

Introduction to Socially Engaged Art

ARTS 333 3 Hours, 3 Credits

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Office Hours TBA

Online Syllabus with links & downloadable texts see:

Greg Sholette Seminars <http://www.sholetteseminars.com/>

Justification: This proposed new course will fill a substantial gap in the art department's undergraduate curriculum regarding the new field of social practice art. The class will also compliment the existing Social Practice Queens MFA graduate concentration in the department. This class satisfies Pathways core learning category of Creative Expression (CE) and partially relates to World Cultures and Global Issues (WCGI) as well as Individual and Society (IS). It requires a combination of research learning, creative expression and writing.

An increasing number of artists, curators, critics and arts administrators have begun to turn their energies toward a new type of participatory art activism. This “social practice art,” as the New York Times describes it, seeks to bring about positive change within specific communities confronted by complex issues such as racism, urban gentrification, environmental damage, precarious labor conditions, high rates of incarceration, and an influx of global refugees among other challenges. This combined seminar and studio course aims to both investigate, as well as to create, collaborative social practice art projects. Class members will be assigned to work in small teams, generating original fieldwork focused on specific community needs. Using the skills, methods, and visualizing technologies found in contemporary art each team is tasked with conceptualizing a solution to a particular social challenge. An important aspect of this course is learning how to integrate investigative scholarly fieldwork with creative problem solving expressed through aesthetic modes of artistic imagination as well as well-reasoned argumentation and oral and written evaluation. Of equal significance to this class is learning how to discuss and evaluate social practice art within a broad context of historical, cultural and geopolitical ideas that pivot on concepts of social justice and emancipation. Several short writing assignments are required as well as a written proposal for the final project to be evaluated by the enter class, plus a final written report with research notes is turned in following class presentations at the conclusion of the semester.

Through a combination of readings, slide presentations, discussions, weekly exercises and mini-assignments and writings, as well as original research, and group projects this course seeks to:

1. Familiarize students with the theory and practice of the emerging field of social practice art and its interdisciplinary, research-based methodology.
2. Investigate ways of combining original fieldwork with artistic practice using both old and new artistic media and technologies in order to solve specific social challenges in the real world.
3. Convey an understanding of the broader local, national and global context within which contemporary socially engaged artists operate today.
4. Discover practical, real-world tools and methods for conceiving, designing, implementing and managing art projects that positively impact society.
5. Develop group social skills through the process of participating in a collaborative learning environment.

REQUIRED TEXT FOR THIS CLASS:

Tom Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art & Social Cooperation*, Duke U. Press, 2013.

GUIDELINES AND CLASS POLICIES

Please show courtesy to the instructors and other students by completely turning off your phones and messaging devices.

It is possible that some of the art and ideas that will be presented might be viewed as controversial or perhaps offensive to some individuals. Everyone in the class should be free to express their views openly and honestly with due respect. Whatever is said in the class remains in the class.

Readings: Students are expected to read the assigned materials before the designated date.

Grading Policies:

No late projects will be accepted. If you know that you will miss a final presentation you must arrange to have a member of your group bring the project to class. If you have a serious emergency on the day a project is due (serious emergencies being defined as- the death or life-threatening illness of a family member, a car accident on the way to class, or an illness so serious that you require the medical attention of a doctor or hospital and for which you can produce a doctor's note) you must contact me as soon as possible to discuss your options.

Requirements: Attendance is very important because your level of participation figures heavily in your overall evaluation and grade.

Evaluation criteria:

30% Class Participation

30% Quality of Research

40% Presentation of Final Project

THE SYLLABUS

Week One: Introductions and Class Overview:

The instructor presents a lecture on post-1960s social, political, and community based arts movement focusing on such questions as: How has it come about that refurbished abandoned houses in Houston, Texas (Rick Lowe) or on Chicago's South Side (Theaster Gates), or a popular restaurant in Pittsburgh PA (Conflict Kitchen), or a community center in Queens, NY (Immigrant Movement International) can inhabit the dual role of solving practical, social needs and also be described as an art project? What genealogy of art has brought about the existence of such work today? What set of criteria do we need to understand it? And how does this "Social Turn" affect the future of art and in particular, your art education?

Review Web sites:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/24/arts/design/outside-the-citadel-social-practice-art-is-intended-to-nurture.html>

<http://isreview.org/issue/90/critique-social-practice-art>

<http://www.artnews.com/2014/04/07/art-of-social-practice-is-changing-the-world-one-row-house-at-a-time/>

Week Two: The intersection of Social Practice Art & Urban Planning. Following the first lecture, the instructor will go into more detail about the way art can intervene positively in reimagining the “city from below.” A comparative analysis will be made of the goals and accomplishments in several artist’s projects focused on housing and urban infrastructure including Hamburg Germany (Park Fiction), Houston (Project Row Houses), Chicago (Dorchester Project), and Campbaltimore (Baltimore), Corona Plaza (Queens NY). We will also debate who does gentrification impact, what are there alternatives, and how do artists and other cultural workers relate to this process?

Readings:

“Interview with Rick Lowe and Mark Stern,” from Chapter 5 of *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*.

“Unnatural Speculations: Nature as an icon of urban resistance on NYC's Lower East Side 1979-1984,” G. Sholette, 1997

“The Problem with Puerilism” Craig Owens, 1984.

Class Exercise:

Breaking into groups, students discuss specific urban locations they are familiar with that also require improvement and visualize ways of solving these problems based on the criteria and methods presented in our readings and in the instructor’s slide presentation. Each student writes a 1-to-2 page interpretation of these discussions and emails this paper to the instructor no later than 3 days before next week’s class.

Week Three: Developing the Research Teams

The instructor will present a tutorial on methods for organizing collaborative work and then we will break the class into smaller working groups. Each team will meet with the instructor and begin to take procedural steps necessary for completing the final project including choosing an area of research study, and designating the division of individual group tasks. Each team will choose a group presenter who will in turn make a brief presentation on their progress every week following this one.

Week Four: Art/Migrants/Frontiers/Borders/Refugees/Others. The class will meet at Immigrant Movement International at 111 Roosevelt Blvd in Corona, Queens, where we will compare and contrast the work of Teddy Cruz, Pedro Lasch, Marina Naprushkina and Tania Bruguera, all of whom are deeply engaged with issues of social immigration while asking how does each artist choose to enact their ideas on this topic and why? How does our idea of the other and the concept of race affect our democratic process? The instructor will also present images of nearby Corona Plaza where a few years ago Queens College social practice students first carried out research in the largely Latino community noting that many are without legal papers, and then we developed several re-designs of the space to make it more accessible to the local community.

Readings: “An interview with Pedro Lasch and Teddy Cruz,” Chapter 9, from *What We Made...*

Review Web sites:

Tania Bruguera/Immigrant Movement International (IMI)

<http://immigrant-movement.us/wordpress/about/>

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/22/arts/design/immigrant-movement-international-in-queens.html?_r=0

SPQ - Corona Studio: Transforming Corona Plaza:

<http://queensmuseum.org/blog-archive/?p=276>

Marina Naprushkina/New Neighborhood Moabit, Berlin, Germany

<https://www.rbb-online.de/kultur/beitrag/2015/09/marina-naprushkina-beim-internationalen-literaturfestival.html>

Class Exercise:

We will walk over to Corona Plaza a few blocks away and using powers of observation learn what we can about a specific space, its cultural environment and who makes up its local population. You will submit a one-page report by email to the instructor three days before the next week’s class.

Week Five: Socially Engaged Art & Labor Justice will focus on the work of Gulf Labor Coalition/Global Ultra Luxury Faction, Studio REV, Marty Pottenger, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, all artists deeply involved in economic justice issues. We will investigate the relationship of methods used by these artist and ask how does their representation of workers needs operate and how might a particular community of workers participate by having a say in a final art project that is also about them? A class discussion based on the written reports will occupy the final hour of the class.

Reading: Chapter 10, from "What We Made," interview with Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Brett Cook.

Review Web sites:

StudioREV

<http://www.studiorev.org/>

Marty Pottenger

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

Gulf Labor Coalition

<http://gulflabor.org/>

Mini-Assignment:

Locate and bring to class an image of a modern refugee in which the person is pictured in such a way that he or she appears to be just like a neighbor or one of your own family members.

Week Six: Tactical Media as Socially Engaged Art was a set of critical cultural practices developed in the 1990s by socially artists and theorists that proposes ways to use the Internet, social media, and new technologies to help bring about democratic solutions to community problems by generating actual and virtual public spaces within which political activism, innovative organizing, and participatory collaborations are realized and supported. How has new media been used by such groups as Black Lives Matter and

Readings: Interviews with Evan Roth & Jonah Peretti, chapter 11, parts 1 and 2 in *What We Made...* Brian Holmes, Swarmachine: Activist Media Tomorrow. (PDF)

Mini-Assignment:

Locate and bring to class one an internet based artwork that uses collaboration, cooperation, crowd sourcing open-source programming, or P2P exchange that has had a positive social application in the world.

Examples:

The Yes Men: Identity Correction <http://theyesmen.org/>

About "Face": Our Social Practice Art Experiment <http://theorynow.blogspot.com/2013/05/about-face.html>

Written Proposals Are Due from each project team: based on your working group's discussions and your initial research please submit a 5-page proposal for the final project and have your team spokesperson send it to instructor no less than 3-days before the next week's class.

Be sure to include clearly written descriptions for these headings:

- Introduce and describe the specific social need your group seeks to address.
- Outline the artistic methods your group intends to apply to this problem.
- Provide a well-reasoned argument for your proposed research and creative work.
- Use at least one art-historical reference to justify your groups proposed project.
- Include a timeline for each step of research and creative work to be undertaken.
- Include a breakdown of the specific tasks assigned to each group member (plus email.)

Week Seven: Socially Engaged Art & Environmental Justice looks at such projects as Mel Chin’s Operation Paydirt in which the artists seeks to call attention to lead poisoning in the soil of his home town of New Orleans, and projects by artist Mathew Friday such as SPURSE about the watershed of New York. *We will review final project proposals during the second half of today’s class.*

Reading: Art, Culture And Ecology,” by Paul O’Brien

Review Web sites:

Mel Chin’s Paydirt project: <http://www.fundred.org/about/operation-paydirt.php>

Matthew Friday’s Everything is Downstream: <http://www.matthewfriday.net/?p=256>

Week Eight: “Work Day” in which all social practice teams share their research and progress with each other and with the entire class, and they in turn receive constructive feedback towards their final projects. We will continue to review all final project proposals as a class.

Week Nine: Socially Engaged Art, Race & Prison Reform examines the high levels of incarceration in many low income and working class neighborhoods and the ways artists have sought to address the social cost of this phenomenon. We will look at the work of Laurie Jo Reynolds Tamms Year Ten Campaign in Illinois, as well as artist Dread Scott’s Harmed & Dangerous installation from 1993, and New York’s Laundromat Project, among other socially engaged works of art. **(Possible guest speaker and/or field trip)**

Laurie Jo Reynolds prison reform project:

<http://tammsyear10.mayfirst.org/>

<http://brooklynquarterly.org/on-legislative-art-laurie-jo-reynolds-and-tamms-year-ten/>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gregory-sholette/artist-shows-supermax-pri_1_b_776761.html

Dread Scott’s prison artwork

<http://www.dreadscott.net/works/harmed-and-dangerous/>

The Laundromat Project NYC

<http://laundromatproject.org/what-we-do/programs/create-change/fellows/>

Week Ten: Social Practice Art: A Summary Lecture in which the instructor presents a slide show that seeks to wrap up the content of the course and initiate a discussion about the success of the final projects.

Week Eleven: “Work Day” a final opportunity for social practice teams to share research and receive a last round of feedback about their final projects due in the week that follows.

Week Twelve: Presentations by Research Groups begins.

Week Thirteen: Presentations by Research Groups continues.

Week Fourteen: Presentations by Research Groups continues.

Week Fifteen: Final Research Group presentations are concluded and *all written project reports are due today, no late papers will be accepted.* The instructor will also use the remaining class time to engage in a group evaluation of the course and its outcomes.

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Books you may wish to obtain for this course:

Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, by Claire Bishop, Verso Books, 2012.

Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook by Pablo Helguera, Jorge Pinto Books Inc., 2011

Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011, Nato Thompson editor, MIT Press, 2012

Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics, by Shannon Jackson, Routledge Press, 2011.

The Interventionists: Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life. Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette editors, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art/MIT Press, 2004.

Other Online Resources:

<http://creativetime.org/summit/>

<http://darkmatterarchives.net>

<http://www.queensmuseum.org/social-practice-queens>

<http://www.socialpracticequeens.org/>

<http://www.sholetteseminars.com/dark-matter-syllabus-cuny-grad-center/>