Indigenous Australian Art: An Analytical Survey

Class code
ANTH-UA 9038 or SCA-UA 9836

Instructor Details
Professor Sabra Thorner
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02 8016 8214 (office)
0415 850 392 (mobile)
Office Hour: Wednesdays 5-6pm

Class Details
Indigenous Art: An Analytical Survey

Wednesdays, 2pm-5pm
Room 304
NYU Sydney Academic Centre
Science House, 157 Gloucester St, The Rocks

Prerequisites
None

Class Description
This course is a survey 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.

Desired Outcomes
As a result of successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the diversity of Indigenous arts in Australia—ranging from acrylic paintings of the Western Desert to bark designs of Arnhem land to urban, politically motivated works in various media (including photography, sculpture, print-making, etc)

- Think about these works both as objectifications of cultural expression (Aboriginal histories, religious beliefs, cultural/linguistic practices) and as political interventions

- Appreciate the role of anthropology/anthropologists in defining “Aboriginal art” as a genre of high art; think about “Aboriginal art” as itself an intercultural production, and be able to thoughtfully address our own participation in defining this category on various markets/multiple regimes of value

- Relate case studies in Indigenous arts to broader anthropological themes, including the definition of race/Aboriginality in Australia; the recognition of Indigenous Australians in various fora; how value is understood/accrued on markets; destabilizing dichotomies between remote/urban, art/craft, ethnography/art, prehistory/history; defining and problematizing
“authenticity,” and “appropriation;” and many more

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<th>Assessment Components</th>
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<td>Class participation: including two components: 1) active engagement in discussions and respectful listening; collaborative group work, as occasionally assigned (10% of final grade); and 2) one 10-15 minute presentation of course materials during the course of the semester (to be decided via student sign-up on the first day of class). You will be asked to summarize authors’ arguments, present major themes, and raise questions for further discussion. Film/video/web clips and/or powerpoint support are welcome but not required (10% of final grade).</td>
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<td>Review of a current exhibition of Indigenous Australian art. 4-5 pages; 20% of final grade. Due at the beginning of class, session 5; assessment criteria to be distributed in session 1.</td>
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<td>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. Due at the beginning of class, session 10; assessment criteria to be distributed in session 5.</td>
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<td>Research paper on a significant topic/issue in Aboriginal art. 10-12 pages; 40% of final grade. Due Wednesday, May 29th, at 5pm. Assessment criteria and a list of suggestions will be distributed in session 10; you may also choose your own topic/issue in consultation with the professor (please schedule an in-person conversation; email is not sufficient).</td>
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Written work must include appropriate citations and references (reference lists are not included in the required number of pages); **please follow the American Anthropological Association Style Guide, available on the NYU Classes site for our course (check under “Resources”).** Plagiarism (not only copying of text, but failure to cite the source of ideas that are not the student’s original thinking) attracts an automatic zero for the assignment as well as formal disciplinary action.

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

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<td><strong>Grade A:</strong> 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.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grade B:</strong> 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.</td>
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<td><strong>Grade C:</strong> 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.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grade D:</strong> 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.</td>
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<td><strong>Grade F:</strong> Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Creative work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.</td>
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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).

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.carryg@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 to 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 Text(s) (not required to purchase)

*Culture Warriors: National Indigenous Art Triennial* 1st ed., 2007 (NYU Sydney; Sydney Uni)

Sutton, Peter, *Dreamings, The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, 1998 (NYU Sydney; Sydney Uni)

Neale, Margo, *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* (NYU Sydney; Sydney Uni)


Perkins, Hetti. *Art and Soul* (NYU Sydney; Sydney Uni)

Perkins, Hetti *One Sun One Moon* (NYU Sydney; Sydney Uni)

*Meerreeeng-An: Here is My Country*, 2010 (NYU Sydney)

*When the Wattles Bloom Again: The Life and Times of William Barak, Last Chief of the Yarra Yarra Tribe*, by Shirley W. Wiencke (1984) (NYU Sydney; Sydney Uni)


*Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia*, Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones (NYU Sydney; Sydney Uni)

*Painting the Land Story*, Luke Taylor 1999 (Sydney Uni)

*Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art*, Seattle Art Museum (NYU Sydney)

*Fine Early Aboriginal and Oceanic Art*, Mossgreen Auctions 2009 (NYU Sydney)

*The Moving Images of Tracey Moffatt*, Catherine Summerhayes (NYU Sydney; Sydney Uni)
Internet Research Guidelines
None

Additional Required Equipment
None

Session 1
What is Aboriginal Art? A Journey to Recognition
February 13
Required Readings:
Morphy, Aboriginal Art, pp. 13 – 65

Films/Media: Art + Soul episode 1 (2010), dir. Hetti Perkins (55 mins)

Session 2
The Cultural Context of Aboriginal Art
February 20
Required Readings:
Morphy, Aboriginal Art, pp. 67 – 180

Recommended:

Session 3
Sydney’s first art tradition: Aboriginal rock engravings
February 27
Required Readings:
Val Attenbrow, Sydney’s Aboriginal Past (2010): pp. 1-56 (skim); 143-151 (read carefully); 161-188 (focus on Bondi and Ku Ring Gai Chase sites).

Case Study of Murujuga (Burrup Peninsula):

Recommended:
**Homework Assignment:** Please visit the rock art site at Bondi Golf Links (Sydney’s inner-city rock engravings) before class-time.

**Field Trip** to Ku Ring Gai Chase National Park and guided tour of Aboriginal rock art sites with Macleay Museum curator Matt Poll. Stay tuned for details; this excursion will be instead of regularly-scheduled class time at the Academic Centre.

**Session 4**

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

March 6

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


Recommended:

Films/Media: *First Australians* Episode 3, “Freedom For Our Lifetime,” (~50 mins), and clips from Culture Victoria website on possum-skin cloak project; kangaroo-teeth jewelry-making; and Auntie Joy Murphy on her uncle Barak.

**Session 5**

**Albert Namatjira and the Hermannsburg School**

March 13

Required Readings:
Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, p. 261 - 282


Recommended:


Films/Media: *Jedda* (1955), dir. Charles Chauvel (101 mins); and *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989), dir. Tracey Moffatt (17 mins). ***Please be prepared to stay an extra 30 minutes today to accommodate media***

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

**Session 6**

**Papunya: Genesis and Genius?**

March 20

Required Readings:
Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, p. 282 – 316


**Recommended:**
Geoff Bardon, *Papunya Tula: Art of the Western Desert*, pp. 10-46

**Homework Assignment:** Every day at 11am, the Art Gallery of New South Wales offers free guided tours of its Aboriginal exhibitions in the Yiribana Gallery, departing from the main Information Desk. Please take one of these guided tours of the exhibition, Papunya Tula, Works On Paper, before class-time, and come prepared to discuss in class.

**Film/Media:** *Mr Patterns* (2004), dir. Catriona McKenzie (55 mins)

**Special Event:** Message Sticks Festival 2013 at Sydney Opera House, March 21-24. Stay tuned for announcements from NYU-Sydney staff about programming for dance, music, and other arts events to which you will be invited! In addition, you may be interested to attend a “conversation” between curator Djon Mundine and artist Fiona Foley to be held on March 23, 2013 at 5:30pm ($16 concession). Check out the entire program at [http://messagesticks.sydneyoperahouse.com/](http://messagesticks.sydneyoperahouse.com/).

### Session 7

**March 24 **

Please note that we are meeting on Sunday night, March 24 for the auction INSTEAD OF CLASS TIME ON WEDNESDAY, March 27

Aboriginal Art on the Market (part 1): Circulation and Value in/through Auctions, Art Centers, Galleries, Museums

Pick two of the following three sub-headings, and read both readings in the categories you select. Consider the readings in the third category to be recommended, not required.

**Auctions**

**Circulation and Value**

**Repatriation**

**Field trip** to Bonhams Auction of the Laverty Collection of Contemporary Australian Art, to be held on Sunday afternoon/evening (time to be confirmed), March 24, at Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art in the Rocks. **Homework Assignment:** Before the auction, please attend an auction viewing—at the MCA March 22 11am-5pm; March 23 10am-5pm; or March 24 10am-1pm; this is an important component of your learning in this week, as it is the best opportunity to engage with the artworks themselves before they are sold at auction.

**Spring Break**
No classes scheduled March 29-April 5, 2013
Session 8  
April 10  
Arnhem Land: from early contact to the distinctive styles/practices of Northeast, Central, and West

Required Readings:
Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, pp. 181-218  
Selections from *Yalangbara: Art of the Djang’kawu* (2008)  

Recommended:

Films/Media: *Dhakiyarr vs. The King* (2004), dirs. Tom Murray and Allan Collins (56 mins) and *Mimi* (2002), dir. Warwick Thornton (13 mins). Clips from Yothu Yindi (“Treaty”); Garma Festival; Chooky Dancers; and Gurrumul

Session 9  
April 17  
Aboriginal Art on the Market (part 2): Appropriation, Rights, and Ownership

Required Readings:

Recommended:
Vivien Johnson (1996), *Copyrites: Aboriginal Art in the Age of Reproductive Technologies* [exhibition catalogue]. Read all (60 pages).

Field Trip to commercial art gallery (either Roslyn Oxley9 in Paddington or Coo-ee Aboriginal Art Gallery in Bondi), and talk with gallerist about Aboriginal art, circulation on markets, and artworks and value. Stay tuned for details; this excursion will be instead of regularly-scheduled class time at the Academic Centre.

Session 10  
April 24  
Western Desert

Required Readings:
Watson, C. “Touching the Land.” In *Art from the Land*. Carty, John and Alison French.  
Selections from *Utopia: the Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye* (2008), edited by Margo Neale

Recommended:

***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 11

Culture Warriors: Art and Activism

May 1

Required Readings:
Morphy, Aboriginal Art, pp. 370 – 420

Recommended:
Richard Bell, Bell’s Theorem, Aboriginal Art: It’s a White Thing. NATSIAA, 2003

Guest Speaker: Artist and Curator Brenda Croft

Session 12

Alternative Models: Aboriginal Artists’ Cooperatives and the Indigenous Avant-Garde

May 8

Required Readings:

Field Trip to Boomalli Aboriginal Artists’ Cooperative in Leichhardt. Tour and talk by founders Bronwyn Bancroft, Euphemia Bostock, and Jeffrey Samuels. Stay tuned for details; this excursion will be instead of regularly-scheduled class time at the Academic Centre.

Session 13

Photography

May 15

Required Readings:
De Lorenzo, “Delayed Exposure: Contemporary Aboriginal Photography”
Racism, Representation, and Photography (1994), read all articles pp. 79-150.

Recommended:

Films/Media: Photographic Memory: A Portrait of Mervyn Bishop (2000), dir. Warwick Thornton (30 mins); and Portrait of a Distant Land [on Ricky Maynard]

Session 14

Art: Culture, Survival, Visibility

May 22

Required Readings:
Morphy, Aboriginal Art, p. 317-352
Michael Dodson: “The End in the Beginning: Re(de)fining Aboriginality”
Djon Mundine (2008), exhibition catalogue essay and images from Ngadhu, Ngalili, Ngeaninyagu

Recommended:

***Research Paper due May 29, 2013, at 5PM*** Investigate in depth a topic or issue in Aboriginal art—either from the provided list of suggestions, or with consultation and approval from the Instructor. 10-12 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**

This course is comprised of 10 in-class meetings and 4 fieldtrips—to best expose students to various nodes in the Indigenous Australian artworld. In addition, students will be expected to attend at least one major exhibition of Indigenous Australian art, in addition any officially-organized fieldtrips; suggestions will be provided by the Instructor in advance of your first assignment. These may include the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Museum of Contemporary Art, community and commercial art galleries (stay tuned for any announcements!). Also, up to two outside-of-class film screenings may also be scheduled. These are a vital part of your learning and attendance is mandatory.

**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.
On laptops in class:

It is ironic that wireless technologies are becoming increasingly distracting rather than useful in many educational settings. While laptops are great for writing and research, recent surveys of the use of laptops in lecture courses suggests:

“Recently, a debate has begun over whether in-class laptops aid or hinder learning. While some research demonstrates that laptops can be an important learning tool, anecdotal evidence suggests more and more faculty are banning laptops from their classrooms because of perceptions that they distract students and detract from learning. The current research examines the nature of in-class laptop use in a large lecture course and how that use is related to student learning. Students completed weekly surveys of attendance, laptop use, and aspects of the classroom environment. Results showed that students who used laptops in class spent considerable time multitasking and that the laptop use posed a significant distraction to both users and fellow students. Most importantly, the level of laptop use was negatively related to several measures of student learning, including self-reported understanding of course material and overall course performance.” (C.B. Fried, 2008. *Computers & Education* 50(3): 906-14).

Based on these resources, I have developed a set of course expectations for laptops and cellphones:

1) Cellphones should be turned completely off during lectures and seminar. Texting is not permitted during class.

2) Laptop use during class is strongly discouraged. If, however, you choose to use a laptop to take notes during lecture, I expect that you will (1) turn off your Wi-Fi access to minimize distractions to your learning; and (2) sit in a seat that will minimize distractions to others.

(Thanks to Professor Ilana Gershon, Indiana University for sourcing this research).