

Western University
Department of Visual Arts

COURSE TITLE: Viva Vita
COURSE CODE: VISARTS 9522A/9622A Grad Studio Elective

Term/Session Fall 2021
Time Thursday 10:30 - 1:30
Location VAC 249
Professor Christof Migone cmigone@uwo.ca
Office Location/Hours via Zoom, Fridays 12-2pm, or by appointment

Course Description/Objectives:

Writing is a wager of presence in the semantic, imaginary and symbolic space.

— Nicole Brossard, *Corps d'énergie: Rituels d'écriture* (1990)

Here form is content, content is form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read –or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself.

— *Samuel Beckett* (writing about James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*)

I start in the middle of a sentence and move both directions at once.

— John Coltrane

Matter is pitiful; form is terrible; in the sculptural work, negation is luminous and contingent. To describe or situate this paradox without dramatization, the paradox of form and suffering or delight, is indexical work. The causal question is suspended, too, by a pleasurable insistence on material instability as a mode and prerequisite of both perception and appearing, without narrative distancing, but still requiring a situating frame.

— Lisa Robertson, *7.5 Minute Talk for Eva Hesse* (2012)

Artists need to talk amongst themselves. Our story was the concreteness of this becoming shared by air.

— Fred Moten, *All School Crit* (2016)

If the practice is to be meaningful, it must engage language, body, history, memory, the present, the unconscious, imagination, ethics, and relation in a drive towards the future.

— Larissa Lai, *An Ontology and Practice for Incomplete Futures* (2015)

A course exploring the notion of the word as a sign of life, a *viva vita*, a *wager of presence* (Brossard). The word and its materiality; its negotiations between the formal and the formless; its various embodiments, its lawfulness and its unruliness; its potentialities and its failures, its scientific fiction and its fictionalized science, its spatiality and its timeliness, its precision and its slippages. We will focus on the voice of the word (and its attendant specter, the *unword*) as it manifests the pervasiveness, persistence and proliferation of the performative. Particular attention will also be paid to techniques of intuition and improvisation. Along with forays into the historical avant-garde (from Pataphysics to Lettrism to Oulipo) and conceptual approaches (Barry, Weiner, Cage, Acconci, Piper, Goldsmith, Thurston) we will read (and play with) works by Maggie Nelson, Clarice Lispector, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Marguerite Duras, Octavia Butler, Maria Fusco, Lisa Robertson, Caroline Bergvall, Chris Kraus, Susan Howe, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Jacob Wren, Georges Didi-Huberman, amongst others. William S. Burroughs developed the cut-up technique after Brion Gysin provocatively declared to him that writing was 50 years behind painting. Could it be that now painting is 50 years behind writing? This course will go beyond this facile polemic and explore writing as speculative agent and nimble material that can intertwine generatively with any artistic practice.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon completing the course, students will be able to:

1. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge

- Understand a range of the key critical, historical, theoretical and conceptual frameworks which animate the notions explored in this course.

2. Application of Knowledge

- Students will further develop the strategic skills and conceptual foundations for production and critical engagement in the areas covered by this course.
- Distill relevant past works and writing on the subject and be able to absorb their strategies and possibilities in order to advance their own contemporary art production.

3. Communication Skills

- Students will develop appropriate vocabulary and thus become able to be articulate when presenting their artwork.
- Students will be able to engage with works by their peers critically, analytically, and constructively.

Course Requirements and Materials:

- Active uwo e-mail address (communications outside of class will be done via e-mail and OWL).
- A collegial disposition (especially during critiques) in the form of attentiveness, respectfulness, and generosity.
- Most readings will be made available for free in pdf form by the instructor but there may be some book purchases required.

Attendance:

- Attendance, punctuality and preparedness for class are critical.
- University regulations stipulate that if a student misses 15% of their classes (see end of syllabus for official policy), without written corroboration for health or bereavement, they can be debarred from participation in final evaluations and/or critiques.

Statement on Academic Offences:

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

Enrollment Restrictions:

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in the Department of Visual Arts, as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

Assignments/Late Assignments:

Students are expected to complete all assignments on time. Failure to complete assignments without prior arrangements with the instructor will result in a failing grade. With prior discussion, students may hand in late work with a 5% per day deduction from the assignment. Extensions will be given upon official notification from the student's faculty advisor due to documented serious health and bereavement reasons (more on that below).

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 below for specific arrangements regarding less than 10% of assignments. Accommodation for missed assignments, or attendance, totaling less than 10%, 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. For UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medical.pdf> [downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

<https://studentservices.uwo.ca> under the Medical Documentation heading]

Mental Health Policy:

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accessible Education Western (AEW):

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

EVALUATION AND GRADING BREAKDOWN:

- 1. Studio Work 60% (including crits) (mid 20%, final 40%)**
- 2. Reflective/Critical/Contextual Writing and Presentations 20% (part 1 - 10%, part 2 - 10%)**
- 3. Participation (includingcrits) 20%**

ASSIGNMENT BREAKDOWN:

1. Studio Work (20% + 40%) [due October 21 and December 2]

Midway through the semester and at the end, each student will host a critique wherein they present a body of work drawn from conceptual or material investigations undertaken during the semester. The work should be devised in connection to the theme(s) of the course and the conversations that will have developed throughout the semester. Alternately, a term paper researching a topic related to the course can be arranged.

2. Writing and Presentation (20%) [due October 14 - part 1, November 11 - part 2]

Students will prepare a 15 minute presentation on one reading or on one artwork placed in dialogue with a reading. The reading can be one of the assigned readings or other (in consultation with me if it is the latter). The presentation will be followed by a 15 minute discussion lead by the student. If class time is not able to accommodate all presentations, some students will be asked to prepare a pdf or powerpoint file or podcast or video to be shared with the class.

3. Participation (20%)

Key for all classes but even more pronounced at the graduate level. To be respectful, constructive, and generative are essential.