

Art 6933

Uncharted territories: art, the unconscious, and the sublime.

3 credits

Sculpture & Photography Graduate Seminar

Spring 2025

Instructor: Sergio Vega

Hours: Wednesday periods 11 to E2 (6:15 to 9:10 PM)

Classroom: FAC B01

Office Hours: Wednesday 3-4PM (by appointment only).

Office FAD 229 / phone: 352-281-7283

Goals and Objectives of the Seminar

This seminar studies theoretical approaches to sculpture and photography making, video, installation art and related art forms, in order to disclose how diverse critical discourses are employed to inform and contextualize the understanding, reception and distribution of artworks. The objective is for students to develop the standards of research, conceptualization and production expected from professional artists. In order to achieve this goal, it is crucial that students strive for developing an effective visual and critical vocabulary to substantiate their practice. Students will be required to produce a new body of work and to talk and write about it in relation to art history and contemporary art theories. Emphasis will be on the integration of studio practice and critical thought. In addition, the goal of this specific seminar will be to examine theories of the unconscious and how those can facilitate the understanding of creative processes involved in artistic practice. The course will also focus on multiple interpretations of surrealism, post-surrealism, contemporary approaches to psychoanalytic theory in artmaking and the theory of the sublime.

Methods of the Course

This course will consist on lectures, readings, class discussions of the readings, critiques of student work and individual consultations. In our weekly class critique sessions students will have the opportunity to receive feedback from classmates and instructors. Students will show their work in progress throughout the semester in this forum. For the final presentation it is expected that the work will be displayed in a finished condition as if it were installed in an exhibition open to the public. The strategies and forms of presentation are crucial for the appropriate reception of the projects. Students should set up studio visits with faculty individually. Everyone needs to meet with the instructor of record for this course at least once this semester.

Topical Outline

When Sigmund Freud published "The Interpretation of Dreams" in 1899, he started what would become an enormous enterprise in the field scientific research focusing on the analysis of the human psyche.

Psychoanalysis is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "A therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association. Also: a system of psychological theory is associated with this method."

In psychoanalytic theory, the unconscious mind consists of ideas and drives that have been subject to the mechanism of Repression: anxiety-producing impulses in childhood are barred from consciousness, but do not cease to exist, and exert a constant pressure in the direction of consciousness. However, the content of the unconscious is only knowable to consciousness through its representation in a disguised or distorted form, by way of dreams and neurotic symptoms, as well as in slips of the tongue and jokes. The psychoanalyst seeks to interpret these conscious manifestations in order to understand the nature of the repressed. In psychoanalytic terms, the unconscious does not include all that is not conscious, but rather that which is actively repressed from conscious thought. Freud viewed the unconscious as a repository for socially unacceptable ideas, anxiety-producing wishes or desires, traumatic memories, and painful emotions put out of consciousness by the mechanism of repression. Such

unconscious mental processes can only be recognized through analysis of their effects in consciousness. Unconscious thoughts are not directly accessible to ordinary introspection, but they are capable of partially evading the censorship mechanism of repression in a disguised form, manifesting, for example, as dream elements or neurotic symptoms. Dreams and symptoms are supposed to be capable of being "interpreted" during psychoanalysis, with the help of methods such as free association, dream analysis, and analysis of verbal slips.

Psychoanalytic theory is a major influence in Continental philosophy and in aesthetics in particular. Freud is sometimes considered a philosopher. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, have written extensively on how psychoanalysis informs philosophical analysis. Other philosophers such as Alain Badiou and Rafael Holmberg have argued that the meaning of psychoanalysis for philosophy was not immediately clear, but that they have come to reciprocally define each other.

From its inception, Surrealism was closely involved with contemporary developments in psychology and psychoanalysis. The movement's leader André Breton had studied medicine and served in a mental hospital during World War I, an experience that directly affected Surrealism's development. The Surrealists' initial understanding of human psychology was largely informed by the work of the French psychologists Jean Charcot and Pierre Janet. Particularly influential for the development of early Surrealist automatic techniques were their studies of hypnosis and what was called psychological automatism, the involuntary actions and processes not under the control of the conscious mind—for example, dreaming. The German artist Max Ernst brought detailed knowledge of Sigmund Freud's more developed theories of the unconscious to the group, and these became the greatest influence on Surrealism. As Freud's writings were translated into French, the Surrealists' understanding and deployment of his ideas became increasingly sophisticated and complex.

It could be argued that the rebellion against the western rationale staged by the surrealists had already been started with the advent of Romanticism in its antagonism towards the ideals and methods of the enlightenment. Crucial to the reevaluation of emotion, sensation and all forms of affect explored by the Romantics was the conception of the sublime, which Immanuel Kant placed beyond the realm of aesthetics. Throughout the class we will explore numerous case studies that exemplify artistic approaches that attempted to dismantle the controlling functions of rationalism by enabling irrationality to operate as a liberating force of the unconscious. We will analyze the Surrealist's methodologies for the unleashing of the libidinal energy of the unconscious through artmaking and their contemporary legacies. In addition, we would explore the theory of the sublime by Kant and others and its applications in the making and interpretations of art.

Readings

Jo Nash

Psychoanalysis: A History of Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory
<https://positivepsychology.com/psychoanalysis/>

Walter Benjamin

A short History of Photography
<https://files.eportfolios.macaulay.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5648/2016/09/16123555/Benjamin-Short-History-of-Photography.pdf>

Mathew Sanderson

Immanuel Kant's Theory of the Sublime
<https://1000wordphilosophy.com/2023/11/11/kants-theory-of-the-sublime/>

Rosalind Krauss

The Optical Unconscious > Chapter four, pp. 149-192, Chapter five, pp. 243-308
MIT Press ISBN 0-262-11173-X (HB), 0-262-61105-8 (PB)

Jacques Rancière
The Time of the Landscape,
On the Origins of the Aesthetic Revolution
Polity Press, 2023 ISBN 13: 978-1-5095-4815-6

Grading Criteria

- A) *Outstanding*: thoughtful and intelligent ideas presented in a clear, organized, and engaging manner, the final product has fine art exhibition quality, among the very best.
- B) *Above average - good*: the ideas are interesting and successfully presented; shows potential, but not necessarily distinctive; roughly equal in quality to the majority of work completed by other students, the final results can be improved.
- C) *Average - mediocre*: achieves the minimum requirements, but not particularly clear, successful or ambitious. Quality of the work is below that of most other projects submitted.
- D) *Unsatisfactory*: does not satisfy the minimum; generally unsatisfactory in terms of quality and clarity.
- F) *Failed*: The student did not complete a project.

Final grade is obtained by evaluations added in percentage
Artwork 50%
Attendance and participation 20%
Assigned presentations and critical papers 30%

Attendance policy

Classes like this are designed to give students the maximum personal attention, however they only succeed when students understand that each person is important to the community. Each student's unique voice is needed in discussions and critiques. Attending class is a vital part of learning the skills and concepts students need to enhance their expressive potential and artistic abilities.

Policy regarding make-up of late work, and missed critiques

It is the student's responsibility to make up missed class sessions or late work. Group critiques and class discussions cannot be repeated. Critique due dates demand the student's attendance.

Counseling

University Counseling Services
Counseling Center
301 Peabody Hall P.O. Box 114100,
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611-4100

Phone: 352-392-1575 Web: www.counsel.ufl.edu If you are experiencing problems or difficulties with the academic requirements of this course you may also contact the Departmental Advisor in Fine Arts: +1 (352) 392-0207. Further, the Dean of Students Office can assist you with a range of support services.

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/supportservices/>

Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Academic Honesty

The university's honesty policy regarding cheating, and plagiarism.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Honor Code](#). Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Health and Safety

1) The link below includes information and policies regarding health and safety in the School of Art and Art History at UF. <http://www.arts.ufl.edu/art/healthandsafety>

Class Attendance

Participation in class is necessary to achieve the course objectives. Students are expected to arrive on time and be prepared to participate in all activities.

Attendance is taken at the beginning of class. Students are considered tardy if they arrive after roll is taken. Students are permitted two absences without penalty; additional absences will reduce the final grade by one letter grade per occurrence. Three "tardies" will equal one absence.

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Online Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. [Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner](#). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluer.com/ufl/. [Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here](#).

Regarding Online courses

Our class sessions may be audio visually recorded for students in the class to refer back and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited.

Campus Resources:

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).

University Police Department: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#)

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

[Career Connections Center](#): Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

[Library Support](#): Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

[Teaching Center](#): Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

[Writing Studio](#): 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information](#).

On-Line Students Complaints: [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process](#).