WHAT IS ART? WHERE IS ART? IDST 190-017

Three Professors:
Gabrielle Berlinger (American Studies/Folklore), Meta DuEwa Jones (English and Comp Lit), Victoria Rovine (Art History)

Tuesday-Thursday 11:00-12:15  Stone Center room 0103
--office hours--

Use Signup Inside of our Course Sakai Site to make an office hour appointment:
Dr. Meta DuEwa Jones (she/zhe; /her/zher): Wednesdays 2:30-4:30
https://unc.zoom.us/j/99746801678
Dr. Berlinger (she/her): Wednesdays 11:00-1:00  https://unc.zoom.us/j/91258560084
Dr. Rovine (she/her): Tuesdays 2:00-4:00  https://unc.zoom.us/j/93150123105

Contact Your Professors:

Use our course email account to contact us: WhatIsArt@unc.edu
Use the subject line to let us know what you’re writing about (ie: “Ackland visit”).

Four Teaching Assistants:

John Bechtold (American Studies)  jbech@live.unc.edu
Tuesdays 12:30-2:00pm in the “ART&” common room at the Ackland Museum

Jake Swartz (he/him/his) (Art History)  jswartz@unc.edu
Fridays 2:00-4:00
https://unc.zoom.us/j/94562462179?pwd=aGJuRWdXQUZDaktwMXhmVTd2N21aZz09

Eve Svoboda (she/her) (Art History)  esvoboda@email.unc.edu
Mondays 11:00-12:30  https://unc.zoom.us/j/6160503283

Hannah Skjellum-Salmon (they/them) (English/Comp Lit)  hanhskj@live.unc.edu
Tuesdays 2-3 (Dey 341) and Wednesdays 10-12 (via Zoom):
https://unc.zoom.us/j/8012430394?pwd=ZnBETIYxL01SMUx3LNULVd6RVFXQT09

Course description

What is art? And where is it found? Museums are devoted to it, scholars study it, poets and writers compose creative works in response to it, collectors spend millions to own it. And yet, definitions of art reveal more about the people doing the defining—and about disciplinary approaches to art—than they do about the creative expressions themselves. By asking the question—rather than by answering it—this class will explore why art matters as a category, what roles artists play in their societies, and what changing conceptions of art tell us about people, cultures, and values around the world.

Art has been used to evaluate cultures and communities; its presence viewed as an indication of sophistication, its absence a mark of “uncivilized” peoples. Thus, defining art is an act of power as well as an expression of taste; and an assertion of cultural values as well as an expression of culture. Our investigation of the meanings of art will draw examples from aesthetic expressions in many media and genres. We will study artists and arts institutions, audiences and art markets,
and the relationship between literature, music and art. We will also consider how different forms of art express religious and spiritual beliefs, political ideals and protest, as well as highly personal reactions to every aspect of our lives.

Your Professors and Their Disciplines
Terms such as “discipline” suggest the rigor, training, and expertise your professors bring to their respective areas of research and teaching. However, “discipline” can also subtly connote rigidity or punishment. In this course, our unique disciplinary approaches, also called “fields of study,” “research methodology,” and “pedagogy” (e.g. philosophy and practice of teaching) emerge from deeply expansive intellectual exploration and joy. Below, your professors have provided highlights from their respective disciplines that buttress their distinct approaches to thinking, writing, and teaching about art. At times during the course these approaches will intersect and overlap, reveling in their “interdisciplinary” nature.

Professor Victoria Rovine loves all kinds of art. She teaches African art history courses, with a focus on dress and adornment. She conducts research through ethnographic methods, such as interviews and participant observation (taking part in the work of the artists she studies, or watching them at work) as well as archival research. Her current research is on the roles of textiles in the French colonial West Africa, when they were important as symbols and as commodities. Her first book is on a type of cloth from Mali (West Africa) whose patterns and techniques were adapted to new markets and meanings in the late 20th century. Her second book is about African fashion design, looking at how designers reimagine styles from their own cultures to create new artistic statements that both preserve and transform the traditions.

Distinct Disciplinary Approach: Art History is the study of human creative expressions in visual form, seeking to understand how these forms make and express meanings. Art historians study how art reflects and shapes all aspects of culture—we ask what art can tell us about politics, economics, spiritual or religious beliefs, systems of status, conceptions of beauty, with all of these topics set in a specific historical and cultural context. Art historians apply a wide array of research methods and forms of analysis to the creative expressions they study. They may study form and style, iconography (interpretation of symbols), social history, gender and race studies, Marxism, Post-Colonial theory, and so on. Professor Rovine fell in love with art history when she was in college because it gave her a chance to combine many of the disciplines she enjoyed, including anthropology, history, comparative literature, and languages. Art historians may study art that was made as art, or they may study other visual expressions—as we will see this semester, determinations about what art is can reveal a great deal about cultures and histories.

Professor Meta DuEwa Jones is a researcher, creative scholar, poet, and professor. She believes writing and teaching about art and literature can influence our perception, and also our apperception. She currently teaches courses focused on African American literature--especially
poetry & children’s literature--music, visual art and graphic novels. Her first book was about innovations in American poetry and visual culture—including art design of album covers—that were influenced by blues, jazz and hip hop. Her research also illuminated how central race, gender and sexuality are to writing about music and its attendant visual cultural aspects. Her current book explores visual artists in a variety of media (e.g. photography, assemblage, paint, printmaking, sculpture), how poets and writers of creative non-fiction, fiction, and autobiography/memoir, collaborate, record, and transform their experiences of living or traveling within Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas; and how these artists attend to the legacy of slavery and migration and its impact on notions of community, kinship and freedom.

**Distinct Disciplinary Approach:** As a professor specializing in literature and creative writing, Professor Jones’s teaching method will emphasize the “close reading and contextual reading of texts and images,” formalist approaches to the role of the lyric first-person “I” and metaphorical eye in poetry based on established and emergent painters in the American canon, comparative annotation, reader-response theory, data mining of words within texts (including the use of word clouds for data visualization), exploration of seriality and visual frame in terms of the art and illustrated layout of a splash page in a graphic narrative work, related methods of examining and understanding different genres of literary work that engages art. The genres in the course that are foundations within the disciplines of English and Comparative Literature include excerpts from memoirs, biography, poems, letters, creative non-fiction—photo-essays, graphic narratives/sequential art, as well as picture-books marketed for children or adults across age ranges.

**Professor Gabrielle Berlinger** studies creative expression in everyday life. As a folklorist, she believes that vernacular expressions—how we tell stories, cook, perform religious rituals, adorn ourselves, build homes, tell jokes, and more—are all artful forms of communication. We communicate personal values and social conditions through our creative expressions. Her first book focused on the nature and significance of urban folklife, Jewish material creativity, and ritual practice in diverse Jewish communities across the United States and Israel. Currently, she is researching the collection, preservation, and interpretation of everyday objects in “alternative” house museums.

**Distinct Disciplinary Approach:** Professor Berlinger will introduce you to the theory and practice of American folkloristics—or, the arts of everyday life. The discipline of Folklore Studies in the United States merges the methodologies of social science and humanities research. Trained as ethnographers, folklorists carry out participant-observation and in-depth interviews to provide context to their close study of different forms of traditional creative expression (narrative, dance, music, food, material arts, dress, ritual, etc.) This fieldwork-based approach is rooted in a focus on performance, bringing attention to how individuals perform their worldviews, senses of self and community, and perceptions of past, present, and future circumstances through the aesthetic
choices they make in everyday life. Folklore Studies views the performance of tradition as a form of communication that reveals the balance of individual will with social circumstance through different modes of creative expression. We rely upon ethnographic fieldwork to contextualize our close study of creative expression as a way to understand the significance and implications of traditional practice in everyday life.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

**SLO 1** Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze creative expressions through three disciplinary approaches:

1) As aesthetic statements, using formal and stylistic analysis
2) As cultural expressions, through analysis of their functions and meanings, and of the cultural institutions that surround them
3) As expressive forms interconnected with other media, including literature and music

**SLO 3** Students will demonstrate comprehension of the roles of art and artists in cultures beyond North America. They will also demonstrate understanding of the implications of classifying objects as art across cultures.

**SLO 4** Students will demonstrate how the close study of creative expressions may reveal multiple contexts of use and meaning over time. Students will engage these diverse perspectives together through research, writing, and small group work.

**Course Requirements, Guidelines, and Tips for Doing Well**

--Attendance and Class Participation—Students should arrive to each class on time, having completed the readings before class. Attendance will not be tallied each day. Instead, consistent attendance and class participation will be strongly encouraged and reflected in regular quizzes, performance on exams, and on-time completion and submission of assignments. Exam dates and assignment deadlines are firm. Late assignments will not be permitted except in the case of documented excuses. The dates of the quizzes will vary, and will not be announced—we may turn to quizzes if we have reason to worry that students aren’t keeping up on the readings. No make-ups for reading quizzes will be permitted.

--Visits to the Ackland Art Museum: The course requirements include visits to the Ackland Museum, located on campus. Our class has a special study gallery there, which you’ll visit over the course of the semester.

--This course is taught in a lecture format. You should take notes on the readings and on lectures, and we will make our Powerpoints available to you after each lecture. We will also provide ample opportunities to participate via in-class discussions, short polls, and short in-class free-writes.

**We will use Poll Everywhere to check in with you-beginning on the first day of class during lecture—to solicit your opinions and assessments about art and relevant readings and topics.**
Please register by the first day of our class meeting: https://edtech.unc.edu/service/poll-everywhere/ Use the dropdown menu under Student Faqs to open “How do I register for a student account?” Follow the directions there to download the app onto your device, and contact the Help Desk (itshelp@unc.edu) if you have any difficulty. Make sure that you login to Poll Everywhere during class using your full UNC email address and your onyen password.

--Laptop and Technology Use Policy—Our course focuses on multi-disciplinary approaches to enhance learning about art. Students’ long-hand note-taking, their embodied script, can also be seen as a form of everyday art. Students are encouraged to reconnect with the visceral and visual dimensions of their note-taking on paper.

Studies have shown that the presence of laptops or other electronic devices in class can lead to students engaging in multi-tasking on material not related to course learning, decreasing the retention of information. This distracted attention has a domino effect on students in the proximity of other students engaged in multi-tasking. Therefore, students should refrain from the use of mobile phones, laptop computers, tablets or other electronic devices for non-course-related tasks. Please turn off non-course related applications or notifications during class time. Smartphones may be used for Poll Everywhere assessments during class. We will make exceptions for students with documented accommodation requirements. Please keep in mind that we have only 75 minutes with you in class—we all want to pay as much attention as possible!

--Communication—TAs are your key primary resource for questions about accessing readings, understanding assignments, interpreting grades, and the like. But feel free to reach out to the professors by email or during office hours for questions about course topics, your own interests and goals, or anything else. Note: all three professors will be checking messages at our WhatIsArt@unc.edu email account.

--Religious Observance—Students will not be penalized for missing class due to observance of an official religious holiday. A student who misses an examination, work assignment, or other project due to the observance of a religious holy day will be given an opportunity to complete the work missed within a reasonable time after the absence, provided that student has properly notified a TA in advance.

--All critical thoughts that are presented as your own must be original. Plagiarism is a serious honor code violation. Academic integrity is essential in this and all UNC courses. The UNC Student Honor Code covers all exams and assignments in this course (please read carefully the Honor Code, https://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/). With respect to the individual paper assignments, this means that what you turn in must be your own work.

--Statement on Accessibility—Students with disabilities are an essential part of the campus community and contribute significantly to UNC-Chapel Hill through their talents, abilities, and
skills. The University is therefore committed to assuring that all students can fully participate in University life and that its programs, activities, and services are accessible, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The University facilitates accessibility by providing reasonable and appropriate accommodations and services to students who have a documented disability. We will be happy to work with students to implement accommodations. See the Accessibility Resources and Services (ARS) site for contact and registration information: https://ars.unc.edu/

--Other Resources:  UNC CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short- or long-term needs. Go to their website: https://caps.unc.edu/ or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

The Center for Student Success and Academic Counseling (CSSAC) offers support to all students through units such as the Learning Center and the Writing Center. http://cssac.unc.edu/

--Email Etiquette Policy—When you send an email to one of your professors or TAs, keep in mind that we may not be able to respond quickly, but we will always aim to get back to you within 48 hours (during the work week). It is always a good idea to use an appropriate salutation in your email, for example, “Dear Professor Berlinger.” In the subject of your email, please include the topic of your email query. Failure to use appropriate, respectful forms of email and other communication with your professors or TAs will negatively impact your class participation grade. You are responsible for checking your UNC email regularly because this is the means of communication we will use outside of class. We recommend that you check your email each day to ensure you won’t miss important information.

--Recording in Class (UNC Policy): The University may record meetings of this class for educational purposes. These recordings will be shared only with students enrolled in the course for purposes of academic instruction only. Your instructor will communicate to you how you may access any available recordings. Unauthorized student recording of classes on personal devices or on any other format is prohibited. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact Accessibility Resources & Service(https://ars.unc.edu/). Other students must obtain express permission from the department to record the class, and the University will only grant such permission in extraordinary circumstances in which the student otherwise lacks access to a recording made by the University or instructor. Students shall not copy, reproduce, or distribute any recordings of their classes, and students shall delete any recordings at the conclusion of the course.

--Possible Temporary Changes to Instruction Modality: We will be meeting in person this semester. We understand the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may require changes to this plan and
will be monitoring the situation closely. If we need to change the format of the course temporarily due to outbreaks of illness, we will announce this via email and the course Sakai site.

--Optional Mask Use Statement: UNC-Chapel Hill is committed to the well-being of our community both physically and emotionally. The indoor mask requirement was lifted for most of campus on March 7, 2022. If you feel more comfortable wearing a mask, please do so. There are many reasons why a person may decide to wear a mask and we respect that choice completely.

--Land and Labor History Acknowledgement at UNC:

We recognize the land and sovereignty of Native and Indigenous nations in Chapel Hill, in North Carolina, in North America, and across the world. We acknowledge that UNC’s land history includes a dispossession of people who first lived here, a dispossession that profited the University at the expense of sovereign indigenous nations.

The University of North Carolina sits on the land of the Occaneechi, Shakori, Eno, and Sissipahaw peoples. Additionally, NC has been home to many Indigenous peoples at various points in time, including the tribes/nations of: Bear River/Bay River, Cape Fear, Catawba, Chowanoke, Coree/Coranine, Creek, Croatan, Eno, Hatteras, Keyauwee, Machapunga, Moratoc, Natchez, Neusiok, Pamlico, Shakori, Sara/Cheraw, Sissipahaw, Sugeree, Wateree, Weapemoe, Woccon, Yadkin, and Yeopim. Today, NC recognizes 8 tribes: Coharie, Lumbee, Meherrin, Occaneechi Saponi, Haliwa Saponi, Waccamaw Siouan, Sappony, and the Eastern Band Cherokee. The state is also home to Indigenous nations from Abiayala that among others include: Maya Q’anjob’al, K’iche’, Awakateco, and Mam, Zapotec, and Otomi.

We offer acknowledgement and appreciation of the First Peoples of this land, their descendants and appreciation.

Additionally, we acknowledge that much of the University was built and sustained with the forced labor of enslaved Africans and their enslaved descendants. Moreover, early funds used to build the university came from the sale of enslaved peoples who were defined by the law as escheats. According to the online exhibit, Slavery and the Making of the University, created by University archivists who researched primary documents dating back to before the founding of UNC, when the General Assembly charted the university in 1789, they did so without allotting any direct appropriations instead granting “the Board of Trustees wo sources of income: monies owed the state for certain kinds of arrearages up to 1 January 1783 and ‘all the property that has heretofore or shall hereafter escheat to the state.’” This led to the University to acquire significant wealth as it inherited property over time. Because enslaved peoples were often included in such escheated property, the university gained wealth by selling the enslaved peoples they acquired through this process.
In addition to acquiring wealth through the sale of enslaved peoples escheated to the University, the University’s infrastructure was built and maintained by people who were given the designation “University servant,” a term used for both Black Americans with ‘free’ status and enslaved persons whose time was hired from their enslavers by the university. Enslaved peoples contributed to the construction of building Old East, the Old Chapel (Person Hall), Old West, the New Chapel (Gerrard Hall), and additions to Old East and Old West, the maintenance of the arduous early life of the University before electricity and running water, including serving many students who lived on campus.

_We offer acknowledgement and appreciation of enslaved people and Black Americans with ‘free’ status, who contributed significantly to the building of UNC and their descendants._

May we honor the land, labor and sacrifices of those who helped build UNC without full benefit of its riches and rich history.

**GRADES**

--Class requirements:

--2 exams (20% and 25%)  Note: we will provide review materials prior to each exam.

--3 assignments (15% each–45% total)  Note: Details about each assignment will be provided well before the due date.

--Reading quizzes/Participation (10%)

Grade scale:

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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
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Note: In order to be fair to everyone, we will not round up grades. If you have any questions about your grades on individual assignments/exams, please contact your TA. Your TA will contact the professors if they cannot resolve a question about grades.
COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS
–We reserve the right to make changes, when necessary, to the syllabus, including readings and assignment due dates. Students will be notified of any changes as early as possible.
--Nearly all of the readings are available on Sakai, under Course Reserves. Some are available directly from links in the syllabus, as noted below.

**Week 1**   Art: What is it and why does it matter? Berlinger (B), Jones (J) and Rovine (R) [initials will follow each day’s topic to indicate lead professor for that day]

**Aug 16:** Course introduction (no reading assignment)


**Watch This Short Video:** Titus Kaphar: “Can Art Amend History?”  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDaldVHUedI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDaldVHUedI)


**Week 2**  Primers for Looking: Art and Illustration in Children’s Literature  (J)


--Watch: This Short Video *"Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw on Andrew Wyeth’s ‘Garret Room’”*.  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDaldVHUedI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDaldVHUedI)


**Week 3**  The Arts of Everyday Life (Folklore’s Perspective)  (B)


**note:** We’re reading only the first two pages of Pocius’ essay – pp. 413-14**


**note:** We are stopping in the middle of page 67 although the chapter continues on,**

**Week 4**  “A Three-year Old Could Make That” Art That Challenges Expectations  (R)
Sept 6  Well-Being Day


Week 5  “Folk Art” vs. “Fine Art” and the Question of Categories (B)


OPTIONAL:
2) You may browse the website of the North Carolina Pottery Center to get a sense of their efforts to preserve and present the pottery of our state: http://ncpotterycenter.org/

Sept 15 – Guest speaker: Mark Hewitt  ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE BY 5:00 pm


Week 6  When Things Become Art, and What Is Left Behind  (R )


Week 7  Harlem on Whose Mind?: Art and Representational Power in the Museum World  (J)

Baum, Kelly, et. al, ““Harlem on Whose Mind?”: The Met and Civil Rights,” February 17, 2021: https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2021/harlem-on-my-mind!#%5B11%5D%23%5B11%5D

Watch (up to timestamp ‘10’08) This Short Video: Dawoud Bey, “Art Begins With An Idea” | TEDxMet https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlfKXUIABH0


Harlem on My Mind Exhibition; --Holland Cotter, “What I Learned from a Disgraced Art Show on Harlem” *The New York Times* 8/19/15

**Week 8**  Exam 1 Week
  Oct 4: Exam review
  Oct 6: Exam 1

**Week 9**  Art as a Tool for Activism (R)
  Oct 11 *Guest speaker: Innocent Nkurunziza*  
  --Watch this video: “What Would You Die For?” Lebanese/Egyptian Artist Bahia Shehab  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uu7jEWx-y1w

**Week 10**  Authenticity & Genre: The Value of Intimacy in Art as Life-Writing  (J)
  Watch: selected reproductions of art under “Painting” and “Photography”  
  Watch This Short Video: “Elizabeth Alexander reads passage from her memoir, ‘The Light of the World’” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5jgVN9NBEk
  Oct 20: No class–Fall Break

**Week 11**  Authenticity: The Value of Preservation  (B)
  Oct 27 – ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE BY 5:00 pm

**Week 12** Defining Art Across Cultures, Across Locations (R)


**Week 13** Art and Belief: Purpose and Promise in Creative Display (B)


**Week 14** Art and Poetry; Art and Politics: Portraits of Migration, Masquerade, Minstrelsy (J)

**Nov 15** --Watch selections from *One Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence’s Migration Series*, Panels related to *ekphrastic* poems below Read both: 1941 & 1993 captions https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2015/onewayticket/panel/1/


**Nov 17**-- Guest Speakers: Cherise Smith & Artist Michael Ray Charles


--Smith, Cherise and Michael Ray Charles: Interview

Watch This Short Video: Michael Ray Charles at Landmarks https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7d6u5-5tL0I
Week 15  Art Everywhere: Multiple Disciplines  All three professors, one lecture!  Happy Thanksgiving Week!

Nov 22  -- ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE BY 5:00 pm

Nov 24: NO CLASS, Thanksgiving Break

Week 16  Nov 29  LDOC–Exam Review and Wrap-up

*FINAL EXAM: Saturday, December 3 at 8:00 am
(*We wish we had a better exam time. But we’re confident early (and not-so-early risers) will do well nonetheless!)