OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE AT BERKELEY, FALL 2019
ART SINCE 1945: A WORLD OF NEW MEANINGS

10AM-12PM MONDAYS, SEP 23 TO OCT 28, CALIFORNIA JAZZ CONSERVATORY, JERRY FIDDLER ANNEX, RENDON HALL, 2040 ADDISON ST, BERKELEY CA 94704

Instructor: Dr Simon Kenrick.
Class notes: these will expand on the weekly session notes and fill in some gaps in the textbook, especially in explaining terms like orientalism, structuralism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism etc.

Where possible, images shown during the course will refer to local collections. Students are strongly advised to visit the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which covers our period, and includes two relevant ongoing exhibits, German Art After 1960, and Pop, Minimal, and Figurative Art.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We offer a moving picture of the arts since WWII—an international and intercultural image of a period of ever-accelerating change in every aspect of human existence. For many it’s been a bewildering sequence of shifting ideas and images which questioned the actual nature of art. New voices, new symbols, new languages have emerged—women, people of color, LGBTQ artists have challenged the very basis of traditional meanings, while bringing a whole new richness and complexity to the world of art. The course offers clues to where we might find our own places in these volatile and often conflictive histories.

We begin with the shift of the global art center from Paris to New York, and end in a multi-polar world of biennales and art fairs, postcolonialism and globalization. We follow threads such as the dialogic nature of international modernism and the multiple uses to which it is put; the encounter with alienation and the search for the spiritual; the related preoccupation with the Primitive, authenticity and instinct; the shift from misrepresentation to self-representation for people previously excluded from the Eurocentric canon; and from high modernism to postmodernism, as established criteria, values and meanings are challenged and ‘deconstructed’ by popular culture, mass production and the voices of the previously excluded. In the context of postcolonialism we look at the important concept of orientalism in relation to the Islamic world; and finally we look at how artists across disciplines and media are addressing the overwhelming threat of climate change in the Anthropocene age.
WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION
Monday September 23rd

Readings are taken from the textbook (S&C) unless otherwise indicated.

SYLLABUS AND SCOPE OF THE COURSE
ART AT MID-CENTURY: THE PREHISTORY OF HIGH MODERNISM
Mid-century artists look back to the revolutionary modernism of the early twentieth century—Cubism, Expressionism, De stijl, the Bauhaus, Dada and Surrealism—with a mixture of awe for its achievements, and impatience at its increasing institutionalization in the market and museum culture.

WEEK 2: EUROPE & LATIN AMERICA; ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM IN THE US
Monday September 30th

Reading: S&C pp. 1071-1081

In Europe, the shadows of Nazism, the Holocaust and Hiroshima, with 30 million dead and 40 million displaced in WWII, are reflected in the existentialism of Sartre, the figuralism of Bacon and Giacometti, and the primitivism of Wols. In Latin America modernist experiment, as in Mexico, Cuba and Uruguay, is integrated with magical realism, indigenism and anti-imperialism. In the U.S., Abstract Expressionism emerges as a specifically American high art form, emphasizing immediacy, spontaneity and a kind of heroic spirituality, while marking a historic shift from Paris to New York as the center of the international art world. ‘Formalism’ and ‘media specificity’ become the aesthetic criteria through which it is promoted by critic Clement Greenberg, while its affinities with the ideology of individual freedom are advanced internationally by USAID and other government institutions.

WEEK 3: REACTIONS AGAINST ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM
Monday October 7th

Reading: S&C pp. 1083-1093

Reactions against the emotionalism, elitism and market orientation of Abstract Expressionism lead to developments in performance art (which cannot be commodified), as well as assemblage and the distanced irony of Pop Art, which subvert the pure aesthetic doctrines of Greenberg. Artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg satirize the pretensions of Abstract Expressionism, deliberately disrupting the criterion of media specificity (notably in Rauschenberg’s ‘combines’), and turning to the ‘readymades’ of Dada—as in the work of Marcel Duchamp—to make their point. Post-independence artists and photographers in Egypt, Morocco and Mali adapt
international modernism to indigenous and nationalist agendas while celebrating their own specific forms of modernity.

**WEEK 4: MINIMALISM AND CONCEPTUAL ART; ARCHITECTURE**
Monday October 14th

*Reading:* S&C pp. 1094-1106

Minimalists and Conceptual artists continue the critique of Abstract Expressionism: rejecting its individualism and hand-crafted techniques, Minimalists such as Donald Judd turn to industrial materials and production techniques while refusing compositional hierarchies, and creating new spatial relationships between his ‘specific objects’ and the viewer. Conceptual artists, in foregrounding the *idea*, release the artist from commitment to any particular medium, extending the possibilities of mixed media work, and often playing between ambiguities in language and meaning in different modes of representation. This period above all represents the critical shift between misrepresentation and self-representation. The advent of feminism in the late sixties generates a new art, a new criticism and a new art history, among other things challenging notions of the ‘great artist’ and the ‘masterpiece.’ Important and ongoing debates develop around the essential or constructed nature of gender in the work of Judy Chicago, Ana Mendieta, Mary Kelly, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger and others. The liberating work of African American and Chicano artists is paralleled in the art of the struggles for national independence in Africa and Latin America.

**WEEK 5: POSTMODERNISM, QUEER THEORY AND CULTURE WARS**
Monday October 21st

*Reading:* S&C pp. 1106-1120

The neoliberal economic policies introduced by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher coincide with the emergence of a new set of cultural theories loosely grouped under the heading ‘postmodernism’—conceived of as a sequel to and a critique of modernism. The combination of challenges from women, LGBTQ communities and people of color represented a fundamental threat not only to established social values but to the very nature of language and the meanings it could convey. Similarly the neutrality of exhibition and museum space was questioned in the context of Eurocentric and patriarchal values, and new strategies devised to foreground these contradictions. The ensuing backlash from mainstream ideologies and institutions became known as the ‘culture wars.’

**WEEK 6: POSTCOLONIALISM, GLOBALIZATION AND CLIMATE CRISIS**
Monday October 28th
Reading: S&C pp. 1121-1135

https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=edward+said+on+orientalism+video&view=detail&mid=64602EB334C8C49B0C3C64602EB334C8C49B0C3C&FORM=VIRE
This documentary will shown and discussed in class.

http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/4574615.htm
Students are asked to watch this documentary before class.

Orientalism, a nineteenth century colonial pseudo-science designed to achieve knowledge and control over the Islamic world, was exposed in a seminal book of the same name by Palestinian-American professor of comparative literature Edward Said in 1978. His sophisticated, much debated critique, developed as liberation movements in the Islamic world were throwing off this oppressive ideology, helped to generate a new academic discipline, Postcolonial Studies. The documentary Edward Said on Orientalism sheds an important light on the images and attitudes we have inherited towards the Islamic world in all its diversity, and helps to explain the deep Islamophobia which characterizes our historical period in the West.

Art produced in the postcolonial context, and representing indigenous and diasporic artists from all five continents, now plays a key role in global culture, its dissemination accelerated by the globalization of art markets along with trade patterns and transnational institutions. Finally, faced as we are with the almost unthinkable consequences of climate change, we examine the work of artists who during the last twenty years or so have confronted this existential threat through their installations, performances, striking imagery and creative oppositional gambits. The course ends with a brief review of what we have covered.

Simon Kenrick
July 2019