

ASIAN AMERICAN ART AND VISUAL CULTURE

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE HART 675: TOPICS IN CONTEMPORARY ART
U PENN ARTH 3509.401 | ASAM 2271.401 | ENGL 2271.401
FALL 2026, TUE 12-3PM
BMC ROOM TBD AND VAN PELT LIBRARY 626 (?)

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DESCRIPTION This experimental seminar will investigate Asian American art and visual culture from both art historical and cultural studies perspectives. Students will be introduced to the history, making, reception, curation, and circulation of Asian American art and representation from the twentieth century to the present. In addition to close readings and formal analyses of our chosen artworks, we will be reading broadly in Asian American history as well as studying artist bios, critical texts, and theories about race and art. A fundamental component of this seminar will be a number of mandatory museum, gallery, and studio visits. Students may therefore have to adjust their schedules to accommodate these obligations.

REQUIREMENTS The course materials are designed to develop your critical thinking, reading, and visual skills. Some of the required texts are quite dense. We will study them carefully. We hope that you will come away from the seminar with the ability to read with precision and to look with imagination as well as the confidence to analyze and to synthesize materials from disparate fields with intellectual rigor. To do this, you must agree to the social contract of reading, which requires the three “yeses”: yes, I will read the text carefully; yes, I will reconstruct its argument on its own terms; yes, I will identify what is useful in the argument. You must fulfill this reading contract before moving to any criticism of the required materials. We will be discussing some difficult social issues over the course of the semester. Please be respectful of your classmates and understand that we all come from different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.

ASSIGNMENTS First Assignment: Class facilitation. Each student will prepare one week. Facilitations should include a brief summary of the readings, 2-3 images for close collective analysis, 2-3 sentences or very short passages for collective close reading, and 2-3 questions for discussion (rolling due date, sign-up in class, one student per week, 20%)

Second Assignment: A formal analysis (3 double-spaced typed pages) of a work of art which you have seen and studied in person in an area collection. You will be given an opportunity to exercise the skill of close looking and thick description in an ungraded mandatory assignment. Further guidance to be given in class. (due date: Friday 25 September by 4pm, 10%)

Third Assignment: Final research essay proposal (1 single-spaced typed page), including 1) a working title; 2) short description identifying your object(s) of study, theoretical lens, and the questions that

will guide your interpretation and argument; 3) a 5-item bibliography; 4) a captioned illustration. (due date: Friday 13 November by 4pm by email, 10%)

Fourth Assignment: In-class presentations for all students. An opportunity to integrate formal analysis, historical context, and theoretical argument in preparation for your final assignment. Further guidance to be given in class. (Tuesday 1 December, 10%)

Final Assignment: Final research essay, 8-10 pages for undergrads, 18-20 pages for graduate students. (due date: Friday 11 December by 4pm, no extensions except in case of emergency, 50%)

A note regarding participation. This is an upper-level seminar: a high degree of participation is expected. Participation grades will be based on the following: attendance, contribution to in-class discussions (quality, not just quantity), coming to class prepared with questions, observations, and comments about the required materials, class facilitation, and engagement with other students in class. Please read the texts carefully, annotate them, and bring them to class.

A note regarding course content. Please note that it is your responsibility to review the syllabus prior to enrolling in the course and to make a reasonable determination about whether you will be able to complete the course requirements, including reading and viewing all the assigned materials. If for any reason you anticipate problems with the course material that preclude your participation, please contact the instructor immediately so that we can determine whether you should seek an alternate course. If you are feeling overwhelmed, please utilize the available resources at Bryn Mawr's Health Center by drop-in or appointment (<https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/offices-services/health-wellness-center/counseling-services>). To speak to a counselor when the Health Center is closed, call 610-526-7778.

A note regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first speak with Access Services. Students can email accessservices@brynmawr.edu to request an appointment to begin this confidential process. If eligible for accommodations as per Access Services, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share their verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>). Any student who has a disability-related need to record this class must first be found eligible to do so by Access Services and must share this eligibility with the instructor. Class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded.

Learning Goals

- Acquire advanced knowledge about Asian American contemporary visual art and culture
- Improve formal analysis and interpretive skills
- Learn and improve close reading skills for challenging critical and theoretical texts, and to apply them in interpretations of visual media
- Learn and utilize research skills for finding and integrating primary and secondary sources into a research paper

Remote Learning. In the event of inclement weather or widespread illness, we may need to meet on Zoom. I also hold office hours on Zoom by appointment. If class needs to be moved to Zoom, an email announcement will be sent to you in advance. Here is the permanent link for Prof. King's Zoom room. <https://brynmawr-edu.zoom.us/j/2418362913> Meeting ID: 241 836 2913

COURSE OUTLINE

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| 1 | 25 August | First class meeting. BMC students: although the official start date is not until 9/1, <i>please plan to attend if you are in the area</i> . If you cannot, review the syllabus on your own and view the first set of slides on Moodle (The 2026 Whitney Biennial). |
| 2 | 1 September
<i>Politics & Aesthetics</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freida Lee Mock, Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision (video, 1994) • Lisa Lowe, "Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique," <i>Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics</i> (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 1-36. • Marita Sturken, "The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietna Veterans Memorial," <i>Representations</i> 35 (1991): 118–142. <p>[DE leads; HK out of town]</p> |
| 3 | 8 September
<i>Chinatowns</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists: Arnold Genthe, Hung Liu • Anthony W. Lee, "Photography on the Streets," <i>Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Chinatown</i> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 101-147. • Anne Anlin Cheng, "Introduction," <i>Ornamentalism</i> (New York: Oxford University Press), 1-25. • Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," <i>Artforum</i> 13.5 (1975): 36-45. • Kislak Center: Twenty-Four Studies of Arnold Genthe <p>[DYK leads]</p> |
| 4 | 15 September
<i>Internment I</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kislak Center: Tomoguchi Family Photographs • Rea Tajiri, History and Memory (video, 1991) • Sam Baker in conversation with Kaja Silverman, "Primal Siblings," <i>Artforum</i> 48.6 (2010), 176-183. • Mae M. Ngai, "The World War II Internment of Japanese Americans and The Citizenship Renunciation Cases," <i>Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 175-201. <p>[DE leads; Special Collections visit]</p> |
| 5 | 22 September | <p>Visit: Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia. Meet in the Barnes lobby.</p> <p><i>Noguchi to Asawa: Designing Postwar America</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huan He, "Isamu Noguchi's Gardens: Yellow Peril in the Age of Information," <i>Configurations</i> 32.1 (Winter 2024): 25-50. <p>[Curator-lead session]</p> |
| | 25 September | Second Assignment Due: Formal analysis of an artwork |
| 6 | 29 September
<i>Internment II</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists: Chiura Obata, Hisako Hibi, Miné Okubo • ShiPu Wang, "Archiving for Reckoning: Chiura Obata's Wartime Work," <i>Archives of American Art Journal</i> 59.2 (September 2020), 46-65. • Christine Hong, "Illustrating the Postwar Peace: Miné Okubo, the 'Citizen-Subject' of Japan, and Fortune Magazine," <i>American Quarterly</i> 67:1 (March 2015), 105-140. |

- Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (Seattle: U. Washington Press, 1946/1983)
[HK leads]

- 7 6 October
Portraiture
 - Artists: Byron Kim, Tseng Kwong Chi, Tehching Hsieh
 - Ikkyo Day, “Unnatural Landscapes: Romantic Anticapitalism and Alien Degeneracy,” *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 73-114.
 - Tehching Hsieh, “I just go in life: An exchange with Tehching Hsieh,” in *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*, eds. Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 318-339.
 - Maria H. Loh, “Renaissance Faciality,” *Oxford Art Journal* 32.3 (2009), 341-363.
 - Susette Min, “Reevaluating the ‘Cultural Work’ of Tehching Hsieh, Byron Kim, and Simon Leung,” *Unnamable: The Ends of Asian American Art* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 85-123.
[DYK leads]

- 8 13 October
Philippines
 - Artists: Allan deSouza, Manuel Ocampo, Paul Pfeiffer, Michelle Lopez
 - Miko Reverez, [*Disintegration 93-96*](#) (video, 2017)
 - Saria Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), xi-67.
[Fall Break for BMC students, no class]
[DE leads; possible studio visit with Michelle Lopez]

- 9 20 October
Korea
 - Artists: Theresa Cha, Nam June Paik
 - Theresa Cha, *Dictée* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2001)
 - Constance Lewallen, “Introduction: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha—Her Time and Place,” *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Cha (1951-1982)* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Art Museum, 2001)
 - Cathy Park Hong, “Portrait of an Artist,” *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (New York: One World, 2020), 151-180.
 - Crystal Baik, “Introduction: The Delicious Taste of Army Base Stew,” *Reencounters: On the Korean War & Diasporic Memory Critique* (Temple University Press, 2020), 3-22.
[HK leads]

- 10 27 October
Vietnam
 - Artists: An-My Le, Andrew Tuan Nguyen, Danh Vo
 - Mimi Thi Nguyen, “Introduction: The Empire of Freedom,” *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 1-32.
 - Danh Vo catalog (?)
[DYK leads]

- 30 October

Saturday field trip to New York City
Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Orientalism: Between Fact and Fantasy*
MoMA: Michelle Kuo, Chief Curator at Large and Publisher
Possible studio visit TBD

- 11 3 November

No meeting due to Saturday field trip

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| 12 | 10 November
<i>Multiculturalism</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists: Patty Chang, Carl Cheng, Ken Lum, Martin Wong, Wu Tsang • <i>Wildness</i> (Wu Tsang, 2012) • <i>The Product Love</i> (Patty Chang, 2009), pending availability • Juan A. Suárez, “Queer Memory and the Brown Commons,” <i>Unbound Queer Time in Literature, Cinema, and Video Games</i> (New York: Routledge, 2025), 113-131. • Shirley J. Lim, “‘Speaking German Like Nobody’s Business’: Anna May Wong, Walter Benjamin, and the Possibilities of Asian American Cosmopolitanism,” <i>Journal of Transnational American Studies</i>, 4:1 (2012). [HK leads] |
| 13 | 17 November | Conclusion |
| 14 | 24 November | No meeting for Penn students, Thanksgiving Break. BMC students TBD. |
| 15 | 1 December | Third Assignment Due: In-class presentations |
| | 11 December | BMC students: Final Assignments due Friday by 4pm by email to HK |