

Humanities 20100: *Explorations in the Arts* (Section 04, Fridays 1:10 to 4:00)



(left) Jean Michel Basquiat, *La Hara* (1981) from *Basquiat's "Defacement": The Untold Story* (2019)
(right) Frank Lloyd Wright, Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York (1959)

This section of *Explorations in the Arts* will focus on art and architecture in New York City. The class will look at art in major museums, commercial galleries, nonprofit institutions, public spaces and artists' studios. The class is designed to be relevant to anyone interested in engaging with the full spectrum of art and architecture in the city. Students will be expected to participate in discussion, complete short writing assignments throughout the term, and, whenever possible, visit important sites and exhibitions individually. By the end of the semester, students will be able to better understand what they are looking at when they interact with art and architecture in New York City.

This semester, special consideration will be given to recent political and ethical conversations surrounding the role of art institutions and questions about the long-term impact of the current pandemic on the culture of the city. Much of this course may need to be conducted online, but as institutions reopen, I hope to add in-person visits to museums and galleries into the syllabus.

The course will begin with a close analysis of Rem Koolhaas and the Office for Metropolitan Architecture's prescient 2020 exhibition *Countryside, The Future* at the Guggenheim Museum. In the exhibition catalog for *Countryside*, published long before the first signs of Covid-19 appeared in Wuhan, Rem Koolhaas posed the following questions:

Does anyone still like cities?
Can a condition be urban without people? Should architects design for disoccupation?
Is avoiding disaster the last mission of humankind?
What do you call a public domain from which the public has been drained?
Was the disaster good for nature?



Interior view of the new Museum of Modern Art including Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. version O)* (1907) and Faith Ringgold, *American People Series #20: Die*. (1967)

Using Koolhaas' questions as a point of departure, we will consider the evolving role of art and architecture in the *new* New York. Special attention will be paid to two recent controversies at the Whitney Museum that have brought social justice to the forefront of discussions about contemporary art—Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket*, based on the iconic 1955 photograph of Emmett Till and Forensic Architecture's 2019 film *Triple-Chaser* about a munitions company owned by Whitney board member Warren Kanders. We will also spend a class looking at the recent exhibition *Basquiat's "Defacement": The Untold Story* about Jean Michel Basquiat's painting of the young graffiti artist Michael Stewart who died while in police custody and consider how it informs current debate about police reform.

As art institutions face new financial uncertainty, questions of access also take on new urgency and we will explore the admissions policies at both the Met Museum and the New Museum as well as the recent redesign and expansion of the Museum of Modern Art. While themes of social justice and institutional accountability will play a central role in this class, we will also be looking at art made during the pandemic and talking about the political and restorative power of art through in-class discussions and virtual studio visits with contemporary artists and curators. In the event that institutions remain inaccessible in the coming months, supplemental films and readings will be added to complete the syllabus.

This class will be taught by adjunct professor Justin Beal, an artist and writer with an extensive exhibition history in the United States and Europe. Beal is currently working on his first book, *Sandfuture*, which will be published by the MIT Press in 2021. For further information, please feel free to contact Justin at justinbeal@gmail.com