



SYLLABUS

POLITICAL AND PROTEST ART

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Contact Hours: 40
London, UK

“Great protests are great art works.” –Sarah Sze

“I am invested in illustrating the possible.”—Theaster Gates

“My wish: use art to turn the world inside out”--JR

Art makes and is made by politics. Art is a frequent go-to for activists, advocates and revolutionaries hoping to catalyze an otherwise apathetic public into action. Art is a critical ingredient for symbolizing and preserving political status. Art is perceived as a valuable investment for building and cementing state power. And of course, art is the subject of political contestation. Throughout time and across continents art is featured as one of the most prominent vehicles for expressing, organizing, and catalyzing political sentiment. Whether through the lens of state actors who commission artists to flaunt the power and wealth of their most dogmatic leaders. Or activists who use art to disrupt the status quo—to tantalize the public into wanting something better. Or artists who are themselves at once servant and agent—marking history with their interpretive observations and making history with incisive calls to action. Art is a critical location of political activity and among the most productive spaces for political conflict.

This course examines the intersection of politics, protest and art in a city that houses the world’s most prominent collections of art and is the cite of significant activist artistic expression. The first week of this four-week course will focus on establishing a basic conceptual framework. We will come to terms with the ongoing contestation about what is or isn’t “art” and what is or isn’t “politics.” We will survey the role of art—as both mechanism and master—in European and US politics throughout history. We will look at the role of art in journalism, political commentary (such as political cartoons), social movements and political campaigns. We will also run through a (very brief) overview of basic art movements and styles—which will serve as the basis for our later weeks.

During weeks 2-4 we will be out on the streets of London for most of our learning. How better to learn about the intersections of art and politics than to see it in action! During week 2 we will look at Art and State-building. Here we will look back in history at the ways in which art and architecture serve as visual cues and barriers for imposing and segregating power.

Potential field trips include—(we aren't doing all of these in one week, don't worry! These are just some options)

- British Museum
- Imperial War Museum
- Houses of Parliament
- Monument to the Great Fire of London
- The Temple
- London in the Blitz WWII tour
- The Banqueting House

Week 3 will focus on Art and Policy through the lens of community and social action. Here we will take seriously the role of public art. Both as a space for expressing the discontent of the masses and for reifying the power of the elite over their constituents.

Potential field trips include:

- Shoreditch Street Art (Brick Lane)
- Sculpture Tour
- Tower Bridge
- National Gallery
- East End Tour
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Week 4 will continue our exploration of Art and Identity. Here, we will explore how artists operate as activists, asserting their own identity or speaking to conflicts regarding identity-based policy, identity formation, and representation. Central during this week will be discussions on race, immigration, LGBTQIA+ politics, ability. We will also focus on the ways in which artists and art galleries are taking on the art industry by opening up more democratic and representative spaces for art consumption.

Potential field trips include:

- Tate Modern
- Contemporary Art Galleries
- Guts Gallery
- Ginny on Frederick
- Queercircle
- Black Blossoms

Assessment

While the vast majority of the class will take place in the spaces that we are studying, students will still be responsible for completing assignments and demonstrating their mastery of the topic. Students will be graded based on the following assignments:

Journal Entries 5% X 8: Students will complete 8 journal entries throughout the term—2 per week. One will pertain to a reading from the week. One will pertain to art that we have visited or studied. Journal entries will be two-page explorations that summarize the primary intervention that the reading or artwork is making. What is salient, noteworthy and how it connects to the broader discussions we are having in class. A specific prompt will be provided each week. I encourage you to bring sketchbooks with you to class—and especially to our field trips—so that you can sketch what we see and take notes. You will not be graded on the quality of your sketches!

Presentation 30%: Each student will work with a partner to present on a topic of their choosing, pertaining in some way to the week's topic. The presentation can cover an art movement, an artist, a piece, a policy or political event that inspired, catalyzed or constrained artistic expression, etc. Presentations will last 30 minutes. Some presentations may occur while we are out and about—sometimes over lunch. So be flexible.

Final Project 30%: TBA