

Professor: David Merritt

Office: VAC 230
Office Hours: Thurs. 1:30-2:30 or by appointment
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Room: MFA Studios/VAC 247
Time: Friday 10:00-1:00pm

Course Description

This course will provide a weekly forum for the critical engagement of the ongoing material production and research of MFA students. Assessment of recent critical texts, analysis of contemporary art works, formal critique presentations and informal studio discussions students will comprise the core of the course. Critique sessions will be directed to sustain discussion and debate concerning students' developing practice and related conceptual concerns. A final critique of all students' work will be organized by the instructor at the end of the term.

Students will be expected to schedule individual or class meetings with the instructor to discuss the progress of their studio work. All students will also be expected to arrange studio visits with a minimum number of Studio Visitors, faculty and other individuals.

Course Requirements

This course presupposes each student's vigorous and regular engagement with a studio practice and with the activities of the MFA community as a whole. All scheduled due dates must be respected and students are expected to punctual attend all classes and fully engage in all class critiques and discussions. The following represents the principle requirements of the class:

Second Year Research Presentations (15%)

The purpose of second year student presentations will be to create a constructive forum for a developing overview of students' studio and written research to date in advance of the final exhibition/ thesis defense. As such these presentations will involve preparing a clear introduction and summary of this research for class discussion. It may include, depending on the focus and development of this research, the presentation of a key reading, summary assessments of critical artists' practices and/or the articulation of developing artist statements. Presentation of this textual research will be offered alongside relevant dossier-oriented documentation of the student's work to date.

If the presentation is supported by a reading (consisting of a key research text or a portion of their working thesis writing) it must be distributed at least a week in advance of the presentation date. Thesis research presentations will be no more than 40 minutes in length and yield a minimum 20 min. class discussion. Discussion the thesis research will be preceded or followed (at each student's discretion) by an overview presentation of the student's current studio practice.

Students will be graded on their ability to highlight and elucidate key concerns, issues and/or creative practices seen as informing their practice, their ability to productively facilitate and engage discussion around the developing research as a whole, as well as the effectiveness the supporting artwork documentation.

First Year Key Works Presentations (15%)

First year MFA students will be expected to select and present what they see as a key contemporary artwork, and to discuss the work in consideration of the terms/ideas/criteria identified in the “Key Works Guidelines” identified below. Students are also responsible to facilitate discussion of the work with the class. The presentation should be no more than 60 minutes in total, including a minimum 20 minutes facilitating class discussion. Students may also request that the class read a short support text in preparation for the discussion.

Students will be graded on the their preparedness and the effectiveness of the presentation and the productiveness of their facilitation of ensuing discussion.

External Studio Visits/ Dossier (10%)

In addition to ongoing critical consultations with their advisor, each MFA student is expected to independently arrange for a minimum of four studio visits over the term. These will include two studio meetings with a visitor from outside the Department and two visits from a department studio faculty member (other than the student’s advisor or mentor). Students are also welcome to arrange visits with Departmental PhD students, but these are not meant to replace those with faculty and/or guests. At the end of the course, students will submit a dossier that effectively summarizes each of these meetings, as well as discussions arising from their midterm critique.

Midterm Critiques (30%)

Students will formally present recently completed studio work and/or projects still in the developing stages in midterm peer critiques. All work-in-progress presented in peer critiques must demonstrate sufficient commitment to warrant class discussion. The schedule for these critiques will be identified early in the course. Students presenting work in these sessions may invite their studio advisor or mentor and may extend invitations to department adjunct professors or any other member from the university or broader community that they would like to have participate in their critique.

Year End Critiques (35%)

Formal critiques will be scheduled for all MFA students in the week following the end of classes. The student’s mentor/advisor and all Graduate Studio faculty members will be present and engaged in assessing students’ works in these sessions. The grade for the Final Critique will be determined by averaging the recommended grades of the graduate faculty, the Advisor/Mentor and the Seminar Instructor. This averaged grade will count for 35% of the total grade for the course.

In addition to formal critiques the course will allow for informal class discussion of developing projects or emerging work in progress. These discussions may be arranged to take place individually with the instructor or with the class as a whole.

Grading Breakdown

The final grade for the course will be broken down as follows:

<u>Studio work</u> (including work presented in peer, formal critiques and related studio discussions).....	65%
<u>Key Works/Thesis Research Presentations</u>	15%
<u>Participation</u> (including class critiques and discussions).....	10%
<u>Dossier</u>	10%

Key Works Guidelines (First year Student Presentations)

For this presentation you should select a work you feel to be of singular importance, and should be prepared through consideration of the questions outlined below. In addition to a close examination of the work proper, you should spend a small portion of time situating the piece in reference to what you consider to be its most relevant context, ie. specific (art) historical, material, or more broadly “social” settings. You should plan your presentation to lead to a focused discussion in which participants engage with the questions “Why this work; Why here; Why now?” Though your presentation should focus on engaging both the work and these questions as directly as possible, if you choose you may provide an accompanying reading to the class in advance of the presentation to prepare the group or aid in facilitating discussion. (Note: The following questions were adapted from Andy Patton under the rubric, “Presentation Guidelines.”)

1. MATERIALS. Of what materials is the work built? Are they conventional or unconventional? How do these connect us or disconnect us from specific social worlds?
2. PROCEDURES. What procedures produced the work? Are they like other art world methods, or like production methods from outside the artworld? How do these connect us to the world?
3. ADDRESS. How does this work address a viewer? What kinds of behavior does it elicit?
4. QUALITIES: What affective qualities do you associate in the work? Does it effect beauty, difficulty, resistance, complacency, daring etc?
5. COMMITMENT: What is the work committed to? What position does it take?
6. ARTIST: What kind of artist does this work produce or require?
7. AUDIENCE: What kind of viewer or audience does this work produce?
8. ATTENTION: What kind of attention does the work require? What does it ask us to pay attention to?
9. MEMORY: How is it that we can remember this work? (What are the means by which it was transmitted through time to us?)
10. HISTORY: What is its relation to the other artworks already in existence? Does it disturb them? Enhance them? What works does it light up?
11. ART: If you assume that every artwork is a statement of what art is or should be, what does this work say about art?
12. RISK: What was at risk in the work appearing at all, in its moment?