

Western University – Department of Visual Arts

VAH 9582B/9682B

## Contemporary Art and the Process of Witnessing

**Professor:** Dr. Joy James  
**Class Day/Time:** Monday 2:30-5:30pm  
**Location:** VAC 148  
**Office Hours:** By appointment  
**Office:** Room 120  
**Phone:** (519) 661-2111 Ext. 86198  
**Email:** jjames53@uwo.ca

### Course Description

This graduate seminar will address creative arts production in relation to historical and contemporary ideas regarding 1) processes of witnessing, 2) notions of subjectivity, and 3) an ethics of difference. The continued importance of photography's aesthetic legacies and the model of the archive to questions of witnessing will be a topic of investigation throughout the course. The capacity of art to bear witness, as this pertains to rapidly changing conceptions of human subjectivity, has been an important discussion in emerging aesthetic models. Moving from art's engagements with radical crises of witnessing in the 20thC to recent re-conceptualizations of the relation between art, science, technology and the production of cultures, we will work with challenging and provocative texts, art objects and exhibitions in an effort to understand the shape and significance of current concepts of witnessing and delve deeply into a practical ethics of scholarly and material practice.

### Evaluation

Attendance at all classes is mandatory. Active participation and full engagement is required for successful completion of this graduate level course. The course requires a rigorous amount of reading, thinking and discussion. Students are expected to come to class having fully prepared to take up critical discussion of materials. A close reading of the assigned materials will open to the impact of ideas of witnessing on contemporary thought and art production, and the implications of these in moving forward projects in contemporary art.

Participation	20%	Ongoing
Book Review	25%	Due date: February 26, 2018
Student Presentation	15%	Due date: March 12/19, 2018
Research Paper	40%	Due date: April 02, 2018

### Course Text

## Syllabus

(Syllabus as listed is tentative and will be altered as the seminar establishes its own rhythm, tempo and student-informed direction.)

## Course Protocols

**Office Hours/Email:** Please email me for a mutually convenient appointment time when you have course-related questions or concerns. I respond to emails within a 24hour period, excepting emails sent after 4:00pm on Fridays—I will answer these on the following Monday.

**Late Assignment Policies:** Hard copies of all assignments must be submitted when due unless there are mitigating and documented circumstances. Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed submissions, presentations, participation components and/or assignments **worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation.** Accommodation for missed assignments, or attendance, **totalling less than 10% of final course grade**, due to medical reasons, may be arranged with the instructor as long as the student contacts the instructor no later than the day after the assignment or attendance is due. All other late assignments will be docked 5% per day. No late assignment submission without accommodation will be accepted more than 4 days after due date.

For the Policy on Accommodation for Illness and a downloadable Student Medical Certificate see:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_illness.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf)

[downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

**Assignment Submissions:** All materials submitted must be work done entirely by the student, expressly for this course.

“Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

Additionally, students may wish to consult the Writing Centre if they have any confusion regarding definitions of academic honesty within University practices. It is the responsibility of the student to be aware of policies governing academic honesty and what constitutes plagiarism and/or cheating. Writing Centre, UCC Room 217;

<http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing>

## Assignment Descriptions

All assignments will be discussed in further detail in class.

**Weekly Reading Due: ongoing**

Seminar participants are required to come to seminar fully prepared to discuss the assigned readings, and as the course proceeds, to develop connections across the larger discursive field in which the readings circulate. To this end, students are asked initially to prepare a brief synopsis of each reading, and to formulate three carefully considered questions/comments that they would like to pursue during seminar discussion. (Please place your name and date on the top of the synopsis sheets, and bring two copies to class: one copy for my reference and the other for you to reference during discussion). As seminar group discussion gains momentum these written synopses will no longer be required.

**Book Review 25% Length: 2000-2500 words/8-10 pages Due: February 26**

Students will select and review in detail and discursively, one of the assigned review texts listed at the end of the course outline. The review will provide an opportunity for an individualized in-depth reading. In addition to a synopsis and critical evaluation of the text's contents, students will address how the text is positioned in relation to other publications, exhibitions and/or artworks in the wider context of witnessing as a significant concept and area study for 21st Century art practice and criticism.

**Student presentations 15% Length: 30 minutes Due: March 12 & 19**

Students will be assigned to present on one of the two days scheduled for presentations. Expectations for the presentations will be reviewed in seminar. This assignment is linked to the book review and offers students an opportunity to connect ideas and theories addressed in seminar to art works and exhibitions of their choice, and expands the number of works we can actively consider during the course of the semester. Students will present and discuss the work of a particular artist or a particular exhibition in relation to the materials arising from book review.

**Research Paper 40% Length: 3000-3500 words/12-14 pages Due: April 11**

Working out of course lectures, readings, discussions, and presentations students will develop individual research projects in keeping with their particular scholarly and studio interest as they relate to the course focus. The research paper will present a clearly articulated argument or position that offers a critical discussion of the chosen topic. Further details of the assignment will be discussed at length and distributed in written form after the first month of classes.

**Book Review List**


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**The University of Western Ontario  
Visual Arts Department**

**POLICIES****Student Conduct:**

All students will conduct themselves in a manner that will be consistent with the maturity and academic integrity expected of university students. Student conduct shall be consistent with the general laws of the community and with University regulations. Students shall show regard and respect for the rights, safety, and property of all members of the University community and are expected to act in a responsible manner within the University and the community at large.

**Attendance:**

A student who misses more than 15% of the course hours, without written corroboration for health or bereavement, can be debarred from writing final exams, or participation in final studio evaluations. Note that if a student consistently is absent from a

3-hour class for 1 hour, they will exceed the 15% cutoff and can be debarred.

**Prerequisites:**

You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that you have not taken an antirequisite course. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as basis of appeal. If you are not eligible for a course, you may be removed from it at any time, and you will receive no adjustment to your fees. These decisions cannot be appealed.

**Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism, which may be defined as “The act or an instance of copying or stealing another’s words or ideas and attributing them as one’s own,” will not be tolerated. (Citation excerpted from Black’s Law Dictionary, 1999, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., p.1170). (Refer to <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2017/pg113.html> with regards to academic penalties for plagiarism.) This includes presenting the visual or aural work of another creator as your own. Visual or Aural Plagiarism may involve both hand-based media such as drawing, painting, printmaking and sculpture, as well as digital media such as photography, video and sound. It includes work subsequently manipulated or transferred between different media, as well as self-plagiarism – work submitted for assignments previously produced and graded for another course. Similar to textual plagiarism, all student work involving the visual or aural work of others must be appropriately cited/identified whether in print or orally. Failure to do so will lead to similar academic penalties as those identified in Western’s Academic Calendar.

#### **Medical Policy:**

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. See course outline for specific arrangements regarding less than 10% of assignments.

#### **Mental Wellbeing:**

“Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Wellbeing [http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental\\_health/](http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.”

#### **Building Access:**

The John Labatt Visual Arts Centre will be closed at 10:00pm each night Monday to Friday. There will be no after-hour access for undergraduate students. The Centre is open weekends 12:00pm-5:00pm unless otherwise posted; access by side entrances only. Students should be prepared to vacate the building promptly at 10:00pm and 5:00pm. You must also sign-in with the building monitors when working in the workshop areas outside of regular office hours.

#### **Permission re: Promotion**

You grant permission for Western University to reproduce your name, information describing your artwork, representations of your work and any other information you have provided for the purpose of display, promotion and publicity either now or in the future.

By installing your artwork in the John Labatt Visual Arts Centre, you grant Western University an irrevocable, perpetual, royalty-free world-wide licence to photograph your artwork and use such photograph(s) for the promotion of your artwork and/or Western University, including, without limitation, advertising, display, editorial, packaging, promotion, television, social media, the Department of Visual Arts website, flickr, Twitter, Instagram etc.). Students wishing to not have their work photographed should not exhibit it in the Visual Arts Centre, Artlab Gallery or Cohen Commons. As the area is open to the public, students, faculty, staff and other visitors will not be prohibited from photographing your artwork while on exhibit at the John Labatt Visual Arts Centre.

You otherwise retain all ownership in your artwork.

#### **Artwork Installation Liability Release**

You understand that the area where your artwork will be hanging or displayed is unsupervised and is in a part of the building that may be open to the public, day and evening, whether or not the building is open. Western University accepts no responsibility for damage to, or loss of, artwork at any time while on display or while being transported to or from the John Labatt Visual Arts Centre. By displaying your artwork in the John Labatt Visual Arts Centre, you accept all risk of loss or damage to your artwork. Western University does not provide insurance for the artwork on exhibition. **If you wish to insure artwork, it is your responsibility to do so.**

#### **Removal**

Western University reserves the right to dispose of artwork not picked up by April 15th of each year.

#### **Please remember:**

One of the most important resources for course counselling, special permissions, course changes, grade appeals, etc., is the Undergraduate Chair of Visual Arts, Professor C. Barteet (tel. 519-661-3440; [vaugc@uwo.ca](mailto:vaugc@uwo.ca)). Please note, however, that should you encounter any serious difficulties due to illness,

family emergency, etc., you should consult the Academic Counselor for your Faculty. Ms. Amanda Green and Mr. Ben Hakala are the academic counselors in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities located in IGA Building, Room 1N20.

The Student Development Centre (WSS room 4111; tel: 519-661-3031; [www.sdc.uwo.ca](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca)) offers a wide range of useful services including workshops on learning skills, career and employment services, and an effective writing program, amongst many more.

The D.B. Weldon Library offers orientation tours from the first week of classes until Thanksgiving, where you will get acquainted with the numerous research resources available. As well, the University libraries have an extremely useful website where you can search the library system, the databases, view your circulation record, renew materials, access your UWO e-mail account, and much more. Check it out at: [www.lib.uwo.ca](http://www.lib.uwo.ca).

Financial Aid Services is your main source of information for OSAP, bursaries, loans, scholarships, and the work-study program which offer part-time positions on campus for Western students. Tel: 519-661-2100; e-mail, [finaid@uwo.ca](mailto:finaid@uwo.ca); or check out their website at [http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/student\\_finances/financial\\_counselling.html](http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/student_finances/financial_counselling.html)

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June 2, 2017