

The University of British Columbia  
Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory  
Thursdays, 2:00-5:00 p.m.

**Fine Arts 543**  
Fall Term 2006  
Lasserre 210

### **Photography in an Age of Violence, 1945 - Present**

Professor: **John O'Brian**  
Office: Lasserre 409  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:30-2:30 p.m. and by appointment  
Tel: 822-4497  
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Course Requirements: Participation, presentations and discussion 50%  
Essay proposal and essay paper 50%

Due Dates: One-page essay proposal **October 19**  
15-20 page essay **December 15 (in Lass. 403)**

Readings: On reserve in Koerner Library and Main Library  
**A list of reserve books and articles will be handed out in class**

*"The photograph is a farewell. It belongs to the afterlife of the photographer. It is permanently inflamed by the instantaneous flash of death."* Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light*, 1997

This course will examine photography's engagement with genocide, warfare, nuclear threat, terrorism and other manifestations of violence in the atomic era initiated by the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It will explore the ways in which violence functions as both image and act. To what degree does the play of representation override historical events – or vice versa? What did Derrida mean when he asserted that nuclear war was "fabulously" textual? How should the different subject positions of spectators contemplating images of violence be understood and theorized (this was a question that Susan Sontag repeatedly asked herself)? What range of strategies have been deployed by photographers and photo-based artists to intervene in an image-world that is both violent and globalized?

Among the topics that will be addressed by the course are: the exhibition of atrocity; terror and simulation; the militarization of urban space; economies of spectacle; war and the state. The chosen theme of the Joan Carlisle-Irving lectures this year is "terror," which will provide an opportunity to engage with visiting scholars and artists on matters of central concern to the class. Two field trips are being planned. One will require long-

distance travel to Toronto. The other will be in Vancouver. Because ARTH 543 is listed as a graduate seminar in Canadian art and photography, attention will be paid to Canadian works and texts where relevant.

### **Early Class Meetings**

*Thursday, September 7, 2.00-5.00 pm.* Discussion of the seminar's themes and readings.

*Thursday, September 14, 2.00-5.00 pm.*

Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, 1969, 106 pages.

Susan Sontag, "Looking at War: Photography's View of Devastation and Death," *New Yorker*, 9 December 2002, 82-98. (Republished in considerably extended form, but without illustrations, as the book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 2003.)

*Monday, September 18, 12.00-1.30 pm.*

Professor Greg Battye, University of Canberra, will join graduate students and faculty for a brown bag lunch in Lasserre 210. He will lead a discussion on his present research, a book-in-progress focusing on photography and narrative, including narratives of war. He has sent ahead a short reading called "Recovering the Bodies: The New Aestheticization of Death in Recent War Imagery," copies of which will be available in Lasserre 403. (For those interested, I also have a 73-page extract of his forthcoming book as a Word Document.)

*Thursday, September 21, 2.00-5.00 pm.*

Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography" (1931), in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography*, 1980, 199-216.

Susan Sontag, "America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly," in *On Photography*, Farrar, Straus 1977, 25-43.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Inside/Out," in *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1994, 49-61.