

# UC Berkeley

## Global Perspectives in Contemporary Art Fall 2018

### Title

Introduction

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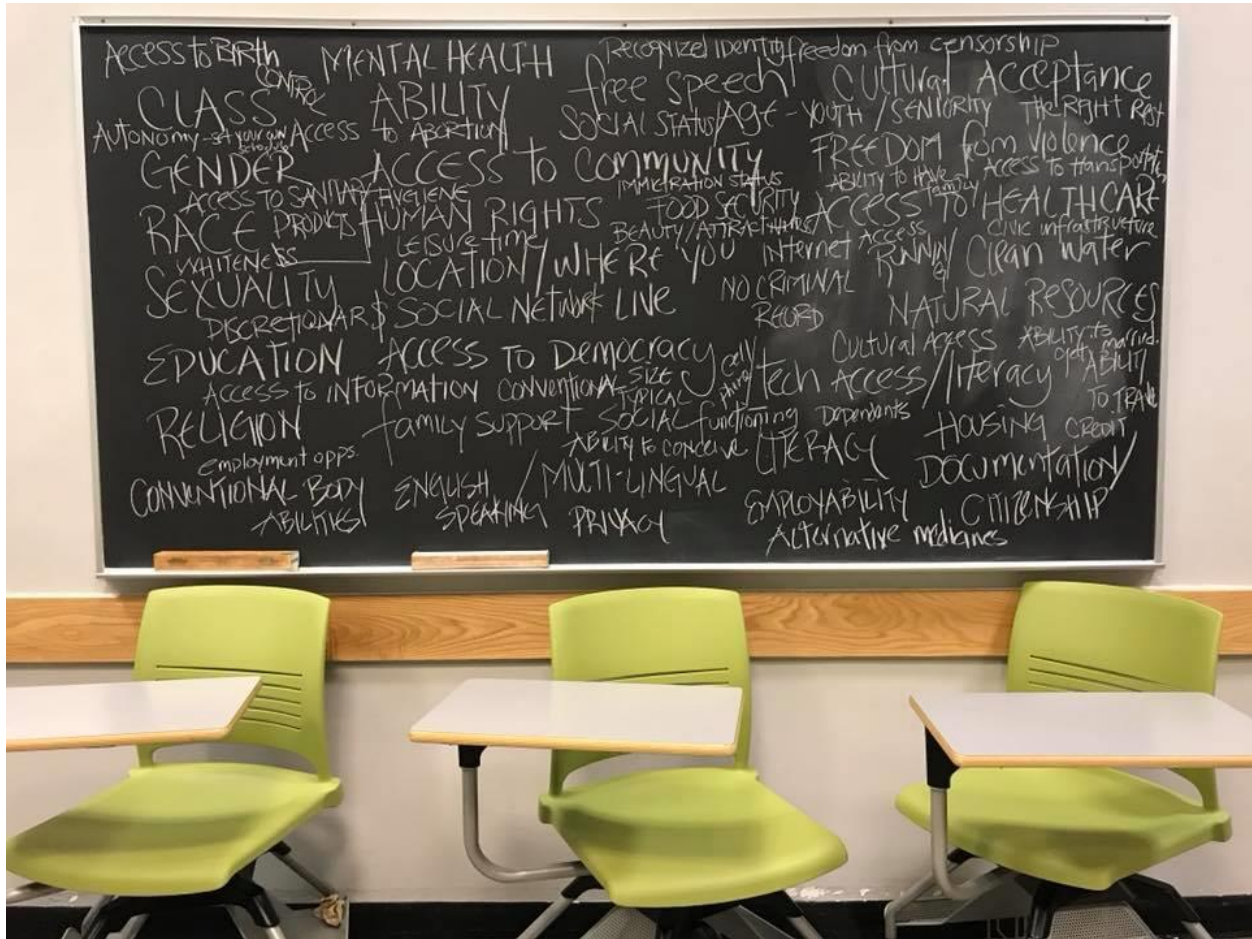
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**Global Perspectives in Contemporary Art**  
 Fall 2018 Visiting Lecturer Christian L. Frock

**INTRODUCTION**

Global Perspectives in Contemporary Art is a unique seminar within the Department of Art Practice – it has been taught by different lecturers each semester and each has brought a distinct pedagogical approach to the overarching concept of global perspectives in contemporary art. It is one of the few seminars in the undergraduate visual art studio program that requires the development of an academic paper, necessitating that the program’s emerging artists consider the broader implications of their work and ideas beyond the confines of the studio.

In my course, students were asked to consider how current events and international politics shape contemporary art and public life. We explored a range of international perspectives on various issues, both from within and beyond the United States. Students were further challenged to consider what it means to think and act globally within the parameters of their artistic disciplines, based on close analysis of responsibility, representation, and accountability within their chosen medium. We foregrounded this work with an expansive consideration of privilege in relation to race, gender, identity, class, education, and ability.

In addition to a number of exercises focused on understanding their personal position within discussions of identity politics, students read and discussed texts by Geraldine Ah-Sue, Naomi Beckwith, Jeff Chang, Teddy Cruz, Ben Davis, Aruna D’Souza, David Joselit, Aurora Levins Morales, Peggy McIntosh, Adrian Piper, Salman Rushdie, Nizan Shaked, Susan Sontag, Hito Steyerl, Nato Thompson, Anuradha Vikram, and WochenKlausur, among others.

Through these readings, we explored strategies and trends for art and exhibition making that reflect broad issues of human and civil rights, including racial equity, colonialism, nationalism, internationalism, feminism, environmentalism, hybridity, borders, migration, diaspora, tourism, capitalism, power structures, and market forces, among other interests.

Topical debates in contemporary art were central to our discussions, including recent controversies surrounding artworks by white artists that abstract racial violence, including protests over works based on the murder of Emmett Till in 1955 and the public execution of the Dakota 38 in 1862, presented by the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Walker Art Center respectively in 2017. Students were encouraged to consider the social impact of the arguments for and against these works and the various protests, including an open letter widely circulated on social media, that spurred a robust global dialog about racial equity in contemporary art. The artist and writer Hannah Black's open letter to the Whitney Museum of American Art, co-signed by dozens of Black intellectuals and cultural producers, demanded the removal and destruction of Dana Schutz's "Open Casket," a painting based on young Emmett Till's open casket, a historic image of lynching and racist violence that galvanized the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. Black's letter was controversial in its demand for the destruction of the work, which some took to be akin with censorship; others argued that the letter was deeply flawed for how it placed limitations on who could make work about historical trauma. Neither of these concerns slowed the explosive dialogue that ensued and it is safe to say that the issues raised in the letter will continue to be discussed in contemporary art and other intellectual and academic arenas for decades to come.

Given the opportunity to archive selected student essays online, we took UC Berkeley's Academic Integrity Statement as the foundation of our work, drawing inspiration from this line: "Universities like Berkeley create knowledge that has a lasting impact in the world of ideas and on the lives of others; such knowledge can come from an undergraduate paper as well as the lab of an internationally known professor." Participation in publishing student work here on the California Digital Library's e-scholarship platform was at each student's discretion, outside of final grades. These are a representative sample of our work. Papers went through several development stages, including multiple rounds of peer review. I provided feedback at milestone stages, as well as guidelines regarding format and structure; I did not provide editorial oversight to allow students unencumbered space to establish their position. Students were encouraged to consider the internet as a global public platform for their ideas and to grapple with the possibility that their perspectives, as artists, can provide valuable insight and clarity to some of the most pressing issues of our time, provided that they take into consideration the world beyond the art world.

*With thanks to all of my students for their hard work, as well as to Art Practice Department Chair and Associate Professor Allan deSouza; Erik Nelson, Art Practice Department Manager; Monica Westin, former publication program manager, California Digital Library; and Katie Fortney, Education Officer, California Digital Library.*

IMAGE: The conditions of privilege, crowd-sourced on September 10, 2018 with Global Perspectives seminar students Cleary Chizmar, Ashna Choudhury, Reniel Del Rosario, Edward Diven, Saba K. Gebremedhin, Stephanie So-Young Kim, Hazanne Likwong, Ariel Lung, Quinn McNulty, Juliette Mekikian, Madison Rae Nelson, Younie Park, Coco Qiu, Lesly Vazquez, Fonda Xu, Sunny Yu, and Qingqing Zhang. Photo: Christian L. Frock