Indigenous Australian Art: An Analytical Survey

Class code: ANTH-UA 9038 or SCA-UA 9836

Instructor Details
Professor Sabra Thorner
sgt217@nyu.edu
Consultation: Mondays 5-6pm

Class Details
Indigenous Art: An Analytical Survey
Mondays: 2pm-5pm
Room 304
NYU Sydney Academic Centre

Prerequisites
None

Class Description
This course is a survey of some of the principal themes and issues in the development of Indigenous Art in Australia. It focuses on some of the regional and historical variations of Aboriginal art in the context of the history of a settler nation, while considering the issues of its circulation and evaluation within contemporary discourses of value. Topics include the cosmological dimensions of the art, its political implications, its relationship to cultural identity, and its aesthetic frameworks. Students will visit some of the major national collections of Indigenous Australian art as well as exhibitions of contemporary works. There will also be guest presentations from Indigenous artists and Indigenous art curators.

Assessment Components
Class participation 20%

Review of a current exhibition of Indigenous Australian art. 4-5 pages; 20% of final grade.

Biography essay of an Indigenous artist (or curator) in which you examine the relationship between the artist/curator's life, work and interpretations of that work. 4-5 pages; 20% of final grade.

Research paper on a topic or issue in Aboriginal art—with consultation and approval from the Instructor. 8-10 pages; 40% of final grade.

Failure to submit or fulfil any required course component results in failure of the class.

Assessment Expectations
Grade A: Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning. Creative work is of a highly sophisticated standard.
Grade B: Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research. Creative work is of a superior standard.

Grade C: Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level. Creative work is of an acceptable standard.

Grade D: Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations. Creative work is of a basic standard.

Grade F: Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Creative work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.

Grade conversion

NYU Sydney uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

A = 94-100
A- = 90-93
B+ = 87-89
B = 84-86
B- = 80-83
C+ = 77-79
C = 74-76
C- = 70-73
D+ = 67-69
D = 65-66
F = below 65

Where no specific numerical equivalent is assigned to a letter grade by the Instructor, the mid-point of the range will be used in calculating the final class grade (except in the A range, where 95.5 will be used).

Grading Policy

NYU Sydney aims to have grading standards and results similar to those that prevail at Washington Square. At the College of Arts and Sciences, roughly 39% of all final grades are in the B+ to B- range, and 50% in the A/A- range.

We have therefore adopted the following grading guideline: in any non-Stern course, class teachers should try to insure that no more than 50% of the class receives an A or A-. (Stern has a different grading policy that we follow in all Stern courses).

A guideline is not a curve. A guideline is just that: it gives an ideal benchmark for the distribution of grades towards which we work.
NYU Sydney has a strict policy about course attendance for students. Faculty will not give students permission to be absent for any reason. Students should contact their instructors to catch up on missed work but should not approach them for excused absences.

All non-medical absence requests must be presented by the student to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs. Non-medical requests should be made in advance of the intended absence. All medical-based absence requests MUST be presented to the Student Life Coordinator. In the case of illness, the student should contact the Student Life Coordinator within three days of the absence or as soon as practicable and provide medical documentation. Faculty will be informed of excused absences by the Student Life staff and Assistant Director, Academic Programs. Any absences of which faculty have not been informed by the NYU Sydney staff will be presumed to be unexcused.

Students are expected to arrive to class promptly both at the start of class and after breaks. Arriving more than 10 minutes late or leaving more than 10 minutes early will be considered an unexcused absence.

This attendance policy also applies to classes involving a field trip or other off-campus visit. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the agreed meeting point on time.

The faculty will report all unexcused absences to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs, and students’ final grades will be negatively impacted by each such absence. Each unexcused absence will result in the deduction of 3 percentage points from the final grade. More than two unexcused absences will result in failure of the course.

There will be no adjustment of attendance records after the end of the semester. If you wish to contest an unexcused absence, you must do so before you leave Sydney. Contact the Assistant Director, Academic Programs to discuss the attendance record as soon as you think there may be a discrepancy about your attendance in class on a given day.

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.

Students must notify their professor and the Assistant Director, Academic Programs in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

Written work due in class must be submitted during class time to your instructor.

Late work should be submitted in person to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs during regular office hours (9:30-5:00, Monday-Friday). You must also submit an electronic copy of late written work to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs – megan.carrigy@nyu.edu – for submission to Turn-it-in.

The Assistant Director, Academic Programs will mark down the date and time of submission in the presence of the student. In the absence of the Assistant Director, Academic Programs, another member of the administrative staff can accept the work in person, following the same protocol.

Work submitted after the submission time without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale for each day the work is late.

Written work submitted beyond five (5) weekdays after the submission date without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.
## Plagiarism Policy

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU Sydney. NYU Sydney policies are in accordance with New York University’s plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

Any course work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form. All students must submit an electronic copy of each piece of written work to www.turnitin.com. Instructions will be provided to you in class.

Penalties for confirmed cases of plagiarism are severe and are dealt with by the Director, NYU Sydney, not your instructor. Your home school will be notified and you will be dealt with according to the standards of that school. The codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges are outlined in the respective school’s academic resources.

## Required Text(s)


## Supplemental Texts(s) (not required to purchase as copies are in NYU-S Library)

- Sutton, Peter, *Dreamings, The Art of Aboriginal Australia*
- Neale, Margo, *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*

## Internet Research Guidelines

None

## Additional Required Equipment

None

## Session 1

**What is Aboriginal Art? A Journey to Recognition**

September 24

Required Readings:

- Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, pp. 13 – 65

## Fall Break

No classes scheduled October 1-5, 2012

October 1
Session 2

**The Cultural Context of Aboriginal Art**

October 8

Required Readings:
- Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, pp. 67 – 180
- Strehlow, T.G.H., “The Art of the Circle, Line and Square.” In R. Berndt, ed. *Australian Aboriginal Art.* (1964)

Session 3

**Aboriginal Art in the 19th Century – William Barak and Tommy McRae**

October 15

Required Readings:
- Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, p. 355-368
- Caruana, *Aboriginal Art*, p. 194-8

Session 4

**Arnhem Land: from early contact to the distinctive styles/practices of Northeast, Central, and West**

October 22

Required Readings:
- Caruana, *Aboriginal Art*, pp. 21 – 100
- Marika, *The journey of the Djang’kawu*
- Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, pp. 126-218
- Djon Mundine, “The land is full of signs: Central northeast Arnhem Land art.” In *Art from the Land: Dialogues with the Kluge-Ruhe Collection of Australian Aboriginal Art*, 85-120, 1999. (C)

Film: *Dhakiyarr vs. The King*

***Exhibition Review Due*** Review of a current exhibition of Indigenous Australian art. 4-5 pages; 20% of final grade.

Session 5

**Namatjira and the Hermannsburg School**

October 29

Required Readings:
- Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, p. 263 - 282
- Jones, *Namatjira: Traveller between two worlds*
- *Additional readings TBD*

Session 6

**Papunya**

November 5

Required Readings:
- Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, p. 283 – 316
- Geoff Bardon, *Papunya Tula: Art of the Western Desert*, p. 10-46
Myers, Aesthetic Function and Practice: a Local Art History of Pintupi Painting.” In Art from the Land: Dialogues with the Kluge-Ruhe Collection of Australian Aboriginal Art, 219-260.

Film: Mr Patterns

Session 7
Western Desert
November 12
Required Readings:
Sutton, Dreamings, pp. 80 – 142
Watson, C. “Touching the Land.” In Art from the Land. Carty, John and Alison French.

***Biographical Essay Due*** Document and analyze the life of an Indigenous artist (or curator); examine the relationship between the artist/curator’s life, work and interpretations of that work. 4-5 pages; 20% of final grade.

Session 8
Art: Culture, Survival, Visibility
November 19
Required Readings:
Michael Dodson: “The End in the Beginning: Re(de)fining Aboriginality”
Ian McLean, How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art, 146-170.

Session 9
Photography
November 26
Required Readings:
De Lorenzo, “Delayed Exposure: Contemporary Aboriginal photography”
Croft, “Blak lik mi: More contemporary Aboriginal photography”
Caruana, Aboriginal Art, p. 179 – 205

Session 10
Culture Warriors: Art and Activism
December 3
Required Readings:
Richard Bell, Bell’s Theorem, Aboriginal Art: It’s a White Thing. NATSIAA, 2003
Morphy, Aboriginal Art, pp. 370 – 420

***Research Paper due December 7*** Investigate in depth a topic or issue in Aboriginal art—with consultation and approval from the Instructor. 8-10 pages; 40% of final grade.

**Classroom Etiquette**
Eating is not permitted in any classrooms. Please kindly dispose of rubbish in the bins provided.

**Required Co-curricular Activities**
The course requires students to attend at least two major exhibitions of Indigenous Australian art in Sydney, in addition to class visits to the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Museum of Contemporary Art.

**Suggested Co-curricular Activities**
Students will attend at least one exhibition of the Sydney Biennale.
Students will visit Canberra in October and will have an opportunity to view major collections of Australian indigenous art at the National Gallery of Australia, the National Museum of Australia, and the National Portrait Gallery of Australia.
Students are also invited to attend the exhibition “Bungaree: The First Australian,” held at the Mosman Art Gallery.
Additional excursions may include a tour of significant Indigenous rock-art sites; a trip to Boomalli Aboriginal Artists’ Cooperative; and a visit to a commercial art gallery.

**Your Instructor**
Sabra Thorner is an anthropologist who has lived on and off in Australia since 1999, working in and with Aboriginal cultural centres in Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide. Her work focuses on Indigenous photography, and how media- and art-making are important forms of cultural activism in contemporary Australia. She has taught Introduction to Anthropology, the Anthropology of Art, and MAP: Indigenous Australia at NYU; and Media and/as Ethnography at the New School.