

Art 2826C

## **The Culture of the Image**

3 credits

### **Section A (lecture)**

Instructor: Sergio Vega

Meeting Time: Wednesday period 9-10 / 4:05-6:00 PM

Location: FAC 201

Office Hours: Wednesday 3:00 PM (by appointment only)

Office Location: FAD 329

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### **Course Description**

Images do not exist in isolation, but often find their meaning within specific social, geographical and historical cultural conditions. People are aroused by images, they break them, mutilate them, kiss them, cry before them, and go on journeys to them; they are calmed by them, stirred by them, and incited to revolt. By analyzing images, we are able to better understand the cultural formations that sustain them and better equipped to find strategies for how to make our own meaningful images. Where does our power to create images reside?

This is an introductory course that focuses on the critical processes by which images acquire meaning, and produce knowledge. The objective is to provide students with an overview of visual representation that facilitates their understanding of the issues involved in the production, distribution and reception of images. In addition to thinking about why visual representations are produced in the context of artistic ideas, (Why is an image is made in this or that way?) the goal is for students to learn how art, and other forms of cultural production, have been created within historical and contextual paradigms. Further, students learn a variety of strategies for including theoretical concepts as a catalyst and method of articulation in their own practice.

### **Course Methods**

This course is a combined lecture and experiential course that will consist of lectures, readings, discussions, critiques, individual presentations and the creation of an image-based story. The lecture series will explore various still contested interpretations of images, the inner workings of image making and what has been called the different realms of "imageness" and how those function within the distinct areas of the sensible. The experiential learning or studio/lab portion (section B) of the course will consist of critiques, student presentations related to course content, and the development of an independent project where students take/create and sequence images to tell a story.

### **Course Objectives**

*Course objectives are designed to actively engage independent and collaborative research, theory/art historical content, professional practice, communication and critical thinking.*

- Critically interrogate the variety of visual messages in the world.
- Understand the relationship between a visual artifact, audience and culture.
- Develop a knowledge base of modern and contemporary artists/designers/cultural producers as a resource to inform your research and practice.
- Effectively initiate individual and collaborative research and clearly present the resulting creative work.

- Read, reflect upon and articulate verbally and in writing artists' influences, motivations, and processes.
- Demonstrate the ability to use language and discipline specific terminology, oral or written, to identify, describe, analyze and contextualize visual material or production.
- Recognize how the meaning of art objects and images are affected both by the social, cultural and economic environment existing at the time of its creation, as by the politics, beliefs and established visual systems of contemporary audiences.
- Recognize how the visual can be used to communicate culture and as a form of resistance to the status quo.
- Question who gets to tell the story, who gets represented and begin to develop an independent voice, demonstrated through critical analysis of visual representation.
- Engage in ethical practices and situate your work, in the context of the broader field of art and visual representation.
- Attend campus and community lectures and exhibitions as a means to expand your perspective and influence your art practice.
- Effectively engage in respectful dialogue that honors diversity.

## Texts / Bibliography

Required Bibliography:

*On Photography*, Susan Sontag

Suggested Bibliography:

*The Power of Images: Response and Repression*, David Freedberg

*Becoming Revolutionary; On Kazimir Malevich* (eflux #47), Boris Groys

*Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Žižek

*Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Bell Hooks

*Perfect Wave*, Dave Hickey

*Photography After Art Photography*, Abigail Solomon-Godeau

*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey

*Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud

*Man and his Symbols*, Carl Jung

*Visual Literacy*, James Elkins

Films:

*October*, Sergei Eisenstein

*Man with a Movie Camera*, Dziga Vertov

*Vertigo*, Alfred Hitchcock

## Calendar / Weekly Topics

### WEEK 1

**Into to the course: Semiotics and the Construction of Meaning**

Roland Barthes: *Image, Music, Text*

### WEEK 2

**How do we relate to images? Desire, Idolatry and Iconoclasm**

David Freedberg, *The power of Images: Response and Repression*, pp. 1-26

Carracci, Fra Angelico, Baldun Grien, Veronese

Case study: *The Venus of Urbino*, Titian, Giorgione, Manet

### WEEK 3

**Introduction to Post-Enlightenment Art**

XIX Century, *The battles of mimetic representation: Romanticism, Classicism, Realism and Photography*

Delacroix, Ingres, Courbet, Daguerre, Nadar

#### WEEK 4

**Transhistorical / Transcultural Archives of Images** Archetypal images and the collective unconscious  
Aby Warburg's *Atlas Mnemosyne* and Carl Jung's *Man and his Symbols*, Archetypal images and the collective unconscious  
Case study: *Atlas Mnemosyne*

#### WEEK 5 & 6

##### Against the Icon

Art in the Soviet Avant-garde and in Weimar Germany, Abstraction, Constructivism, Design and the Bauhaus.  
Abstraction, collage and designed images. Cinema Montage.  
Boris Groys. *Becoming Revolutionary; On Kazimir Malevich* (eflux #47)  
Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Sergei Eisenstein, Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, Lazlo Moholy Nagy  
Screenings: Sergei Eisenstein, *October* and Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera*

#### WEEK 7

**Surrealism and the Culture of the Unconscious** (Psychoanalytic theory, surrealism and the imaginary)  
Sigmund Freud. *Totem and Taboo* (excerpts)  
Rosalind Krauss, *The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism*, pp. 87-118. The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths  
Man Ray, Claude Cahun, Lee Miller, André Kertesz  
Case studies: Claude Cahun and the construction of queer Jewish identity, Lee Miller on the crossing over between art (surrealism) and photojournalism

#### WEEKS 8-9-10

**Modernist Photography, Photo Journalism and Socially Engaged Photography**  
Europe and America before and during the Great Depression  
Mathew Brady, Atget, Brassai, Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau, Willy Ronis, Ed Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz, Jacob Riis, Lewis Hines, Ben Shawn, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans

#### WEEK 11

**The Family of Man Gone Sour**  
The Family of Man exhibition, Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, Duane Michals

#### WEEK 12 & 13

**Desire and the Male Gaze**  
Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, pp. 362-374, Brian Wallis, Art After Modernism  
Screening: Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*  
Cindy Sherman, Richard Avedon, Helmut Newton

#### WEEK 14

**Photography and Contemporary Art**  
Abigail Solomon-Godeau *Photography After Art Photography*, pp. 75-86  
Brian Wallis, *Art After Modernism*  
Rauschenberg, Warhol, Jeff Wall, Greg Crewdson, Philip Lorca di Corcia

#### WEEK 15

Final Exam: April 29th

## **Section B (studio)**

Instructors:

Classroom: FAD 329

Meeting Time: period 3-4 / 9:35-11:30

### **Course Methods**

Section B is conducted by the Teaching Assistants and is where students discuss, conceptualize and produce their assignments in close collaboration with their instructors. In this section, students will have the opportunity to flesh out their ideas, learn techniques, show their work, and receive feedback from classmates and instructors on regular basis. There will be three main assignments that will culminate in a twenty-image portfolio due on Friday April 28th. In addition, there will be several technical and research-based assignments throughout the semester.

### **Topical Outline**

This section of the course focuses on the study of the basic principles of photography: 1) Handling Equipment Functions of the camera. Aperture and time of exposure, equivalence charts. ISO sensibility. Depth of field and focusing. Optics, functions of different lenses. Using tripods. 2) Exposure Composition. Portraiture. Landscape. Figure and ground. Bracketing your exposure. 3) Processing of digital images Overview of Adobe Photoshop software. Tools. Levels and exposure correction. Lightness and contrast. Working with layers. Filters. 4) Printing Functions of the printer demonstration. Kinds of paper.

### **Assignments**

There will three assignments:

#### **1) The Nuts and Bolts**

Gaining control over the camera is an imperative for any photographer. The relatively simple mechanical operations provide us an endless array of possible combinations for recording, interpreting and abstracting the world around us. More than just a tool for inscribing on film or digital sensor the world as it is, the camera allows us to project our personal vision, to record the world as we see it. The tools for the creation of photographic subjectivity are many, but in this course, we will begin with the basic mechanisms of the camera: shutter, aperture, ISO, lens. The objectives for project 1 are as follows:

1. Complete 10 fully edited images, converted to black & white.
2. 3-4 images focusing on aperture control, at least two images each, showing shallow depth of field and deep depth of field.
4. 3-4 images focusing on shutter control, at least two images each showing stopped motion, blurred motion and panning.
5. 3-4 images focusing on exposure control featuring images made at various times of day and lighting conditions, ie; morning/noon/night and indoor/outdoor

#### **2) Framing**

Now that you have an understanding of the basic mechanisms of the camera and how to control the technical quality and character of your images, it's time to focus on composition. Many of the same strategies employed in design, drawing and sculpture can be employed within the photographic frame. Strategies such as symmetry, rule of thirds, figure ground, contrast (tonal and content), balance, leading lines, visual weight, etc. can be employed to add

dynamism to your images. For this project, challenge yourself to use the frame as the space to express how you visualize the world around you. Question the way things are supposed to look and highlight the unique way the photographic apparatus mediates our perceptions. Remember, as useful as understanding the elements of good composition can be, using a formula for making photos will only render formulaic images.

1. Complete 10 fully edited images, converted to black & white.
2. Produce at least one interpretation of each of the compositional elements discussed in class.

### 3) **Floridian Stories** (Assignment due Friday February 27th)

For this assignment you will have to produce a portfolio of at least 12 final images. There will be work in progress critiques of this project throughout February in order to arrive at the final selection, conceptualization, and complete processing of these images.

Think about aspects of Florida that may be unknown to most people, but are relevant to you. Look at your surroundings in a critical way. Dig into your past or that of your family and town. Explore stories you may have heard. Think that Florida is perhaps the quintessential site where surrealism found its final incarnation. Explore the paradigmatic character of Florida as a scenario where contradictory forces coexist in various layers of the social and cultural strata.

Get out with your camera on regular basis and explore, look for sites, situations, things, people and anecdotes. Plan on taking at least 10 photographs per day. This assignment entails the production of a photo portfolio that presents a cohesive personal and critical vision of Florida both technically and conceptually.

### 4) The Identity Project (Final Portfolio due April 24th)

For this assignment you will have to produce a portfolio of at least 20 final images. There will be work in progress critiques of this project throughout the semester in order to arrive at the final selection, conceptualization, and complete processing of these images.

For this project you have to work every day. The first thing you do in the morning is to look at yourself in the mirror and ask: Who am I today?

The construction of the self as a cohesive, defined entity, rarely reflects the complexity and multiplicity of subjective individual experiences. How those experiences relate to the sense of self we adopt as our persona? Much has been said about identity, but in the end: do we really know who we are? Are you the person that your parents expect you to be? Are you the self-idealized persona that appears in social media? Are you the person that is feeling under the weather after something bad happened? Are you the person that is feeling euphoric after something good happened? Are you the person that others think you are? Are you one, or many?

The idea is to explore alternative ways of being and perform that new persona throughout the day. You may decide to be someone radically different or not, but you have to believe it for at least a day. Then you photograph yourself in any situation that represents or somehow reflects aspects of that newly acquired version of yourself.

Grading Criteria:

- 25pts Complete list and number of images
- 25pts Originality/Creativity
- 25pts Craftsmanship/Technical Proficiency
- 25pts Formal Elements of Design and Composition

**Late Work**

Specific due dates will be clearly communicated for each assignment or project on e-learning. Students with a legitimate documented excuse who are absent on an assignment due date will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up the assignment. Students with an unexcused absence are encouraged to complete assignments, but late submissions will result in a drop of one full letter grade for the assignment per class period it is late. All assignments are due at the beginning of class, turning it in at the end or after class is considered late. Full participation by having completed work is required along with active participation through shared ideas and commentary.

## **Sections A & B**

### **Critical Dates**

Final Exam: April 29<sup>th</sup>

Portfolio due on April 24<sup>th</sup>

### **Grading and Evaluation**

Lecture 50% / Lab 50%

#### **Lab**

-Class Participation 20%

-Critiques (Projects 1-3) 30%

-Final Portfolio 50%

#### **Lecture**

-Class Participation 30%

-Final Exam 70%

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

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

The **Health and Safety Handbook** can be found here:

<http://arts.ufl.edu/academics/art-and-art-history/health-safety/>