

Syllabus: The Politics of Public Art  
Instructor: Colin McLaughlin-Alcock  
Meeting: T, TH 7pm-8:45pm

## **The Politics of Public Art SOAN 335-00-s21**

Instructor: Colin McLaughlin-Alcock

Email: [cmclaughlin@carleton.edu](mailto:cmclaughlin@carleton.edu)

Office Hours: T, TH 5:00-6:00, or by appointment.

Plus open desk conversation at end of classtime.

Booking office hours: <https://cmclaughlin1.youcanbook.me>.

Request extensions: <https://forms.gle/jwxMbUZbbx9HVLmk7>.

Zoom link for office: [\[Click Here\]](#) ID: 992 889 0199 Pass: 101468

Zoom link for class: [\[Click Here\]](#) ID: 955 0668 2822 Pass: 633674

### **Introduction and Goals:**

In this class we will explore the politics of public art. While we will look at the political messaging of public art, we will also seek to understand how public art, through its integration into a social geography, has a political impact beyond its meaning. We will see how art claims public space and structures social action, how art shapes social groups, and how art channels economic flows or government power. By tracing the ways that art is situated in public space, we will examine how art enters into urban contest and global inequality. For the purposes of this class, we will focus primarily (but not exclusively) on public art in urban settings. Class activity will include exploration of public art and students will be introduced to key concepts of urban spatial analysis to help interrogate this art.

### **Prerequisites:**

There are no prerequisites for this course.

### **Student Outcomes:**

By the end of the course,

- 1) Students will be able to analyze public art as a structural component of urban change.
- 2) Students will be able to trace how the physical location of art enters into existing power relations, and how this might influence future political contest.
- 3) Students will be able to debate the relevance of art to daily practice and large scale economic change.

### **Assignments:**

*Readings and Reading Responses:* For each class session, students will have assigned readings to complete before class. Students are responsible for short responses to each reading, identifying key ideas and points of interest. This can take any format you want (paragraph note/audio/video/photographed margin notes) but does need to be submitted in moodle as preparation for class. These will be graded on the basis of participation, meaning, as long as you complete these, you will receive full credit for the assignment.

*Reading forum:* At least once a week, you are required to post to the class's reading forum, highlighting a point of engagement with the reading that you would like to develop further. This can be a question, an exciting quotation, something you didn't understand, something that surprised you, a point where you disagree, a connection that you see to other material in the course, and so on. An additional two times per week, you are expected to provide a constructive response to another student's post. (Constructive responses do more than just acknowledge the initial post, but build on it in some way, adding to the conversation which another student has started). At least 2 times over the course of the term, you are encouraged to post your response as a meme. Posts are due the night before the relevant class, in order to

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allow time for responses. Responses are due by classtime. [**Total Expectation:** At least 3 forum engagements per week: 1 post, and 2 responses].

*Short Assignments:* There are five short research assignments over the course of the term. Through these assignments, students will identify public art near their home or on campus and examine various political aspects of those works of art. These assignments will be used as a basis for class discussion.

*Final Project:* The short assignments will prepare the student for a final research paper that presents a political analysis of a particular work of public art, chosen by the student. Alternately, for the final project, students may write a proposal for an imagined piece of public art that they would like to create. This proposal should demonstrate a strong understanding of the political concepts discussed in class, and an analysis of how the art project and its location would have political impacts.

*Extra Credit:* Further, all students are eligible for up to 5% extra credit (up to a maximum of 100%). To claim this extra credit, you must identify a news story about public art and submit that news story to me along with a 1-2 paragraph response explaining how that news story relates to themes addressed in our class.

Students will be graded as follows:

*Attendance and Participation*.....10%  
*Reading Responses*.....10%  
*Forum Posts*.....20%  
*Assignments*.....30%  
*Final Project*.....30%

### **How to Succeed in This Class:**

1. Practice engaged reading: This means you should read assignments carefully, take notes, and take the time to reflect upon what you have read. Some readings may be challenging and may require extra time to process. Taking this time will put you in a position to contribute in class discussion and to succeed in the writing assignments.
2. Experiment with ideas: Reading responses, forum posts, and class discussion present opportunities to practice articulating your own ideas about the readings. Don't be afraid to share thoughts which are incomplete, or to talk out a theoretical idea which you aren't completely sure about. To support experimentation, I will offer extra credit to remediate any disappointing grades received when a paper tries out a difficult theoretical framework but doesn't fully succeed in its analysis. This extra credit can be realized by meeting with me to talk through the finer points of the paper.
3. Keep up with the assignments: There are a lot of small assignments in this class, many of which are graded on completion, meaning that an easy way to get a good grade in this class is to be sure to get all the work done (conversely, missing a lot of work is an easy way to fall behind).
4. Ask questions and be willing to ask for help: Accepting help and learning when to ask questions is an important academic skill. It is okay to be confused or to struggle with an assignment. Part of learning is figuring out how to work through these blockages, and I am happy to help with this, but I can only help if you ask.

If you follow this advice, you will be well positioned to succeed in this class.

### **Campus Resources:**

College can be difficult personally, socially and intellectually, and it is easy to feel overwhelmed. Many students struggle with depression or other personal issues at some point in their college careers. It is important to seek help if you need it, and the following resources are available to you. Please do not hesitate to seek help:

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Academic Support Center: 507-222-5560  
Student Counseling Services: 507-222-4080  
Emergency counseling (on call) : 855-705-2479  
CAASHA (sexual harassment/assault): <https://www.carleton.edu/student/orgs/caasha/>  
Other support resources are also available.

### **Readings:**

Students are responsible for obtaining the following books:

Kester, Grant H. *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*.  
Duke University Press. 2011.  
Lipsitz, George. *How Racism Takes Place*. Temple University Press. 2011.  
Peterson, Marina. *Sound, Space, and the City*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

All other readings will be available online through the course portal.

### **Course Outline**

March 30 ***Introduction and Welcome***

April 1 ***Defining Key Terms: What do we mean by "politics", "public", "art", and "public art?"***

Barrett, Jennifer. 2012. "Historical Discourses of the Museum," and "The Museum as Public Space" From *Museums and the Public Sphere*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell. Pp44-97.

April 6 ***Monuments And Memory***

Schwenkle, Christina. 2009. "Monumentalizing War: Towards a New Aesthetics of Memory." From *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam*. Indiana University Press. pp 102-141

Hallman, J.C. 2016. "Monumental Error: Will New York City Topple a Racist Statue?" *Harper's Magazine*. November 2016. pp 27-39.

***Assigned:*** Assignment 1: "Monuments and Contestation"

April 8 ***Site Specific Art***

Kwon, Miwon. 2004. "Siting Public Art: Integration vs Intervention." From: *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. MIT Press.

Kester, Grant H. 2011. nos. 2+3, From "The Genius of the Place." (*Enclosure Acts, The Twelfth Seat and the Mirrored Ceiling*) Durham: Duke University Press. 2011. Pp 76-95

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April 13 ***Claiming Space/ Artistic Counterpublics***

Caldeira, Teresa. 2012. "Imprinting and Moving Around: New Visibilities and Configurations of Public Space in São Paulo." *Public Culture* 24(2 67): 385–419.

Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. 1998. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24(2): 547–566.

Ranciere, Jacques. 2015. Theses 8, 9 and 10 from *Ten Theses on Politics* in "Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics." Bloomsbury. Pp37-44

**Due Assignment 1: Monuments and Contestation.**

April 15 ***Art, Race, and Place***

Lipsitz, George. 2011. "The White Spatial Imaginary," And "The Black Spatial Imaginary." From *How Racism Takes Place*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pp25-72.

**Assigned:** Assignment 2: "Art in My Community

April 20 (***Cont.***)

Lipsitz, George. 2011. "Horace Tapscott and the World Stage in Los Angeles," And "John Biggers and the Project Row Houses in Houston." From *How Racism Takes Place*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 131-169.

April 22 ***Art As Erasure***

Slymovics, Susan. 2000. "Dada Colonialism in Ein Houd." from *The Object of Memory. Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Pp29-80.

**Due: Assignment 2: "Art in My Community**

April 27 ***Art and Exclusion***

Bishara, Amahl. 2012. "The Separation Wall as Stage for Refugee Identities." From *Back Stories: U.S. News Production and Palestinian Politics*. Stanford University Press. Pp167-196.

Harb, Shuruq. 2017. "Don't Confuse Me with the Monkey: On Banksy's 'Walled Off Hotel.'" *Ocula Magazine*. July 21, 2017.

**Assigned: Assignment 3: My Spatial Imaginary**

April 29 ***Art in Motion***

Kwon, Miwon. 2004. "Unhinging of Site Specificity." From *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. MIT Press.

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Pieri, Caecilia. 2014. "Can T-Wall Murals Really Beautify the Fragmented Baghdad?" In *Ibraaz*. 007. June 2014

#### May 4 *Creative Cities and Neoliberal Governance*

Landry, Charles. 1994. "The Creative City: Its Origins and Futures." From *The Creative City A Toolkit for Innovators*. Earthscan.

Sooudi, Olga. 2016 "Making Mumbai's Emerging Artworld through Makshift Practices." *Journal of South Asian Studies*. 39 (1) 149-166.

#### May 6 *Artistic Imaginaries*

Peterson, Marina. 2010. "Preface," "Introduction," and "Chapter 1: Center for a Centrifugal City." *Sound, Space, and the City*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

#### **Assignment 3 Due: My Spatial Imaginary**

#### May 11 (*Cont.*)

Peterson, Marina. 2010. Chapter 2, "Mapping a Metropolis in Motion." *Sound, Space, and the City*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

McLaughlin-Alcock, Colin. 2020. "Cultivated Affects: The Artistic Politics of Landscape and Memory in Amman's Gardens." *Visual Anthropology Review* 36(2) 275-295

#### **Assigned: Assignment 4: Urban Imagineering.**

#### May 13 **Art And Gentrification**

Harvey, David. 2012. "The Art of Rent." From *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. London; New York: Verso.

Wright, Willie Jamal and Cameron Khalfani Herman. 2018. "'No Blank Canvas': Public Art and Gentrification in Houston's Third Ward." *In City and Society*. 30(1). Pp 89-116.

#### May 18 *Art as a Social Phenomenon*

Gell, Alfred. 1998. "The Problem Defined: The Need for an Anthropological Theory of Art" and "The Theory of the Art Nexus." From *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

#### **Due: Assignment 4: Urban Imagineering**

**Assigned:** Assignment 5: "Art as a Social Object"

#### May 20 : *The Relational Turn and Socially Engaged Art*

Bourriaud, Nicholas. 1998. Selection from *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les Presse Du Reel.

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Bishop, Claire. 2004. Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics. *October*: 51–79.

Kester, Grant H. 2011. nos. 3, 4, 6 From “Autonomy, Antagonism, and the Aesthetic.” (*Relational Antagonism, The Risk of Diversity, Art Theory and The Post-Structuralist Cannon.*). In *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*. Durham: Duke University Press. Pp 29-42,53-65.

### May 25 *The Politics of Participation*

Kester, Grant H. 2011. nos. 1,2,3 From “Eminent Domain: Art and Urban Space.” (*Blindness and Insight, The Invention of the Public, The Boulevards of the Inner City*). In *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*. Durham: Duke University Press. Pp155-199

McLaughlin-Alcock, Colin. 2021. “Politics of Belonging Among Young Artists in Amman, Jordan.” From *Visual and Cultural Identity Constructs of Global Youth and Young Adults: Situated, Embodied, and Performed Ways of Being, Engaging, and Belonging*. Fiona Blaikie ed. Routledge.

### **Due: Assignment 5: Art As a Social Object**

### May 27 *Art as Government*

De Cesari, Chiara. 2010. “Creative Heritage: Palestinian Heritage NGOs and Defiant Arts of Government.” *American Anthropologist* 112(4): 625–637.

Lambert-Beatty, Carrie. 2012. “Women, Waves, Web.” In *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of Nongovernmental Activism*. Meg McLagan and Yates McKee, eds. Zone Books. Pp. 277–298.

Melamed, Samantha. 2017. “Can this tiny storefront save Philly’s most drug-ravaged neighborhood?” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. March 30, 2017.

June 1- No Readings Due. Wrap up.

### **Policies:**

**Academic Honesty:** I am required to report plagiarism and other forms of cheating to the school. This can result in discipline, including potentially a zero for the class and other sanctions from the school. Please do your own work.

**Absences:** Attendance and participation is a key part of this class. However, I recognize that things come up where you may not be able to attend. Each student can have two absences without a penalty. No explanation is required for these absences, although you are still responsible for the class material and any work that was due on that day. Additional absences will require consultation with me to be excused and may result in makeup work or points taken off the grade. Your best bet is to contact me as early as possible

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if you will be absent for more than 2 classes. After 2 absences, unexcused absences will be penalized at 5% (or half a letter grade) off of your final score for each absence.

**Lateness:** To request an extension, please use this link: <https://forms.gle/jwxMbUZbbx9HVLmk7>. It is my general policy to grant short extensions when they are requested. However, please recognize that the deadlines in this class are important, both for keeping you from falling behind, and for making sure that you are prepared to participate in class. (Classwork often builds off assignments). If you are behind on multiple assignments or request an extension of more than 2 days, you must communicate with me. We will agree on an appropriate new deadline and, at times, I may ask you for a more detailed plan explaining how you expect to get caught up. Without an extension, late assignments will be penalized a half letter grade for each day that they are late. Students who are struggling to keep up with the pace of the class are encouraged to request a meeting with me to discuss appropriate supports which would enable them to succeed in the class (including potentially extensions/waived deadlines). Per school policy, all assignments except for the final assignment must be submitted by 5pm on the last day of classes, and I do not have the leeway to grant an extension on this.

**Regrades:** If you believe that your grade on a particular assignment or in the course was in error, you may contact me with a letter explaining why you believe that the grade should be changed. You should be prepared to meet with me to discuss your request further. All regrade requests must be made before the end of the term, and within ten days of the grade being assigned.

**Behavioral Expectations:** I look forward to getting to know all of you and to having engaging discussions in the classroom. In order to maintain an open classroom, it is important that you treat one another with respect. Threatening or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated and may result in you being dropped from the class.

**Academic Accommodations:** I am committed to designing a class where all students can succeed. If you are encountering obstacles, I encourage you to reach out to me and to Disability Services to discuss potential accommodations to facilitate your success and inclusion. In addition to talking with me, please contact [disability@carleton.edu](mailto:disability@carleton.edu) or call Sam Thayer ('10), Accessibility Specialist (x4464) or Chris Dallager, Director of Disability Services (x5250) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.