, December 10 Last Day of Class

Final Projects Due: Friday, December 14, Hard copy in American Studies Office before 5pm