Course description:

The Venice Biennale, the sprawling international art show held every two years in the thirty national pavilions of the Giardini della Biennale and in the vast 16th-century shipbuilding and warehouse spaces known as the Arsenale, has been a leading international venue for contemporary art for over a century. It has also frequently been the occasion for artistic, political, and social debates. With more than three hundred artists from sixty countries participating, and close to a quarter of a million square feet of exhibition space, the Biennale as it exists today offers a uniquely exciting and always controversial experience of cutting-edge art from around the world, including everything from paintings to high-tech installations.

In this seminar we will study the Biennale as an institution involving issues of aesthetics, internationalism, multiculturalism, gender, and even economics. And while active engagement with recent art will be the focus in this class, we will also explore the historical background of Venice and the Biennale. To these ends students will undertake both critical analysis and historical research, investigating different ways of relating to contemporary art.

This seminar includes a five-day trip to Venice, Italy, over the October mid-term break (leaving Oct. 14, returning Oct. 19). We will prepare by studying the institutional history of the Biennale and its place in contemporary art, as well as past debates and controversies. Following the trip, students will report on their experiences and, for their final projects, will investigate topics in response to issues raised by the exhibit.

Required texts:

Reading packet to be purchased at University Copy Service, Houston Hall, lower level.

Artforum vol. 44, no. 1 (September 2005).

Additional readings will be assigned over the course of the semester, and supplemental reserve reading materials will be available at Fisher Fine Arts Library.
Class requirements:

In addition to weekly attendance and active participation, students will be expected to prepare reading reports, short research presentations, critical responses to contemporary art, and a final research project.

Attendance:

Class absences should be cleared with the instructor in advance. Unexcused absences may result in a grade penalty.

Grading:

Breakdown of grading is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly reports</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short research presentation (due Sept. 26)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art journal</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical reviews (due Oct. 31)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final project (due Dec. 5)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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Course schedule:

Monday Sept. 12 – Introduction: Contemporary Art and the Venice Biennale: Rodney Graham

Reading:


Monday Sept. 19 – History of the Biennale

Readings:


Class will visit the Fisher Fine Arts Library. Presentation by Fine Arts Librarian William Keller.

Monday Sept. 26 – The Biennale from 1995 to 2003

Reading:

Packet #7: Peter Schjeldahl, “Festivalism: Oceans of Fun at the Venice Biennale,” *New Yorker*, vol. 75, no. 17 (July 5, 1999), pp. 85-86.

Short research presentations on one of the past decade’s Biennales (students will work in pairs)

Monday Oct. 3 – Biennale 2005: Issues and Views

Readings:


Class visit by artist Cecilia Paredes-Reise, representing Costa Rica at this year’s Biennale.


Reading:


Ruscha reading TBA

Friday Oct. 14 – Depart for Venice US Airways flight 830 leaving 5:50 pm

Wednesday Oct. 19 – Return to Philadelphia US Airways flight 829 arriving 2:45 pm

Monday Oct. 24 – No class, individual meetings scheduled to discuss final projects

Monday Oct. 31 – Reviewing the Biennale: Reading and Writing Criticism

Critical reviews due. Visit with critic Dave Hickey (tentatively scheduled).

Monday Nov. 7 – Curating Contemporary Art

Visit with ICA Curator Ingrid Schaffner (tentatively scheduled)

Monday Nov. 14 – Contemporary Art in Public Space

Readings: TBA

Wednesday Nov. 16 – Lecture: Jenny Holzer on “Public Art,” 5:00 pm, Institute of Contemporary Art. Pre-register (required) at: [http://humanities.sas.upenn.edu](http://humanities.sas.upenn.edu) or (215) 573-8280. Attendance required.

Monday Nov. 21 – Student Presentations: Final Project

Monday Nov. 28 – Student Presentations: Final Project (cont’d)

Monday Dec. 5 – Final Projects due in class