



ARTH 3399: Special Topics in Art History (Art and Identity)
University of Texas at El Paso
Fall 2025

CRN: 15894

Class meeting times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:00-1:20 pm

Classroom: Fox Fine Arts A458 (fourth floor, Art wing)

Professor: Dr. Melissa Warak (she/her/ella; please call me Dr./Professor Warak or Dr. W)

Email: mcwarak@utep.edu

Office Phone: (915) 747-7849 (during office hours)

Office Location: Fox Fine Arts A454 (down the hall from our classroom)

Student/Office Hours: Mondays, 2:00-4:00 pm and Thursdays, 2:00-3:00 pm and by appointment. Sign up for office hour meetings here: <https://calendly.com/warakofficehours/15min>.

COURSE MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY

All materials for the course, including PowerPoints and PDFs of course texts, will be uploaded to the course Blackboard page. Students will need a strong internet connection and a computer (either a laptop or a desktop) in order to study the images on a larger screen. Google Chrome is the recommended browser for Blackboard. UTEP students may check out laptops and wifi hot spots from the UTEP library. See [here](#) for more information.

ABOUT YOUR PROFESSOR

Dr. Warak specializes in the relationship of music and sound to art of the twentieth century. Dr. Warak is a proud Texan and a native of Houston. She earned a B.A. with honors in English literature and art history from Vanderbilt University, and her M.A. and Ph.D. in art history from the University of Texas at Austin. Her current research focuses on the ways that visual artists after the late 1950s employed musical models in their work. Her book *Sonic Sculpture and the Performative Impulse: Sounding Things Out*, a study of sound-producing sculpture, was published in 2025 by Routledge. Other research interests include disability representation in art, the history of abstraction, portraiture and self-portraiture, performance, spirituality in modern and contemporary art, and the ways that science and technology interact with art, including conservation studies. Her research has been supported by grants and fellowships from the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, the Getty Research Institute, the Royal Music Association of the United Kingdom, The Menil Collection, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the Yale University Art Galleries, the Tate Modern, the Grand Palais in Paris, the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, the Kress Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the National Science Foundation, among others.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the concept of artistic identity from the late nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries. We will explore how an artist's identity plays a role in the way that their art looks and

discuss the representation of others' identities through art of these time periods. The course is not a general history of identity-centered art, but will consider it theoretically, thematically, and through case studies. We will strive to understand both the artists' intentions and the critical or popular reception of the works studied in the class.

Some of the art we will study was created with the intention of challenging the comfort levels of the viewer. In that sense, we should all strive to create a discussion environment that is open to ideas and respectful to difference of opinion. It is not expected that you should enjoy – in a conventional sense – or agree with the ideological premises of all the art explored in this course. Please contact Dr. Warak in the first week of class if you would like to discuss any concerns about course content.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

During this course, students will develop their understanding of identity positions in art after 1880 and acquire skills essential to the professional art historian. These include the following:

1. Conducting visual analysis, scholarly writing, research in primary and secondary texts, understanding multidisciplinary research methodologies, and writing formal analysis and interpretive texts.
2. Analyzing and critically evaluating ideas and arguments and participating in peer review.
3. Interpreting and applying ideas from scholarly texts to analyze works of art.
4. Considering approaches to understanding art when viewed in person, as well as curatorial choices made by museum spaces.
5. Learning how to analyze case studies within a broader social history framework.
6. Applying course material in terms of improving aesthetic appreciation, problem solving, broader cultural literacy, and facilitating further coursework in the arts and humanities.

COURSE STRUCTURE

1) LECTURE AND DISCUSSION. The class will meet in person in Fox Fine Arts A458 on Mondays and Wednesdays. Expect to use the full class time. Discussion is critical in this course, so expect to take part in the class discussions. Students will be graded on **discussion participation** in class. Discussion points will be assigned for both the first and second halves of the semester. Participation may mean different things for different students; see Dr. Warak for participation options. Otherwise, a good rule of thumb is to try to contribute *at least* once per class (via ideas, questions, or responses to your professor or other students).

2) QUIZZES. We will have one syllabus quiz and eight reading quizzes throughout the semester. See the Quizzes policy below for details.

3) WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS. This course has three small and one large writing assignments. The small assignments include a visual analysis worksheet (designed to help prepare for exams and the research paper) and two worksheets based on visits to the El Paso Museum of Art and the Rubin Center for the Visual Arts. We will work on the larger project all semester: a research paper of about 8+ pages in length, which will include a prospectus (proposal), some in-class writing, and peer review of work in progress. The paper assignment and other materials related to the project are compiled in a Blackboard tab labeled "Written Assignments."

5) EXAMS. This course will have two exams. See the Exams policy below for details.

6) EMAIL. Dr. Warak will email the class regularly using the UTEP email addresses on file and will try to respond to student emails within twenty-four hours. Please treat emails as professional correspondence. Any course announcements on Blackboard will also be emailed to students.

7) GRADEBOOK. All course grades will be updated on the Gradebook on Blackboard. Students should keep track of their progress throughout the semester.

8) STUDENT HOURS. Student hours (also called **office hours**) are a time for students to get to know their professor, talk about the course content in further depth, discuss concerns or grades, or to learn more about their field of study or graduate study. Office hours are for you, so take advantage whenever you need these kinds of interactions. These will be held via Zoom or in person. To make an appointment for office hours, go [here](#). Sign up for as many fifteen-minute time slots as you need. This will send an email to you and Dr. Warak to confirm. Email Dr. Warak if you would like to create an appointment outside of office hours due to class timing conflicts.

GRADING POLICY

This course will be graded on a **scale of 500 points**.

Syllabus Quiz:	6 points
Visual Analysis Worksheet:	14 points
Rubin Center Worksheet:	10 points
El Paso Museum of Art Worksheet:	15 points
In-Class Writing Exercises (3):	30 points
Quizzes (8):	70 points
Exam 1:	100 points
Exam 2:	100 points
Paper Prospectus:	10 points
Paper Peer Review:	20 points
Paper:	100 points
Participation 1:	10 points
Participation 2:	15 points

There may be extra credit opportunities available during the semester.

Note: You will see that the Blackboard page allows for 510 points, but this accounts for the free quiz grade. You are graded only out of 500 points. Therefore, here is the point breakdown for final course grades:

450 – 500 points:	A
400 – 449 points:	B
350 – 399 points:	C
300 – 349 points:	D
000 – 299 points:	F

TEXTS/READINGS FOR CLASS

We do not have a textbook to purchase for this course. Readings will be posted as PDFs to the Course Readings tab in Blackboard. All readings are eligible for the exams and should be completed before the day that they are listed. All students will need to purchase one basic composition book for in-class writing.

TAKING NOTES IN CLASS

It is critical that students take detailed notes in class. Exam material will come from ideas discussed in

class; use the readings as supplements to the lectures and discussions. Completing the readings will not take the place of attendance and participation in class. I recommend bringing a notebook designated just for this course if you hand-write your notes, but you may use a laptop to type them if you wish. Taking notes by hand is still the recommended format and many studies show that the act of writing by hand helps one retain information and ideas. It is important that your laptop use does not distract other students and Dr. Warak may ask you to hand-write notes if laptop use presents a problem. Using bullet points will help you write down more information. Students will find basic identifying information for each work shown (artist name, title, date) and vocabulary terms on the PowerPoint slides. Write the date at the beginning of your notes so you know what we covered each day. PowerPoints will be uploaded to Blackboard after each class day. Students are responsible for acquiring notes and announcements made during missed classes, so make a friend and exchange contact information. Dr. Warak will not provide class notes to students. See Dr. Warak for help taking notes.

EXAMS

Our two exams are worth 100 points each and consist of a single essay question that you will write in class. You will get to choose among several questions. Exams are **open note**, so make sure to take notes extensively. Students may use their hand-written class notes (or printouts of typed notes) and quizzes. Students may not bring printouts of the readings or the PowerPoints from class. The questions are designed for students to show off what they have learned in the class and will require a synthesis of concepts. We will not have specific image lists for each exam (no memorization); instead, students will decide on appropriate examples from class that best suit their essay. The exams are not cumulative; and we will review for them in class. Exams may be made up only in extreme circumstances documented with the Dean of Students; contact Dr. Warak before your exam if you cannot attend. Plan your semester accordingly.

READING QUIZZES

Our reading quizzes are worth 10 points each and are **not open note**. Quizzes are timed at ten minutes each and will be taken at the beginning of the class period, so make sure you are on time to class. Quizzes will cover only the reading(s) listed for the specific quiz day. See the schedule for quiz days. Dr. Warak posted a **study guide to the quiz readings** (under the Course Readings tab on Blackboard) for help in thinking through what you should study from each reading. The quizzes will likely include a combination of short answer, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and true/false questions. To prepare for these, read the texts carefully and take notes on them; this will also help with studying for the exams. You may find it useful to skim the readings once for the larger issues at stake and then take notes during a second and more careful reading. Be sure that you can identify the authors' arguments and the primary evidence used to support them. As you read, think critically about what might be useful about the texts for that day's topics. There are no makeup quizzes, but every student will get one free quiz grade (no points removed).

LATE WORK POLICY

Every assignment explains the corresponding late work policy.

COURSE POLICIES

ATTENDANCE POLICY (MANDATORY ATTENDANCE)

Policy in short:

DO NOT COME TO CLASS IF YOU ARE SICK. Wear a mask if you are recovering from an illness.

Allowed absences without penalty (no documentation or prior email needed) = **3 absences**

Tardies = $\frac{1}{2}$ **absence**

Automatic drop = **6 absences total or 2 absences before the course census date (Sept. 10)**

Absences due to COVID-19 illness will be excused, but will require official documentation.

Policy in detail:

Class attendance is a requirement and use of the full class period is expected. Make sure you (and only you) sign the attendance sheet at the beginning of class every day. Do not sign the attendance sheet for anyone else or ask anyone to sign for you.

You are allowed **three absences** for *any reason* without grading consequences. There are no “excused” or “unexcused” absences, except in the case of COVID-19 absences. It is up to your discretion how you use your three absences, including for illness. You do not need to show documentation or doctor’s notes, and you do not need to notify Dr. Warak in advance except in the case of a religious holy day (see below). **More than three absences from class will result in a lowering of your overall grade by fifteen points per absence** (remember that this class is graded on a scale of 500 points). In the case of an illness or emergency that causes you to miss more than three consecutive class days, email Dr. Warak ASAP. Students who are more than **ten minutes late or who leave early** without permission will be given half credit for attendance. **Tardies or partial attendance (half credits)** will figure into the absence count. The absences column on the Gradebook section of Blackboard keeps a running tally. You can access the attendance record on Blackboard to see which days you have missed or were late/left early.

COURSE DROP POLICY

Six absences will result in an automatic drop from the course; this includes tardies and excused absences from COVID. Students with two or more absences by the census date (Sept. 10) will be dropped unless the student has spoken to me about extenuating circumstances.

COPYRIGHT OF THIS COURSE

All materials used in this course are protected by copyright law. The course materials are only for the use of students currently enrolled in this course and only for the purpose of this course. They may not be further disseminated or shared with other students or websites.

FERPA AND EMAIL POLICY

This course adheres to [Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA) regulations. I will always email the class through Blackboard. I will never post identifiable information about students, and I will not discuss specifics of your student performance with anyone without a FERPA waiver signed by you. FERPA regulations forbid faculty from exchanging emails with students about grade numbers specifically. This is because email is considered an insecure medium and may be hacked. Make an office hours appointment if you have a question or concern about letter grades or numbers. However, you may email more generally about improving in the course.

LAPTOPS, TABLETS, AND PHONES

Students may use computers and tablets to take notes during class, but please keep phones out of sight. Please use electronics professionally. If you need to use your phone during class (even to text), please step out of the classroom briefly. There are power outlets all along the walls. Lectures may not be recorded without permission from Dr. Warak and/or CASS accommodations.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Please be respectful of other students in the classroom. The classroom door will be open for five minutes after class begins; after ten minutes, tardies will be given. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom may result in a directive to leave class or being reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with UTEP policy. You may bring a drink, but it must have a sealable lid. If you need to use your phone for any reason, please step outside of the classroom. **A note on bags:** please make sure your bag is small enough to fit fully under your chair. If not, you will be asked to put it to the side of the classroom.

SAFEASSIGN

Most written documents will be submitted through SafeAssign links on Blackboard. Students should submit the file type indicated in the assignments (.docx or .pdf). Uploading a document to SafeAssign sometimes takes several minutes, so give yourself some buffer time in case there is an upload error. SafeAssign is also a plagiarism detection tool, and you can use this to your advantage by pulling an Originality Report for work that you upload. SafeAssign provides Dr. Warak with a time stamp for each submission, as well as an Originality Report.

AI POLICY

UTEP officially considers the use of AI (artificial intelligence) as a form of plagiarism unless otherwise directed by the professor. The use of AI programs for any assignment is prohibited in this class. All written work, including exams, will be run through AI detection software; any assignment suspected to have used AI will be sent to the Office of Community Standards (<https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/standards/>) and assessed for academic dishonesty at the university level. At the minimum, this would result in a zero for any assignment on which UTEP has determined that AI was used.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AND PLAGIARISM

Academic dishonesty – including the use of AI on assignments – or cheating will result in referral to the Office of Community Standards and will incur harsh penalties, including failure of the assignment, of the course, or further disciplinary action determined by the university. Please do not waste your time trying it; expend your energy on doing the work instead of cheating yourself out of an education. Any student who cheats does not deserve a degree from UTEP because it has not been earned honestly. All students are expected to engage in their academic pursuits in a professional manner and to maintain honesty and integrity. Sometimes, students commit academic dishonesty without knowing it, but ignorance is not an excuse. All students are responsible for knowing the requirements of academic honesty set forth by UTEP. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty. See the UTEP policy on academic integrity and scholastic dishonesty: <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/standards/student-conduct/academic-integrity.html>.

POLICY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, PREGNANT STUDENTS, AND STUDENT-PARENTS

Accommodations will be made for students with limitations due to disabilities if they are registered with the [Center for Accommodations and Support Services \(CASS\)](#) and procure the proper documentation: (telephone: (915) 747-5148). Students with documented disabilities should make sure that the professor receives the appropriate paperwork from CASS within the first week of class. Please note that CASS is available to help students with any disabilities, documented illness (including anxiety, depression, and PTS), and in the case of short-term disability (broken bones, etc.). UTEP has a [Student Pregnancy and Parenting Nondiscrimination Policy](#), which may allow for some accommodations through CASS. Please note that all course documents use the Atkinson Hyperlegible or Calibri fonts because these are the most accessible for students with learning and vision disabilities.

POLICY FOR STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911(a)(2) defines a religious holy day as “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20 ...”. See your professor at least a week in advance if you intend to miss class in observance of a religious holy day.

COVID-19 PRECAUTION STATEMENT

Please stay home if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we can work on appropriate accommodations. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, please report your results to covidaction@utep.edu, so that the Dean of Students Office can provide you with support and help with communication with your professors. See [here](#) for the latest information about testing for COVID-19 on campus.