

Curating the Avant-Gardes



Image: Installation view of the exhibition *Francis Picabia: Our Heads Are Round so Our Thoughts Can Change Direction* (The Museum of Modern Art, November 21, 2016–March 19, 2017)

Last updated: 01-09-2026

ARH 6931 Seminar in Curatorial Studies
School of Art + Art History, College of the Arts, University of Florida
Spring 2026 Credits: 3

Wednesdays **Periods 8–10 | 3:00–6:00pm** **FAC 116A**

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Course Description and Objectives

The anti-art ambition of the avant-garde was made clear in its artists' practices, methods of display, and various discursive statements. New forms of collage and political photomontage went hand-in-hand with the appropriation of readymade objects as works of art and the elaboration of creative life practices.

Exhibition displays were never a simple affair: coal sacks were hung from the ceiling; sixteen miles of string were unraveled; a tape recorder of hysterical laughter played in the background. “We intend to destroy museums,” the Futurists warned the readers of their founding manifesto.

Given the avant-garde ambition to negate traditional forms of artmaking and exit the traditional venues of art-viewing, how have curators subsequently exhibited and displayed avant-garde work? This curatorial studies seminar will introduce students to key issues within curatorial practice by focusing on a range of case studies centered on modern and avant-garde practice. Special attention will be paid to the ways in which art historical questions are posed and addressed by exhibitions, object-based research, and forms of museum scholarship.

With the generous support of the School of Art + Art, several guest curators will be invited to speak to the class throughout the semester.

Course Requirements and Grading

Active Seminar Participation	10%
Weekly Catalogue Responses	10%
Weekly Presentations	5%
Artist Studio Visit & Follow-Up Report	5%
Final Project: Proposed Exhibition (70%)	
Exhibition Abstract, Outline, & Bibliography	10%
Exhibition Checklist	5%
Wall Panel Text + Sample Object Labels	10%
Sample Installation/Layout	5%
Accompanying Catalogue Outline	5%
Final Presentation	10%
Final Exhibition Proposal	25%

Completion of all presentations and assignments is necessary to pass the course.

Letter Grade	% Equivalency	GPA Equivalency
A	94 and above	4.00
A-	90 to 93	3.67
B+	87 to 89	3.33
B	83 to 86	3.00
B-	80 to 82	2.67
C+	77 to 79	2.33
C	73 to 76	2.00
C-	70 to 72	1.67
D+	67 to 69	1.33
D	63 to 66	1.00
D-	60 to 62	0.67
E, I, NG, WF	59 and below	0.00

Assignments

Active Seminar Participation

Students are expected to attend all classes and participate extensively throughout each class, including the conversations with the guest curators.

Weekly Catalogue Responses

For each assigned exhibition catalogue, students will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire summarizing the show, its main argument, and the catalogue contributions.

Weekly Presentations

Each week, assigned students will prepare a PowerPoint dedicated to the exhibition under consideration, bringing in installation photographs and high-resolution images of sample checklist works. They will also be responsible for leading discussion that day.

Artist Studio Visit & Follow-Up Report

In *The Curator's Handbook*, Adrian George writes, "A curator should experience as many other exhibitions and art projects as possible, engage in dialogue with other curators, academics, and artists across a whole range of art forms and media." Toward this end, this seminar asks you to schedule and attend a studio visit with a current MFA student in School of Art + Art History's Studio Art program. A brief 1-page follow-up report should summarize the artist's practice and the conversation held during the visit.

Final Project: Proposed Exhibition

As their culminating work for the seminar, students will conceive, research, and write about a proposed exhibition in relation to the seminar's main theme (modern and avant-garde art). This project will feature many individual assignments scheduled throughout the semester, including an Exhibition Abstraction, Outline, & Bibliography; an Exhibition Checklist; Wall Panel Text + Sample Object Labels; Sample Installation Images/Layout Designs; an Accompanying Catalogue Outline; as well as a polished, conference-style Final Presentation and a Final Exhibition Proposal (10 pages in length).

The final project and proposed exhibition should demonstrate significant research, original argumentation, clearly defined critical stakes, and mastery of the related secondary literature. It should also incorporate feedback and suggestions from the course instructor.

All assignments must be in Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. Please number the pages. Any citations must be done in Chicago-style.

Chicago Manual of Style Guide: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Readings

All assigned readings will be available either on reserve at the Architecture & Fine Arts Library or made available online through the Canvas e-Learning Course Website. All readings must be completed before each class. Please bring copies of the readings to class with you and be prepared to discuss them.

Academic Policies and Resources

Information about university-wide policies and resources can be found here:

<https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>

Resources for Art Historical Research:

UF Libraries Catalogue: <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/>

UF Libraries Inter-Library Loan Service: <https://accesssupport.uflib.ufl.edu/ill/>

Journals:

Recommended art history journals include *The Art Bulletin*, *Art Journal*, *Art History*, *October*, *Grey Room*, *Oxford Art Journal*, *History of Photography*, *International Journal of Surrealism*, *Dada/Surrealism*, *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, *Modernism/modernity*, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, *African Arts*, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, *Third Text*, *Representations*, *Critical Inquiry*, *Word & Image*, *American Art Journal*, *Panorama – Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art*, *ARTMargins* + lots more – access through UF Libraries Catalogue.

Databases:

WorldCat, JSTOR, Oxford Art Online – access through UF Libraries Catalogue.

Chicago Manuel of Style Quick Guide for Citations:

https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Important Deadlines & Dates:

Friday, February 6, 12:00pm (noon)

Exhibition Abstract, Outline, & Bibliography Due

Friday, February 27, 12:00pm (noon)

Exhibition Checklist Due

Friday, March 13, 12:00pm (noon)

Artist Studio Visit Follow-Up Report Due

Monday, March 23, 12:00pm (noon)

Wall Panel Text + Sample Object Labels Due

Friday, April 3, 12:00pm (noon)

Sample Installation/Layout Due

Friday, April 10, 12:00pm (noon)

Accompanying Catalogue Outline Due

Wednesday, April 15, 3:00–6:00pm

Final Presentations (Day 1/2)

Wednesday, April 22, 3:00–6:00pm

Final Presentations (Day 2/2)

Tuesday, April 28, 11:59pm

Final Projects Due

Schedule

The schedule may change slightly during the semester in response to the needs of the class.

Wednesday, January 14

Introductions & Overview

Wednesday, January 21

Wednesday, January 28

Wednesday, February 4

Friday, February 6, by noon

Exhibition Abstract, Outline, & Bibliography Due

Wednesday, February 11

Wednesday, February 18

Wednesday, February 25

✉ **Friday, February 27, by noon** **Exhibition Checklist Due**

Wednesday, March 4

Wednesday, March 11

✉ **Friday, March 13, by noon** **Artist Studio Visit Follow-Up Report Due**

Wednesday, March 18 **No Class (Spring Break)**

✉ **Monday, March 23, by noon** **Wall Panel Text + Sample Object Labels Due**

Wednesday, March 25

Wednesday, April 1

✉ **Friday, April 3, by noon** **Sample Installation/Layout Due**

Wednesday, April 8

✉ **Friday, April 10, by noon** **Accompanying Catalogue Outline Due**

Wednesday, April 15 **Final Presentations (Day 1/2)**

Wednesday, April 22 **Final Presentations (Day 2/2)**

☞ **Tuesday, April 28, by noon**

Final Projects (Exhibition Proposals) Due