

Arts and Jewish Experience: Exploring Diverse American Identities through Art JST 431 / 431H

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Portland State University
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Wednesdays: 11 am-1:50 pm
Sciences Research and
Teaching Center 155

My office is in Judaic Studies, 4th Floor, University Center Building.

Course Description

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This course examines the diversity of American identities through art. This course defines both art and identity broadly in order to foster an engaging, wide-ranging conversation about what it means to explore our self-hood and communal belonging through creative expression. We will consider work by artists working in diverse media including but not limited to creative writing, dance, quilting, rock music, performance art, and visual art. We will investigate questions such as: how do artists interpret their cultural heritage, race, religion, gender/sexuality through creative works? How can these works facilitate cross-cultural understanding as well as a deeper understanding of our own identities? How do artists navigate issues of appropriation and address historically silenced voices? How can these works be a model or starting point for participants' own final projects—which can be creative explorations of their own identity, or academic explorations of others' art about culture? No previous coursework in Jewish studies or art is required: the course will provide introduction to the topic and the instructor will be highly available for support as needed.

Required Text

Joy Harjo, *Crazy Brave* (available on reserve at the Library)

Suggested Secondary Texts for extra credit – Honors students must read one of these (These are just suggestions; you may also propose an alternative!)

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*

Joy Ladin, *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Genders*

Sandra Cisneros, *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life*

Mitchell S. Thompson, *The Residue Years*

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

Matthue Roth, *Yom Kippur A-Gogo: A Memoir*

Additional readings are available online at D2L. Homework will also include streaming video and audio available for free online.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation

Attendance in class is required. Active participation is an integral component of the course; students are expected to complete readings in a timely manner (before the class time under which the readings are listed) and contribute to class discussions. Your participation grade will reflect your preparedness and contribution to class. Please note that laptop computers are NOT permitted during class. I have found that they detract from a classroom community and can disrupt other students. There is one exception during which they will be allowed: for selected discussions of online readings. I will alert you to those times.

2. Homework, Research Paper and Presentation

In lieu of exams, students will carry out a series of small projects. Each student will also develop interview skills related to art and identity; all students will practice interview skills on in-class guests. Students will also be responsible for brief assignments throughout the class.

In addition, each student will be responsible for completing EITHER a creative project OR a research paper about American identity in art, as well as an initial informal proposal, a Project Plan, an in-class presentation of the Plan, and a final presentation of your project. The topic for your research paper is due on October 26th at 4:00 PM. Presentations of your research will take place in class on November 2. The final creative project or research paper is due on December 1 at 4:00 PM (we will present projects to each other in the final class one day earlier, on November 31, but they do not need to be turned in until December 1). I am available for meetings in person, over skype, and via email to help you in any way during the process of your paper or project. The PSU Writing Center is a helpful on-campus resource. It is located in Cramer Hall 188; for appointments, call 725-3570.

Grade Distribution

Class Attendance and Participation 35%
Homework Assignments 10%
Project Proposal/Presentation of Project Proposal 20%
Final Creative Project or Research Paper 25%
Final Creative Project or Research Paper Presentation 10%

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to conduct themselves with academic integrity. For more information, see the PSU Student Code of Conduct at <http://pdx.edu/dos/codeofconduct>. Resources If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please don't hesitate to consult with me. In addition to the resources of the department, a wide range of services is available to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements. Advising and Career Services (Phone: 503-725-4005, 402 University Services Building) offers a variety of services including advice for students choosing or changing majors as well as assistance for students encountering academic difficulties (website: <http://www.pdx.edu/uasc/>). Writing support is available in the PSU Writing Center (Phone: 725-3570, 188 Cramer Hall, website: <http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/>). Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) (Phone: 725-2800, UCB 200) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, strategies for managing stress, and connections to off-campus mental health resources (website: <http://pdx.edu/shac/counseling>). Disability Resource Center (Phone: 725-4150, Smith 116) offers support and assistance with accommodations for students with a variety of disabilities (website: <http://www.drc.pdx.edu/>). If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please notify me in a timely manner so that we can make arrangements to address your needs.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. Introduction

9/28 Introduction

Assignment for next week:

Brainstorm and write down five interview questions for visiting artists. Questions can be general, since we will be interviewing a range of artists.

10/5 An Indigenous Jewish Art Form (including discussion about Alicia's work and process)

- 1) Alicia Jo Rabins, selected "Girls in Trouble" songs and Biblical/rabbinic texts
- 2) Siona Benjamin, [visual artwork](#)
- 3) Discuss interview questions
- 4) Class visit by [Melika Belhaj](#)
homework: schedule meeting with me to take place before Wednesday 10/12; informal proposal for final paper or creative project due 10/12 via email; watch videos and read article for 10/19 (note: Afro-Punk video is one hour; please allow time!); attend Wong Street Journal if possible!

II. Diverse Art Forms, Diverse Identities

10/12: class is cancelled for Yom Kippur. Instead, we will schedule one-on-one meetings at our mutual convenience over the next two weeks to begin planning final projects. In addition, you are invited to attend the performance this weekend by next week's visiting artist.

- 1) Write a one-page, double-spaced informal proposal about one or more ideas you might like to focus on in your final paper or creative project, and submit via email to rabins@pdx.edu. *I am more interested in your ideas than in a structured paper; please spell-check and observe capitalization and punctuation, but feel free to write informally rather than arguing a point or writing a formal paper.*
Due via email (rabins@pdx.edu) by end of day, 10/12. I will send written responses by Friday so that you can edit for next week when topic is due. I am happy to schedule a meeting as well.

Weekend, optional/suggested performance attendance:

The Wong Street Journal by LA-based performer Kristina Wong

7 Shows, October 13-15 (preferred) & 20-23, 2016

The Headwaters Theatre, 55 NE Farragut St, Portland OR 97211

10/19 Hyphenated Punk

- 1) Discuss final projects and answer any questions
- 2) The Komina's (Muslim-American punk band) [NPR feature](#) and [interview](#)
- 3) The Pogues (Irish punk Band, [video](#))
- 4) Golem (Jewish-American punk/klezmer band, [video](#))
- 5) Afro-punk traditions (AFROPUNK documentary, [video](#)) – OR, if you are not into punk and can't handle a whole hour, a non-punk alternative about culture and music: [Gustavo Santaolalla interview w/Krista Tippet \(On Being\)](#)
- 6) Class visit by Ruth Wikler-Luker, producer/performance curator, and Kristina Wong, writer/performer

*** One-Page Creative Project or Research Paper Topic due October 26 (changed from 19th) at 4 pm via email (rabins@pdx.edu). This is a one-page plan for your final project including between 1-4 sources that you will be drawing on or analyzing (for academic papers) OR a statement of creative project plans including genre, length, medium and key concerns (for creative projects).

10/26 Speaking Stories (and visiting artist, Pepper Pepper)

- 1) Visiting Artist: Pepper Pepper
- 2) Reginald Dwayne Betts, poem "[A Post-Modern Two-Step](#)" and Fresh Air interview
- 3) Jenny Johnson, poem: "[In the Dream](#)"
- 4) Sandra Cisneros, poem: "Loose Woman"
- 5) Melissa Bennett, poem: "[FSU Goes to the Rose Bowl](#)"
- 6) Kenneth Koch, poem: "To Jewishness"

11/2 Ritual, History and Visual Art AND Presentations of Plans for Creative Projects or Research Papers

- 1) Article: [Asian-American Artists Explore their Identity](#)
- 2) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, poem – [Tiger Mask Ritual](#)
- 3) Elvira Bodjzic – Rebuilding a Cultural Tradition [article](#) & visual art
- 4) Video/Music – Beyonce, "Lemonade"
- 5) Victoria Hannah, [music video](#) – "The Aleph-Bet Song"
- 6) Students present plans for creative projects/research papers

REQUIRED EVENT: Sunday, 11/6, early afternoon (note, this replaces 11/23 class)

"Jews, Punk and Poetry: Performance and Discussion by Golem and Alicia Jo Rabins" at PSU
Required attendance (students who cannot make this may attend Kristina Wong's October show, above, or propose an alternative event!)

11/9 – Migrations, Origin Stories and Folk Arts

- 1) Alice Walker, essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens" and [quilts of Gee's Bend](#)
- 2) Jacqueline Nicholls, [Papercuts of Misogynistic Talmud Quotes and other Feminist Orthodox art](#)
- 3) Reading: NEA interview with poet [Javier Zamora](#)
- 4) Native Photographers (based on the recent [PAM exhibit](#))

11/16 – Intersecting Identities. Class to be conducted over Skype.

- 1) Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (excerpts)
- 2) Ruby LaToya Frazier, visual artist - [article](#)
- 3) Dana Tai Soon Burgess, dancer - [video](#), "Dancing Through the Asian American Experience"
- 4) Shira Erlichman – "Artists and Mental Illness Interview Series: Shira Erlichman"
- 5) Joy Harjo, *Crazy Brave* – moved from earlier
- 6) due from Honors Students and others desiring extra credit/make-up credit: response paper for second book

(Note: 11/23 we will not meet – this class is replaced by performance attendance on 11/6, or alternate event attendance if needed)

11/30 Final Project Presentations and Closing Discussions

*****12/1: Final Projects Due at 4 pm