Course description

This course surveys the work of African American artists, from the nineteenth century to the present. Lectures will cover a range of visual media, including painting, sculpture, prints, photography, and contemporary performances. We will consider the ways in which artists and scholars have worked to define “African American art” in relation to Euro-American and African cultural production as well as to the evolving social and political history of people of African descent in the United States. In addition to attending lectures, participating in discussions, and completing two writing assignments, students will visit area museums to view original artworks.

Graded work and expectations

10% Class participation; assessment based on attendance, contributions to class discussion, demonstrated effort and commitment to course goals
40% (2) reading exams
50% (2) writing assignments

Attendance and prompt arrival at all classes is required. Students are allowed up to three absences per semester (this includes excused and unexcused absences). Unless approved by a faculty member or dean, more than three absences will seriously impact your final grade and may result in failure. All assigned readings are required and should be completed before class to enable your full participation.

Detailed descriptions of your writing assignments will be provided in separate handouts. Please note that late work will receive a 5% grade reduction per day late; if two classes pass after the due date, your work will receive a failing grade. Exceptions will be made in documented cases of illness, family emergencies, religious holidays, etc. Please make sure to keep me informed of any circumstances that may prevent you from coming to class and/or passing in your best work on time.
Open communication between students and instructor is very important to me; it also directly contributes to your success in this (as in any other) course. I encourage you to meet with me in office hours or schedule an appointment to discuss any aspect of your performance in the course and/or specific course materials/content. Please note that I will also comment on drafts of your written work in person, but not by email.

**Writing guidelines**

All of the writing assignments for this course must be typed and should adhere to the following style: 12-point, Times New Roman font; double spacing; single-sided pages; and 1-inch margins on all sides (you will need to set these in MS Word). Please include internal citations when necessary – e.g., (Sheehan, 5) – as well as a bibliography, both of which should adhere to either MLA or Chicago style. MLA and Chicago style guides are available in libraries throughout campus. All papers must be carefully proofread for typographical errors as well as spelling and grammatical mistakes. Students who do not follow these guidelines will be asked to revise and resubmit their essays, which will then be subject to the penalties for lateness defined above.

**Plagiarism and academic honesty**

Please familiarize yourself with the definition of plagiarism in Rutgers’s official policy statement on academy integrity: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml. As a student in this course, you are responsible for understanding and thus avoiding the varieties of plagiarism in college writing outlined in this statement. Any student who plagiarizes will receive a zero for the given assignment and, in some cases, a failing grade for the course.

**Course materials and resources**

*Textbook*

You should purchase the following book, which has been ordered for you at the Rutgers University Bookstore and NJ Books. Additional readings on our syllabus have been posted to Sakai.


*Sakai* (Rutgers’s course webpage system)

All of our course materials, including the syllabus, scanned readings, writing assignments, and the PowerPoint presentations used in class are available for download through Sakai: http://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal.

**Weekly syllabus and required readings**

**TU, Jan 18**  Introduction to African American art

**TH, Jan 20**  Constructing identities: early portraiture I  
Joshua Johnston, Moses Williams

Patton, 42-49

**TU, Jan 25** NO CLASS (in lieu of Feb 19-20 events)

**TH, Jan 27** Constructing identities: early portraiture II
Augustus Washington, James P. Ball


Patton, 71-74

**TU, Feb 1** Mastering landscape
Robert S. Duncanson, Edward Mitchell Bannister


Patton, 74-89

**TH, Feb 3** Sculpting race and gender
Edmonia Lewis


Patton, 89-98

**TU, Feb 8** Class visit to the Art Library

**Groups 1 and 2: conduct research for your first writing assignment**

Kymberly N. Pinder, “Black Representation and Western Survey Textbooks,” *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 3 (September 1999): 533-538


**TH, Feb 10** Class visit to the Art Library

**Groups 3 and 4: conduct research for your first writing assignment**
Kymberly N. Pinder, “Black Representation and Western Survey Textbooks,” *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 3 (September 1999): 533-538


**TU, Feb 15**  
**Locating African American art circa 1900**  
Henry Ossawa Tanner


Patton, 98-103

**TH, Feb 17**  
**The idea of the New Negro**

**Class discussion of readings:** Groups 1 and 2 meet in Murray 301; Groups 3 and 4 meet in the Maxwell Multipurpose Room, Zimmerli Art Museum


**Sat, Feb 19**  
**Marion Thompson Wright Lecture Series**  
**Beauty and the Black Body: History, Aesthetics, and Politics**  
Paul Robeson Campus Center, Rutgers University Newark Campus, 9:30am-3:30pm

The Marion Thompson Wright Lecture Series, New Jersey’s largest and most prestigious conference commemorating Black History Month, celebrates its 31st anniversary. This year’s conference will examine how the presence and persistence of African Americans in the United States have challenged and reshaped notions of beauty, especially in the realms of art, popular culture, and photography. Speakers include Deborah Willis, Richard Powell, Maxine Craig, Tiffany Gill, and Okwui Enwezor. Talks will be followed by a visit to the Newark Museum exhibition, *Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present.*

Deborah Willis, “Introduction,” in *Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), xiii-xxxii

http://www.newarkmuseum.org/PosingBeauty.html

**Sun, Feb 20**  
**A Public Conversation: The Art and Social Impact of Great Photographs**  
Newark Museum, 2:30-3:30pm with reception to follow
Professor Sheehan will moderate a discussion with artists Lewis Watts, Lauren Kelley, and Jamel Shabazz. Their work will be on display in the *Posing Beauty* exhibition. Pre-registration is required; call 973-596-6550.

**TU, Feb 22**  Picturing the New Negro I  
James Van Der Zee, the Scurlock Studio


Patton, 105-114

**TH, Feb 24**  Picturing the New Negro II  
Palmer Hayden, Archibald Motley, Jr.

**Paper #1 due**

Patton, 114-128, 135-139

**TU, Mar 1**  Picturing the New Negro III  
Meta Fuller, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, Augusta Savage, Sargent Johnson


Patton, 128-135

**TH, Mar 3**  Murals and the Federal Arts Project  
Aaron Douglas, Charles Alston


Patton, 139-150

**TU, Mar 8**  Documenting Harlem  
Jacob Lawrence


**TH, Mar 10**  The politics of abstraction  
William H. Johnson, Hale Woodruff, Norman Lewis

Patton, 150-181

**TU, Mar 15**  NO CLASS (Spring Break)
TH, Mar 17  NO CLASS (Spring Break)

TU, Mar 22  The visual culture of the Civil Rights Movement I


Patton, 183-185

TH, Mar 24  MIDTERM EXAM

TU, Mar 29  The visual culture of the Civil Rights Movement II

Spiral and Black Arts

Patton, 185-232

TH, Mar 31  Black Feminisms I

Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar


TU, Apr 5  Black Feminisms II

Renée Cox, Carrie Mae Weems, Lorna Simpson

*Guest lecturers*: Tashima Thomas and Ellen Brueckner, graduate students, Art History Department


TH, Apr 7  Class visit to the Morse Center

*Groups 1 and 2*: Discussion of second writing assignment and selected works on paper by Emma Amos, Chakaia Booker, Willie Cole, Paul Pfeiffer, Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems, and Fred Wilson

TU, Apr 12  Class visit to the Morse Center

*Groups 3 and 4*: Discussion of second writing assignment and selected works on paper by Emma Amos, Chakaia Booker, Willie Cole, Paul Pfeiffer, Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems, and Fred Wilson
TH, Apr 14  Postmodern explorations of the self
David Hammons, Lyle Ashton Harris


Patton, 232-273

TU, Apr 19  Subverting stereotype
Robert Colescott, Michael Ray Charles, Kara Walker


TH, Apr 21  Remaking American history
Fred Wilson

**Paper #2 due**


TU, Apr 26  Post-black art?
Glenn Ligon and *Freestyle*


TH, Apr 28  Field trip to the exhibition “Glenn Ligon: AMERICA” at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City

Details TBA

**FINAL EXAM: Wed, May 11, 4-7pm**