

Artists' writings, interviews, lectures, and their influences

MFA seminar 2011-2012 (Term 1 & 2)

Instructor: Marina Roy

Artists today rarely only focus on the production of artworks. In fact, with the MFA being viewed as virtually mandatory for any artist aspiring to be a serious artist and/or an artist aspiring to teach at the post-secondary level, how one uses language becomes an essential part of artistic 'training.' In his book *Art Subjects*, Howard Singerman addresses how research, theory, and writing has become central to graduate education, often eclipsing more traditional skills. According to Thierry DeDuve, the contemporary artist is someone: 1. who adopts an 'attitude' or position, rather than being a master of technique; 2. has an artistic practice *in general*, rather than working in a specific medium; 3. whose work involves deconstruction, rather than invention or imitation.

In keeping with the economic and political realities of global citizens in the 21st century, artists are usually juggling a few roles, and often doing it rather well. They read a fair bit. Many teach, curate, write, perform lectures/talks, and intervene in a variety of ways within public space. These activities have a bearing on their position within the art world, and how their work is received by the public. While this activity is too often acculturated – subsumed within new cultural and bureaucratic norms – it can also fuel new agonistic debates and strategies (especially in its initial impact).

One of the aims of this class is for each of you to think critically about what kind of writing can emerge from the artwork you make, what type of writing attracts you, and how writing could become an extension of your practice rather than just an obligatory component of the MFA program. There are obvious instrumental advantages to being able to write and articulate oneself as an artist, but more importantly deepening your understanding of texts, and your skills in writing and speaking can broaden your engagement as thinkers and citizens – not only discover how reading and writing can compliment an artistic practice, but how it can enhance agency in any number of contexts.

A few artists who would be important to read and discuss include:

Marcel Broodthaers, Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Allan Sekula, Tacita Dean, Guy Debord, Lygia Clark, Helio Oiticica, Hito Steyerl, Seth Price, Ken Lum, Jeff Wall, Stan Douglas, Isabelle Pauwels, Maria Eichhorn, Andrea Fraser, Mary Kelly, David Robbins, Mike Kelley, John Miller, Mark Dion, John Kelsey, Dexter Sinister, Frances Stark, Liam Gillick, and Ai Weiwei.

Half the seminar class time will focus on critiques of your artwork. The other half will be directed toward investigation of how artists communicate textually and verbally. We will look at artists' works that combine critical practices in reading, writing, and performing (amongst other practices). We will read artists' writings but also the writings that influence them, whether theoretical or literary. Interviews are also useful to understanding how an artist thinks and expresses her/his views.

Students will be responsible for completion of at least one major art project per term (which will be critiqued in class). They are also responsible for a piece of writing that can take any number of forms, but which will somehow relate, or serve as preliminary research, for their major essay (10 pages per term).

Each week there will be designated time for discussion of readings and critique of artworks. The reading list is subject to change based on student interests that become apparent during seminar discussion.