Indigenous Australian Art: An Analytical and Cultural Survey

Class code
ANTH-UA 9038 or SCA-UA 9836

Instructor Details
Petronella Vaarzon-Morel
pvm2@nyu.edu
0428 633 216 (mobile)
Consultation by appointment
Please allow at least 24 hours for your instructor to respond to your emails.

Class Details
Spring 2015

Indigenous Australian Art: An Analytical and Cultural Survey
Tuesday, 12:00 – 3:00pm
February 3 to May 12
Room 302
NYU Sydney Academic Centre

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 colonisation of Australia, 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 and national identity, and its aesthetic frameworks. Students will visit some of the major collections of Indigenous Australian art as well as exhibitions of contemporary works. There will also be guest presentations from Indigenous artists and Indigenous curators of art.

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 paintings of Arnhem Land to urban, politically motivated works in various media (including photography, sculpture, print-making, etc) and reflect critically on the ways in which it is displayed.
• 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/art history 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 themes, including the definition of race/Aboriginality in Australia; the recognition and representation of Indigenous Australians in various forms (the constitution, art museums, media); how value is understood/accrued on markets; destabilizing dichotomies between remote/urban, art/craft, ethnography/art, prehistory/history; defining and problematising “authenticity,” and appropriation” and many more.

**Assessment Components**

This course is comprised of in-class seminars and field trips—to best expose students to various nodes in the Indigenous Australian art world. Students will also be expected to attend at least one major exhibition of Indigenous Australian art, in addition to any officially-organised field trips.

**Class participation includes two components:**

1) Active engagement in discussions and respectful listening; collaborative group work as occasionally assigned (10%).

2) 15 minute presentation of course materials during the semester (to be decided via student sign-up on the first class). You will need to summarise authors’ arguments, present major themes, and raise questions for further discussion. Collaboration with another student may be necessary depending on numbers. Film/video/web clips and/or PowerPoint are welcome but not required (10%).

**Review of a current exhibition of Indigenous Australian art around Sydney: 4-5 pages; (15%)**

Your instructor will provide a listing with addresses.

- Due by 12pm, Tuesday March 3 (Session 5)

**Presentation on a work of art: 10 minutes; (15%).**

Visit the Art Gallery of New South Wales and select and research one work of art by an Indigenous artist that is on display and prepare a 10 minute, object-centered talk on this work. We will be presenting in front of the selected works in the Yiribana Gallery at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

- Due by 12pm, Tuesday March 31 (Session 8)

**Profile of an art producing community: 4-5 pages; (15%)**

You will compose a profile of an Indigenous art producing community in Australia detailing its first experiments with making art for the public domain. Please specify the cultural, historic, stylistic negotiations that informed the community’s adaptive practices and include some information on one of its better-known members.

- Due by 12pm, Tuesday April 21 (Session 11)
Final Research paper: 10-12 pages; (35%)
Write on a significant topic/issue in Aboriginal art using at least three of the class readings. Assessment criteria and a list of suggestions will be distributed in session 8; you may also choose your own topic/issue in consultation with the lecturer. Please schedule an in-person conversation; email is not sufficient).

• Due by 5pm Wednesday May 13 (Session 14)

Written work must include appropriate and consistent citations and references (reference lists are not included in the required number of pages); please follow NYU’s Style Guide available on the NYU Classes site for our course (check under “Resources”).

Failure to submit or fulfil any required course component will result 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.

**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.

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

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

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

### Grade Conversions

This course 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
Late Submission of Work

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

Late work should be submitted in person to the Academic Coordinator during regular office hours (9:00am-5:00pm, Monday-Friday). In the absence of the Academic Coordinator, another member of the administrative staff can accept the work in person. The NYUS staff will mark down the date and time of submission in the presence of the student. Students must also submit an electronic copy of late written work to Turn-It-In within 24 hours.

Work submitted after the submission time without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale (for the assignment) 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.

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.

Attendance Policy

Study abroad at Global Academic Centres is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centres is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalised with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade for every week of classes missed.

The class roster will be marked in the first five minutes of class and anyone who arrives after this time will be considered absent. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences will result in harsher penalties, including failure.

Classroom Expectations

This is a seminar subject and requires the active participation of all students. It also requires engaged discussion, including listening to and respecting other points of view. Your behaviour in class should respect your classmates’ desire to learn. It is important for you to focus your full attention on the class, for the entire class period.
• Arrive to class on time.
• Once you are in class, you are expected to stay until class ends. Leaving to make or take phone calls, to meet with classmates, or to go to an interview, is not acceptable behaviour.
• Phones, digital music players, and any other communications or sound devices are not to be used during class. That means no phone calls, no texting, no social media, no email, and no internet browsing at any time during class.
• Laptop computers and tablets are not to be used during class except in rare instances for specific class-related activity expressly approved by your instructor.
• The only material you should be reading in class is material assigned for that class. Reading anything else, such as newspapers or magazines, or doing work from another class, is not acceptable.
• Class may not be recorded in any fashion – audio, video, or otherwise – without permission in writing from the instructor.

**Required Texts**


**Supplemental Texts**

• Peter Sutton, *Dreamings, The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, 1998
• Margo Neale, *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*
• Benjamin Genocchio, *Dollar Dreaming: Inside the Aboriginal Art World*. Hardie Grant Books, 2008
• Hetti Perkins, *Art and Soul*
• Hetti Perkins, *One Sun One Moon*
• Meerreeng-An: Here is My Country, 2010
• Shirley W. Wiencke, *When the Wattles Bloom Again: The Life and Times of William Barak, Last Chief of the Yarra Yarra Tribe*, 1984
• *Yalangbara: Art of the Djang’kawu* (2009)
• Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia*,
• Pamela McClusky and Wally Caruana, *Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art*, Seattle Art Museum
• Catherine Summerhayes, *The Moving Images of Tracey Moffatt*
• *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*
• Alison French, *Seeing the Centre: The art of Albert Namatjira* 1902-1959 (2002), National Gallery of Australia
Session 1  What is Indigenous Art? A Journey to Recognition.
Tuesday February 3

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:

Homework Assignment: Research the Indigenous peoples from your hometown or city and write one or two paragraphs based on your findings. Please be prepared to present and discuss briefly on the bus on February 10 (Session 2)

Session 2  The Memory of Place: Aboriginal rock engravings of Sydney and Murujuga
Tuesday February 10

Required Reading:

Required field trip/excursion: Guided tour of Aboriginal rock art sites at Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park with Matt Poll, Curator of Indigenous Heritage and Repatriation Project, Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney. This excursion will be instead of the regularly scheduled class time at the Academic Centre. We will meet at the Academic Centre and a bus will take us to Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, which will take approximately 45 minutes. Depending on traffic, we may be a little late returning to Sydney. Please wear comfortable closed-toed shoes, as we will be walking on uneven, rocky and sometimes steep paths. A hat, sunscreen, sunglasses and a bottle of water are recommended for the field trip.

Homework Assignment: Visit the Art Gallery of New South Wales and select and begin research on one work of art by an Indigenous artist that is currently on display. Most of the Indigenous works are exhibited in the Yiribana Gallery which is on the lower ground floor of the Gallery. You will need to take the escalators down three levels to reach the Yiribana Gallery. This research will form the basis of a 10 minute talk that you will deliver in front of the selected work and in front of your class mates on Tuesday March 31 (Session 8).
Please email me your selection by **Tuesday February 24 (Session 4)** to avoid duplication and to ensure that the work will still be on display for our presentations. Everyday at 11am, the Art Gallery of New South Wales offers free-guided tours of its Indigenous collection in the Yiribana Gallery, departing from the main Information Desk. Consider joining one of these or other free-guided tours. Please note that Indigenous art is hung throughout the Gallery and isn’t just on the lower ground floor.

### Session 3 Indigenous Art in the 19th Century: William Barak, Tommy McRae and Mickey of Ulladulla

**Tuesday February 17**

**Guest Lecturer:** Jonathan Jones  
(Wiradjuri Artist, Educator and Curator will discuss his own art practice, which is reflective of and informed by southeast histories and practices.)

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**


### Session 4 First Citizen: Albert Namatjira and the Hermannsburg School

**Tuesday February 24**

**Guest Lecturer:** TBC

**Required Reading:**
- Brenda L Croft “Albert’s Gift,” in *Australian Aboriginal Art*, Issue 1, 2009, pp. 70–75.

**Recommended Reading:**

**In Class Media:** Excerpts from *Art + Soul* Series 1 episode 3 Bitter and Sweet. (2010), dir. Hetti Perkins (55 mins)

**Session 5  Eulogies in Ochre: Art from the East Kimberley and the Tiwi Islands**

**Tuesday March 3**

**Guest Lecturer:** Stephen Gilchrist

**Required Reading:**


**Assignment due:** Review of a current exhibition of Indigenous art around Sydney: 4-5 pages; (15%)

**Session 6  Across the Desert: The Art Producing Communities of Utopia, and Yuendumu.**

**Tuesday March 10**

**Guest Speaker:** Dr Harriet Fesq

(Writer, Curator and former Co-ordinator of the Durrmu Arts Centre Peppimenarti, Northern Territory, Harriet Fesq will explain the Art Centre Model that characterises much of the Indigenous Art Market and her own experiences of managing an Art Centre.)

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


**SPRING BREAK: 16–20 March**
Session 7  Northeast, Central, and Western Arnhem Land: Contact, Collections and Cultural Practices.

Tuesday March 24

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


Required field trip/excursion: We will view the Arnott’s Collection of bark paintings and the permanent collection at The Museum of Contemporary Art with Keith Munro, Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs. An app is available for those who would like to engage with the collection through their devices. [http://www.mca.com.au/apps/](http://www.mca.com.au/apps/)

Session 8  Class Presentations

Tuesday March 31

We will be meeting at the Art Gallery of New South Wales for our presentations on an Indigenous work of art in the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

**Assignment due: Presentation on a work of art: 10 minutes; (15%)**

Session 9  Papunya: Genesis and Genius?

Tuesday April 7

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


In Class Media: Excerpts from Mr Patterns (2004), dir. Catriona McKenzie (55 mins)
### Session 10  Alternative Models: Aboriginal Artists’ Cooperatives and the Indigenous Avant-Garde

Tuesday April 14

**Guest Lecturer: Artist Tony Albert**

(Girramay artist, Tony Albert was the 2014 winner of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Prize and the Basil Sellers Art Prize. He is a member of the proppaNow art collective and will speak about his independent and collaborative practice that is indexed to social justice.

**Required Reading:**


### Session 11  Daguerreotypes, Stereotypes, Prototypes: Reframing Indigenous Photography

Tuesday April 21

**Required Reading:**


**Assignment due: Profile of an Indigenous art producing community 4-5 pages; (15%)**


### Session 12  Aboriginal Art on the Market: Circulation and Value in/through Auctions, Art Centres, Galleries, Museums.

Tuesday April 28

**Guest Lecturer: Tim Klingender**

(Tim Klingender, Former Director, Head of Aboriginal Art at Sotheby's will come to class and speak to us about his experiences with Sotheby’s and the current state of the Indigenous Art Market. He will also discuss the resale royalty act, cultural heritage export licenses for Indigenous art and the importance of provenance research.)

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


**Session 13  Indigenising Museums: Repatriation, Activism and the Politics of Curation**

**Tuesday May 5**

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


*Please come to class prepared to talk about your final research paper.*

**Session 14  Art: Culture, Visibility, and Survival**

**Tuesday May 12**

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


*Homework Assignment.* Please bring a coloured print out, or alternatively, email me at least two days before class, one or two images of your favourite Indigenous works that you have encountered during the semester. This will fuel our final discussions in class and we will co-curate an exhibition in class and invite NYUS staff to attend.

*Assignment: Final Research Paper due by 5pm Wednesday May 13: 10-12 pages (35%)*
Petronella Vaarzon-Morel (M.A., Indiana University) is a social/cultural anthropologist whose interests include Indigenous relations to the land, personhood, identity and human-animal relations. Over many years she has conducted ethnographic research with Indigenous groups in central and northern Australia for Aboriginal land and Native Title claims, and for a range of other issues in such areas as environment management, the ‘stolen generation’, health and housing.

In collaboration with Warlpiri she co-authored the book *Warlpiri Women’s Voices*. Her academic publications include articles and chapters in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes, and she has presented papers at national and international conferences. In 2012 she was the recipient of an Anthropology of Native Title Services (ANTS) Research Fellowship, at the University of Adelaide, and in 2013 a Research Writing Placement at the Centre for Native Title Anthropology, Australian National University. Her pedagogic background includes a period teaching introductory anthropology at Indiana University, Bloomington.