

## ARTH 340: *Islomania: an exploration of contemporary art in the Greek islands*

Summer Session I | May 29 - June 24, 2023

Athens, Eleusis, Hydra, Poros, Crete

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### Course Description

*Islomania*, according to author Lawrence Durrell, is “a rare but by no means unknown affliction of the spirit. There are people [...] who find islands somehow irresistible. The mere knowledge that they are on an island, a little world surrounded by the sea, fills them with an indescribable intoxication.”

Durrell, L. 1953. *Reflections on a Marine Venus*. Faber and Faber, London: p. 1.

True to the quote above, Greek islands, especially in the summer, have been inscribed in the collective consciousness as utopias of leisure, fun, the beach, and a laid back lifestyle. On the other hand, contemporary art is identified with cutting edge interpretations of the human condition, offering ample opportunities for aesthetic appreciation, but also contemplation and personal transformations.

Interestingly, in the past few years, a beautiful paradox has been observed, leading to an increasing trend: Greek islands as a destination for world-class contemporary art exhibitions, ranging from group shows of emerging artists to a glorious recent solo Jeff Koons show on the island of Hydra. Prestigious foundations, internationally acclaimed artists, established curators, sensational venues, imaginative exhibitions, all can be found in a plethora of island settings. The ‘experiment’ is paying off, with popularity, visibility and visitability of the aforementioned shows on the rise.

The course will follow this trajectory via a contemporary art island-hopping process, while also exploring the main(stream) scene for contemporary art in Greece in Athens, a city that has evolved into a contemporary art metropolis in the past few years. A brief history of contemporary art and its curatorial practices will establish the context of the course and allow us to immerse ourselves in its various genres and manifestations before we travel around. The range of venues we will visit spans the National Museum of Contemporary Art, archaeological museums and monuments engaging with contemporary art, commercial galleries, private foundations, state institutions, popup summer-only events, gardens, derelict buildings, and the street-as-art gallery.

**STUDY NOTE:** A considerable amount of work for class will be conducted in the field, i.e. in museums, galleries and contemporary art shows. The material covered is study material so students are strongly advised to take notes during class visits.

The aim of this course is to create the context for students to form a solid and educated opinion about what constitutes contemporary art in Greece in the 21st century as well as how we can all contribute, as educated travelers, to the preservation and dissemination of this cultural knowledge. Alongside the particulars of the Greek situation, the students will acquaint themselves with the terminology, international framework and challenges for contemporary art in the current world.

### Course Approach

To investigate the issues outlined above, we will engage in the following:

Reading: We will read a wide variety of texts ranging from current scholarship on contemporary art, curating, museums and art history to philosophy, sociology and related disciplines.

Analyzing and interpreting: We will critically analyze and interpret our first-hand experience from scheduled class visits to museums, galleries, and exhibitions where we will study contemporary art in a visual, typological and contextual manner. Our tools will be field notes, student presentations and discussion on site followed by discussion in class and independent student work (individually and in groups) in the form of assignments.

Working and thinking with others: Art is a collective endeavor, so is education. Building the culture of the class so that genuine inquiry is possible will take concerted effort. Because we rely on everyone's contribution, the course will follow the pedagogy of a seminar, focused on motivation for participation in an atmosphere where all (informed) opinions are encouraged.

Writing: This course involves a significant amount of writing of different kinds. You will take brief field notes during visits, as mentioned above; you will write brief reports on selected readings to present to class as assigned. You will take scheduled written midterm and final exams. Please consult essay and reading rubrics for more detailed instructions.

N.B. Working and thinking with others is essential and fundamental for the successful completion of the course. Contemporary art in Greece, and elsewhere, can only be perceived and studied as a collective effort, and the exchange of opinions and information is vital for a class environment that is fundamentally inclusive, encouraging and open to different and, at times, diverse views.

## Learning Objectives

The course **aims at an in-depth understanding of what constitutes contemporary art and its context (curatorial, spatial, cultural) in the 21<sup>st</sup> c.**, beyond the established, popular and obvious connection with art and its history. It is designed ideally for students of archaeology, art history, fine arts, curating, classics, philosophy, architecture, social and cultural anthropology, heritage studies, tourism management, sustainability and environmental studies, or any discipline with interest in the arts and art institutions.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Acquire a firm knowledge of trends, genres and manifestations of contemporary art.
2. Inquire into the reasons why Greek islands are ideal laboratories for contemporary art in the summer.
3. Unravel curatorial practices specific to contemporary art.
4. Reflect on the role of the curator and the artist in 21<sup>st</sup> century art.
5. Delve into the history of contemporary art and its connection with the art that preceded it.
6. Explore a wide thematic range of art genres through a variety of exhibition modes.
7. Experience contemporary art in sensational settings as a multisensory engagement of the self.
8. Familiarize themselves with basic terms and literature, pertaining to art and its history.
9. Through visits to venues and exhibitions of contemporary art, understand site management, curatorial practices and people flows, and develop the ability to critically assess how such places become integral for the cultivation of aesthetics and ethics in relation to art.
10. Analyze the parameters that contribute to the making and staging of a contemporary art show.
11. Critically assess and evaluate exhibitions and curatorial projects whether in museums and art institutions or elsewhere.
12. Position themselves on the debate about art and society in the world of today.

## Course Requirements

Due to the nature of the course (intensive daily attendance and frequent travel), students are not required to submit a lengthy final essay (i.e. term paper). However, a course grade will be assigned, based on throughout-the-course student evaluation.

Components contributing to the final grade will be the following:

- An in-class 2-hr final exam
- A brief midterm essay (c. 500 words, see relevant rubric on moodle) and oral presentation thereof
- Active participation (not merely physical presence, but the expression of critical opinions and contribution to class dialogue) and working together with the professor and fellow students.
- Short field reports and student presentations, individual and/ or group, when visiting sites and monuments (details on schedule below)
- In-class debate (date and topic on schedule below; see also rubric on moodle)
- Daily readings. Please note that the daily reading load varies depending on each week's subject matter and/ or travel load. Readings are available on the Professor's reserve shelf at the CYA library as well as on moodle as .pdf documents or links to documents, videos, and images.

## **Class Field Work**

Field walks and field work are essential components of the course. The work that is accomplished in the classroom is complementary and preparatory for the field work (visits to shows, field walks). The core of the course happens in the field, and is based on discussion, observation, and critical processing of information in a multisensory manner with class participants being present physically and mentally on every field trip. Contemporary art is palpable and embedded in the life of Greek islands in the summer and it is only in the field that the aim of the course is realized fully.

## **Evaluation and Grading**

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

Field reports 10%

Debate 20%

Midterm essay 10%

Oral presentation of midterm essay 10%

Participation 10%

Final exam 40%

**TOTAL: 100%**

## **Evaluation Criteria - Course Assignments**

Debate

- Criterion 1: arguments
- Criterion 2: team work
- Criterion 3: presentation skills

Midterm essay and oral presentation thereof

- Criterion 1: creative and critical approach
- Criterion 2: bibliography
- Criterion 3: succinct and convincing presentation of case to class

## CYA Regulations and Accommodations

### Attendance Policy

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential. Absences are recorded and have consequences. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office.

### Academic Accommodations

If you are a registered student with a disability (with your home institution) and you are entitled to learning accommodation, please inform the Office of Academic Affairs and make sure that your school forwards the necessary documentation.

### Policy on Original Work

Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be provided (Check the Student Handbook, pg. 7).

### Use of Laptops

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work. A 'laptop-free zone' is available in the classroom for students who do not use electronic devices and who feel distracted if they sit close to one.

**Course Outdoors Activities Note** The course field trips might require moderate physical activity, i.e. a considerable amount of walking in high temperatures, standing, and/ or hill walking. Make sure to wear a hat and sunscreen and stay hydrated during field trips. Snacks are also advised. Certainly, there will be breaks.

### Books, Course Materials, Moodle

For books, please see detailed bibliography at the end of the syllabus and specific readings for each day. You are responsible for keeping up with every day's required reading, as laid out on the syllabus and posted on Moodle. Recommended reading is strongly advised but not mandated.

**Websites** (checked for functionality at time of syllabus drafting. If any non-working link is found, please notify the professor)

1. New York Times article about Athenian graffiti and street art, 2014

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/16/world/europe/across-athens-graffiti-worth-a-thousand-words-of-malaise.html>

2. The Economist article about Athenian graffiti and street art, 2017

<https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21729765-anti-austerity-artists-are-impressing-tourists-how-angry-street-art-making-athens-hip>

3. Professor Hadji's article about Athenian graffiti and street art, 2019

[https://issuu.com/isrf/docs/isrf\\_bulletin\\_issue\\_xviii/s/84856](https://issuu.com/isrf/docs/isrf_bulletin_issue_xviii/s/84856)

4. Documenta 14 Official

Website

<http://www.documenta14.de/en/>

5. The Parthenon of Books, Marta Minujín, 2017

<http://www.documenta14.de/en/news/21124/marta-minujin-s-the-parthenon-of-books-is-taking-shape-in-kassel>

6. The Parthenon of Books, Marta Minujín, 1983

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/minujin-the-parthenon-of-books-t143>

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## Class Schedule

Class Day	Day/Date	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due
1	Tue June 27	<p><b>Classroom</b></p> <p><b>Contemporary art: an introduction</b>  <b>Description</b>            Part A: We introduce ourselves, and the course objectives and requirements are presented. We explore the syllabus to ensure basic points (requirements, deadlines, assignments, bibliography, final grade breakdown, travel schedule) are thoroughly understood.            Part B: The first meeting ends with a library tour, with special emphasis on the course reserve shelf.</p>
2	Wed June 28	<p><b>Curator collection spectator</b>  <b>Description</b>            We enter the world of contemporary art by introducing basic concepts, derivations and stakeholders in the world of curating contemporary art. Why do we make a big deal about curating? Does art need to be curated? Is there anything that is <i>not</i> curated anymore? We will address these questions and pave the way to the theory and history sessions that follow in the first part of the course.</p> <p><i>Required reading</i>            Tokumitsu 2015,  <a href="https://newrepublic.com/article/122589/when-did-we-all-become-curators">https://newrepublic.com/article/122589/when-did-we-all-become-curators</a>            Berger 1972, Ch. 1: 7-34; Ranciere 2007</p> <p><i>Recommended reading</i>            Süsskind, 1985</p> <p><b><u>Short assignment</u></b>  <b><u>What can be curated? Short (two-paragraph) essay due at the beginning of next week</u></b></p>
3	Thu June 29	<p><b>National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST)</b>            (FIX metro station or a short walk from Pangrati)</p> <p><i>Description</i>            A project that was in the making for far too long; a museum that was homeless for decades; a listed building that celebrates Greek modernism at its best; a museum that opened in the heart of the pandemic and managed to win our hearts. A tour of the permanent collection of the NMCA of Greece and a discussion of new developments (new Director's plan, Daskalopoulos donation).</p> <p><i>Required reading</i>  <a href="https://zkm.de/de/hans-belting-contemporary-art-and-the-museum-in-the-global-age">https://zkm.de/de/hans-belting-contemporary-art-and-the-museum-in-the-global-age</a>            EMST catalogue (reserve shelf at CYA library)</p>

4 Fri June 30

**Eleusis 2023 field trip**

*Description*

2023 is a seminal year for the once glorious, recently heavily industrialized city of Eleusina near Athens. ELEUSIS 2023, a cultural capital institution that saw the city of Eleusis win the bid a few years ago, after a turbulent course with many changes in its Board, staff and mission, has finally launched its program, heavily relying upon contemporary art. We will visit venues, meet with stakeholders, and understand contemporary art in an unusual setting, contemplating the legacy it will leave behind once 2023 is over.

5 Mon July 3

**Crete trip**

**Classroom**

*Description*

Crete trip orientation. A brief historical trajectory of a varied and diverse, often contested history, that will provide us with the cultural context to study contemporary art on the island of Crete, the largest Greek island, and once an independent state.

Our contemporary art island tour will take us from one end of the island to the other, from an East to West route, stopping off in the major cities of Crete: Agios Nikolaos, Heraklion, Rethimnon, and Chania.

**EVENING: BOAT TO HERAKLION, please be on time!**

6 Tue July 4

**East Crete Agios Nikolaos  
Mamidakis Art Beach Hotel**

*Description*

An institution that is gaining popularity globally, the Art Hotel's Sculpture Garden will be explored in conversation with the Mamidakis Foundation people. This luxury resort was one of the first art hotels in Greece, with an emphasis on contemporary art and a program that is enriched every year to include, among other entities, a residency for contemporary artists and professionals of contemporary art (critics, curators, theorists etc.), an annual award for emerging artists, and a conference program.

7 Wed July 5

Night in Agios Nikolaos  
**East Crete- Plaka and Spinalonga islet visit**

*Description*

A former Venetian fortress, Ottoman town, and Leper Colony, now a listed monument on the UNESCO WHS tentative sites list. In addition, an unexpected contemporary art venue.

Discussion about the connection between (Greek) landscape, history and contemporary art; discussion about grim sites tourism management and approaches. Discussion about the increasing popularity of dark tourism. Discussion about UNESCO WHS and its criteria.

*Recommended reading:*

Hislop 2005

**FIELD REPORT 1: GROUP ASSIGNMENT: oral presentation**

**Night in Heraklion**

8	Thu July 6	<p><b>Heraklion - Rethimno</b></p> <p><i>Description</i></p> <p>We will visit the Municipal Gallery – Basilica of St. Marc at Heraklion, where temporary exhibitions of contemporary art are hosted in a formerly religious setting, before we take a short walk in the neighborhood of Lakkos to see an open-air street-art gallery that has shaped the character of a once derelict area. Discussion on the transformative power of (contemporary) art.</p> <p>We leave for Rethimno, where we will visit the Contemporary Art Museum of Crete, the only designated contemporary art museum on the island.</p> <p>Lunch at Rethiminon Night in Chania</p>
9	Fri July 7	<p><b>Chania</b></p> <p><i>Description</i></p> <p>We will visit the Municipal Gallery to view the contemporary art exhibition on show, also Yeni Camii at the Old Port, and KAM, regular venues for contemporary art. We will also visit the New Archaeological Museum of Chania, to discuss the relationship between contemporary architecture and the display of antiquities.</p>
10	Mon July 10	<p>Friday evening: return <b>Take-home midterm essay preparation</b></p>
11	Tue July 11	<p><b>Poros/ Hydra trip</b></p> <p><i>Description</i></p> <p>Two traditionally artistic islands that have captured the heart and mind of many artists from different genres (from poet George Seferis to Leonard Cohen and Brice Marden, to name but a very few). A stone’s throw from Attica, these venues will form our next island laboratories for the exploration of contemporary art.</p> <p>We begin with Poros and the first island-exclusive contemporary art gallery, <i>Citronne</i>, which started the trend and then expanded with a permanent venue in Athens.</p> <p>Night in Poros</p>
12	Wed July 12	<p><b>Hydra</b></p>

## *Description*

The car-free tranquility of Hydra is ideally complemented by a blooming contemporary art scene. We will visit DESTE Foundation's Slaughterhouse annual temporary exhibition of contemporary art. In addition, we will explore the once experimental now established unique contemporary art institution *Scholeion*, a one-man show by multitalented and multifaceted artist/ curator Dimitrios Antonitsis. An optional trip to the residence/ studio of Greek painter Panagiotis Tetsis completes our Hydra experience. NOTE: The Historical Museum of Hydra is wonderful, but outside the scope of our class. However, on occasion they host contemporary art exhibitions in a very conservative, conventional museum setting. If this is the case, it will be added to our program.

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Thu July 13

Night in Athens

### **SNFCC**

#### *Description*

A Renzo Piano creation, a dream-come-true in a former wasteland, this architectural assemblage, that houses the National Library and the National Opera House of Greece, also hosts an array of contemporary art pieces and on occasion contemporary art shows, ranging from Sofia Vari to Louise Bourgeois.

14

Fri July 14

### **Takis Foundation**

#### *Description*

Takis, an iconic Greek artist of the avant garde, long-lived and prolific in his artistic production, left behind a legacy of art and activism, as well as a Foundation. Our visit entails acquaintance with the oeuvre of Takis, also discussion about the reality of running an artist-endowed Foundation for Contemporary Art in Greece.

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Mon July 15

**Tbd**

16

Tue July 16

**Return – preparation for debate**

17

Wed July 17

**Athenian street art walk: an exploration of the largest contemporary art gallery in town!**

18

Thu July 18

**Classroom**

**Debate and final exam review**

A. Debate: theme TBD

B. Final exam review session

19

Fri July 19

**Classroom**

**Final exam, 9:00-11:00**

NOTE: students with relevant academic accommodations will be granted extra time

NOTE:

*Course schedule, in terms of subjects and readings, may be subject to change to benefit student learning and in keeping up to date with current research*

## Full Bibliography

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# CYA Syllabus

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