



**ARTH 3395: Topics in Contemporary Art
Art After 1990
The University of Texas at El Paso
Spring 2026**

CRN: 27678

Class Meeting Times: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 11:30 am to 12:20 pm

Location: Fox Fine Arts A458

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

Email: mcwarak@utep.edu

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

Office Location: Fox Fine Arts A454 (fourth floor, Art wing)

Student/office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00-3:30 pm. 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.

ABOUT YOUR PROFESSOR

Dr. Melissa Warak is an Associate Professor of Art History and specializes in the relationship of music and sound to art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Dr. Warak is a proud Texan and a native of Houston. She earned a B.A. 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 from the mid-fifties to late sixties employed musical models in their work. She is the author of *Sonic Sculpture and the Performative Impulse: Sounding Things Out* (Routledge, 2025) and is working on a new book on the sung voice in contemporary art. Other research interests include the history of abstraction, spirituality in modern and contemporary art, science and technology in modern and contemporary art, and disability representation in art. 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 in Houston, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the Yale University Art Galleries, the Tate Modern, the Grand Palais in Paris, the Kress Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the National Science Foundation, among others.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an upper-division (3000-level) history of global art from 1990 to the present, concentrating on specific themes and trends in contemporary art. Designed for art students as well as anyone interested in current trends in the art world, this course utilizes a primary methodology of cultural and social history, but will also consider materials, technique, style, biography/psychology, and other contextual factors that contribute to understanding the way that a given work of art looks. The course will explore various theoretical viewpoints to understand the points of view of the artists (the artist's intentions) as well as how we the audience understand and interpret art that may not be conventional (the work's reception).

As a content advisory, please note that this course covers art that is sometimes shocking, offensive, controversial, or otherwise difficult for many viewers. It is not expected that you should enjoy – in a conventional sense – or agree with the ideological premises of all of the art explored in this course. Some of the images we will discuss in class deal frankly with racism, sexism, global politics, violence, war, religion, the AIDS epidemic, and sexual trauma, among other difficult themes. They are not shown in class for shock value or to promote specific ideologies. These works are intended by the artists to challenge the comfort level of the viewer and discussion about them is important. Speaking to how such images make you feel is vital, as this deepens our understanding of their power. If you have concerns about certain content, email Dr. Warak or visit office hours so that we may discuss privately how to approach it in your studies.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

1. Conducting visual analysis, research in primary and secondary texts, scholarly writing, 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. Gaining skills and competency in delivering in-class presentations.
4. Gaining knowledge of the terminology, trends, and methodologies used to write about contemporary art.
5. 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 but may have some online learning days. Plan to use the full class time each day. 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 to discuss alternatives to traditional in-class participation. Otherwise, a good rule of thumb is to try to contribute *at least* once per class (via ideas, questions, or responses to 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) TEACHING PRESENTATIONS. Each student will teach the class about an artist during one class day. See the assignment and list of artists under the “Presentations” tab on Blackboard.

4) WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS. This course has three small writing assignments and one larger project. The small assignments include a visual analysis worksheet and worksheets based on visit to the El Paso Museum of Art and the Rubin Center for Visual Art at UTEP. We will also have several in-class writing exercises. We will work on the larger research project all semester that will include a prospectus (proposal) and peer review of work in progress. All assignments are compiled in a Blackboard tab labeled “Written Assignments.”

5) EXAMS. This course will have two exams: a midterm and a non-cumulative final exam. 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 24 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 through 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. Dr. Warak will hold office hours from 2:00 to 3:30 pm on Mondays and Wednesdays via Zoom conferencing, in person, or on the telephone. 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 both of us to confirm, as well as a Zoom meeting link if you choose to meet online. Email Dr. Warak if you would like to create an appointment outside of office.

GRADING POLICY

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

Syllabus Quiz:	6 points
Reading Quizzes (8):	70 points (lowest quiz free bonus points)
EPMA Worksheet:	10 points
Rubin Center Worksheet:	10 points
Visual Analysis Worksheet:	14 points
Artist Presentation:	25 points
In-Class Writing 1:	10 points
In-Class Writing 2:	10 points
In-Class Writing 3:	10 points
In-Class Writing 4:	10 points
Exam 1:	70 points
Exam 2:	100 points

Research Paper:	130 points (10 + 20 + 100)
Participation 1:	10 points
Participation 2:	15 points

There will 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 and any extra credit. You are graded only out of 500 points. Thus, this is the point breakdown for grades:

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

TEXTS / COURSE READINGS

We do not have a required textbook. Selected articles and essays will be posted as PDFs to Blackboard under the “Readings” tab and are listed in the course schedule. Readings for each day should be completed *before* class begins. All readings are eligible for the exams. Some of the readings are theoretical and will take longer to read, but many of them are shorter exhibition reviews.

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 presentation 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.

EXAM POLICY AND STRUCTURE

Students will take two exams in class. Exams are **open note**, so make sure to take notes extensively. Students may use notes, quizzes, and presentation handouts for exams. The questions are designed for students to show off what they have learned in the class and will require a synthesis of concepts.

They may be short answer (2-3 sentences), long answer (a long paragraph), or an essay (if an essay, students will have a choice among several questions). We will not have specific image lists for each exam (no memorization), but students should choose examples of works of art from class. The exams are not cumulative. We will review for them in class. Exams may be made up only in extreme circumstances documented with the Dean of Students and approved by Dr. Warak; contact Dr. Warak ASAP if you will miss an exam. 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 and the quiz study guide 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 author's 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. If you know in advance that you will be absent on a quiz day, email Dr. Warak to take it before that class day. There are no makeup quizzes after the quiz day, but every student will get one free quiz grade (no points removed).

IN-CLASS WRITING

We will have several short writing exercises in class to help with the paper project. Students need to purchase one basic composition book only for in-class writing, though it may also be used to organize ideas for the paper assignment. Students who cannot write by hand should receive CASS accommodations to complete the work. Students who miss class in-class writing due to absence should email Dr. Warak by 5:00 pm on the missed day if they would like an opportunity to make up the assignment.

LATE WORK POLICY

Every assignment explains the corresponding late work policy.

*****COURSE POLICIES*****

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Policy in short:

Attendance is required and will be taken daily.

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 needed) = **4 absences**

Tardies or leaving early = **½ absence**

Automatic drop = **7 absences total or 3 absences before the course census date (Feb. 4)**

There are **no excused or unexcused absences**; you just get the four for free. See [here](#) for info about UTEP COVID-19 testing.

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 **four absences** for *any reason* without grading consequences. There are no “excused” or “unexcused” absences. It is up to your discretion how you use your free absences, including for illness. You do not need to show documentation or doctor’s notes unless requested. You do not need to notify Dr. Warak in advance except in the case of a religious holy day (see below). **More than four 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 leave early** without permission will be given half credit for attendance. **Tardies (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

Seven absences will result in an automatic drop from the course; this includes tardies and excused absences from COVID. Students with three or more absences by the census date (Feb. 4) will be dropped.

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 entire 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 about improving in the course more generally.

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 about 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 only (no food), and it must have sealable lid. If you need to use your phone for any reason, please step outside of the classroom. We have shelves in the classroom for items that will not fit under your desk.

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 faculty 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 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. Any student who must cheat to pass a class 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 I use the Atkinson Hyperlegible or Calibri fonts on course documents 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.

