

## Syllabus

# BIOART SEMINAR // NATURE AS MATERIAL

### Instructor

Brittany Ransom ::  
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Office hours by appointment

Location: Taos Campus  
Time: May Term May 13 - May 30

Course Website:  
<http://bioart.brittanyransom.com/>

\*\* The syllabus and course schedule is subject modification throughout the semester. Please feel free to make suggestions on the depth to which various materials are covered if the course is moving too quickly. The schedule will be updated online as the course progresses. You will be given adequate notification of any changes in regard assignment due-dates. \*\*

### Description //

Utilizing the natural landscape of Taos, New Mexico as a main material, this course introduces artists and collaborative groups working with nature, science, and alternative organic methods as material to produce sculpture, installations, and performance based work and research. This is a combined seminar and studio course that will focus on BioArt. This course explores nature as material, research based art practices that engage in biology, the environment, genetics, technoscience, and the use and collaboration with plants and animals, organic, and synthetically 'organic' materials. Open to Art, Creative Computation, Computer Science, Engineering, Biological, and Social Science Majors.

### Course Goals //

This course aims to allow students to both practically and theoretically engage in the intersection of biological sciences and art through accessing nature as material and professional artists and researchers engaging in this practice as well. Thus students will be able to evaluate and participate in critical practices and discussion about bio art concepts and beyond from a fine arts perspective. Students will also be able to articulately explore and debate issues of accessibility, accountability, and overspecialization in contemporary Bio Art practices. Creative assignments will provide students the opportunity to access nature and science as a material to produce a final exhibition ready piece by the end of the semester.

### Student Learning Outcomes //

-Students will be introduced to artists, designers, and collaborative groups working with various forms of digital / hybrid media as material within the context of contemporary art practice to produce sculpture, installations, and performance based work and research. This is a combined seminar and studio course that will allow students to focus on the methodologies of various topics including BioArt, technology and the body, interactive sculpture, installation, sound, and performance. Students will explore various digital tools as material, research based art practices that engage in programmable and technological media to create their own artistic projects.

-Students will both practically and theoretically engage in the intersection of digital materials and art through accessing current technologies, artists, and researchers engaging in hybrid practices. Thus students will be able to evaluate and participate in critical practices and discussions about digital / hybrid media concepts and beyond from a critical fine arts perspective. Students will be able to articulately explore and debate issues of accessibility, acceptability, and specialization in digital / hybrid media in contemporary art practices.

-Students will be able to choose the appropriate form (formal presentation, artistic installation, or gallery show) in which to present their research and creative projects through open critiques, group discussion, and art exhibitions.

-Students will design and consider the way they present their research and artistic projects to suit their particular audience (peers or public) when presenting their work for critique or evaluation. Students will be able to accurately describe their methods of research, fabrication, and conceptualization of each of their assignments through an open discussion with peers and visiting artists / public.

-Students will be able to use presentation software such as PowerPoint, Keynote, or Presi to present their physical artistic projects to enhance public presentations, critiques, and evaluations.

- Practically, Theoretically, and Conceptually engage in the intersection Art, Nature, and Science as practice and research.
- Comprehension of the histories of contemporary trends of BioArt
- Ability to speak critically and effectively in seminar discourse and art critique formats.
- Create a final polished art work / installation / research paper.

### **Student Responsibilities //**

A background in biological sciences or knowledge thereof is not necessary for the successful completion of this course. However such knowledge could be helpful.

### **Assignments //**

This course will take place as a seminar discussion based on assigned readings and video presentations, and lectures. The assignments in this course will be a combination of reading assignments, responses, and studio based creative assignments. A series of assignments can be found on the following pages that will support this focus. Please visit the homework & assignments section of the class website for more information and updates throughout the semester.

### **Reading Materials:**

**Open source** reading materials provided

### **Physical Materials:**

- Moleskine Sketchbook: <http://www.moleskine.com/en/collections/model/product/plain-soft-notebook-extra-large>
- Personal Computer

### **Evaluation //**

Comprehension of concepts, integration of artistic goals, and imaginative ingenuity in creative projects will be considered. More importantly, participation in class discussions and the amount of effort put into each class and outside work will be evaluated as will the ability to inventively apply ideas for creative assignments. Personal initiative, research, participation and artistic development over the length of the semester will also be the main source of evaluation.

### **Grading //**

**Class Participation 30%** - Class participation includes attending scheduled class lab time, workshops, critiques, discussions, and an overall active engagement in class.

**Reading Responses 20%** - Each week we will look at several artists and collaborative groups working within the realm of Bio Art. You will be asked to submit a response about a specific topic (TBD weekly by instructor) to the course blog. Feel free to use the blog to also share other interesting projects or information that you might find useful to yourself and your classmates. The blog is a place meant for you to share your ideas about class topics, resources, collaborative ideas, and interesting projects that you might come across. A username and password have already been created for you and will be assigned to you the first day of class. Late blog responses will result in a lowered grade.

**Assignments 1-4 (collectively) 40%** - The specifics of these assignments can be found below and on the course website. Each assignment is worth 10% of your grade and are collectively worth 40%. Assignments that are turned in late will be penalized one letter grade.

per class meeting that they are late. Assignments that are turned in a week late or later will be reviewed but will be given a failing grade.

**The Final Project is worth 30%** - The final project will consist of an artistic work or installation of your choosing utilizing the skills obtained in lab exercises and inspired by course content. This project will be completely up to your design. Please see the homework and assignments section both in this syllabus and on the course website for details.

### **Attendance //**

Attendance is **MANDATORY** as there are lecture topics that cannot be made up outside of class. The instructor will **NOT** be available to personally re-teach a class if you are absent unless it was for an excused absence.

Be considerate of other classmates and show up on time for class. Late arrivals are disruptive for everyone. **Being late to class three times will be considered as one unexcused absence.**

Though the instructor keeps attendance records, it is the student's responsibility to also keep track of their absences and late arrivals. The instructor may, but is not obligated to, notify the student if their total number of absences is nearing critical.

Students are expected to utilize work time during class productively. If a student leaves class early without approval from the instructor, they will be marked as absent or tardy – even if it is a "work in class" day or the instructor's lecture is completed before the class period ends.

**one unexcused absence** = no penalty except for loss of instruction

**two unexcused absences** = grade lowered 1/2 letter grade

**three unexcused absences** = grade lowered one letter grade.

**four unexcused absences** = four absences may result in an automatic failure

A PDF of each lecture will be posted to the course website after each class. This is not an open invitation to miss class, it is to offer you notes to refer to as we will be busy with hands on demos in class.

### **Disclaimer //**

Projects created in this course may be used by the department and lab for purposes of promotion for students, the Department, or the University in general. The Department may also use these materials for instructional purposes in future courses. Students will be notified accordingly. NO ANIMALS will be used in this course that are covered under

Student reading responses and personal opinions will be kept as part of class discussion. The course blog will not be made public to those outside of the university and the class.

### **First Day Login //**

You will be assigned a log in name and password to access the course blog. Please check on the first day to make sure you can log in and successfully make a test post.

### **Academic Honesty and Misconduct //**

You are bound by the Honor Code and the SMU Student Code of Conduct. For complete details, see: [http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL\\_01\\_ToC.asp](http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL_01_ToC.asp)

### **Disability Accommodations //**

Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first be registered with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. Students may call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements.

### **Religious Observance //**

Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

### **Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities //**

Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue).

### **Assignments //**

#### **Assignment #1: The Exploration of Nature as a Material**

Consider various types of natural materials based on the discussions, lectures, and examples shown in class. Create an artwork that utilizes and or exploits an element of nature as a material. This is an open ended assignment and all suggestions / trajectories to this assignment are welcome to be discussed and executed. You will meet individually with the instructor to discuss your planned approach to this assignment.

Deliverables:

- Completion of project for group discussion / critique
- Documentation: make a short (>5min) video documenting creative assignment and concept, your tools, techniques, and outcomes. Upload your video to google video, youtube, or other online resource and send the link to the instructor
- 3-5 high resolution images of your final project posted to the blog

#### **Assignment #2: Urban Nature**

Create an artwork (or performance) that addresses the meeting of urbanization and the natural world. Again this is an open ended assignment and all suggestions / trajectories to this assignment are welcome to be discussed and executed. You will meet individually with the instructor to discuss your planned approach. This assignment is open to be completed with a partner.

Examples:

Natalie Jeremijenko: <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/xdesign/>

\*\*see projects: Feral Dogs, One Trees, and Ooz

Tiffany Holmes: <http://tiffanyholmes.com>

\*\* see projects: fres 2.0, Lakewalk, and drinking the lake.

Beatriz Dacosta: <http://www.beatrizdacosta.net/pigeonblog.php>  
Michael Mercil: <http://michaelmercil.com/virtualpasture1.html>  
Phillip Ross: <http://www.philross.org/>  
Rinaldo and Youngs: <http://farmfountain.com/>  
Catherine Chalmers: <http://www.catherinechalmers.com/residents.cfm>

**Deliverables:**

- Completion of project for group discussion / critique
- Documentation: make a short (>5min) video documenting creative assignment and concept, your tools, techniques, and outcomes. Upload your video to google video, youtube, or other online resource and send the link to the instructor
- 3-5 high resolution images of your final project posted to the blog

**Assignment #3 /// Laboratory as Studio**

Students will have the opportunity to safely draw using bioluminescent bacteria as a medium. By doing this, the group will explore using bacteria (safely) as a medium to create drawing compositions. Artists working in this realm will also be introduced and discussed in class. The bioluminescent bacteria takes two days to culture and will be photographed. The photographs will be the resulting artwork. Use of the darkroom will be necessary for this project. Will need access to photo printer to print out students bio-luminescent bacteria images.

**Deliverables:** 3 Photographic Images of Final Compositions

**Assignment #4 /// Digital Compositions**

Students will work independently to create digital collages from images that they gather by using a digital microscope to collect samples from Taos. Students will print these final collages as large scale images.

**Deliverables:** 1 Complete composition printed at 1' x 3' or similar

**Assignment #5 /// FINAL PROJECT**

**Part #1:**

Create a project of your own design that speaks to the discussions, readings, and lectures held in this course dealing with BioArt and Nature as Material. A typed 1 page proposal with a drawing, sketch, or model (with approximate dimensions) attached for your final project due via email. In your one page proposal, please discuss what you would like to work on for your final project, why you want to produce this piece, and your conceptual reasoning behind wanting to create the work. Please include a list of parts and materials that you think you might need to execute this project. You will each meet with me individually to discuss your final projects on March 30th to gain approval to begin working on project and to receive feedback to help you find parts and give you conceptual feedback and other helpful resources.

\* You may work in small groups with permission

Deliverables: 1-2 Page Proposal, Drawing/Sketch/Model, Materials Needed

## **Part #2: Final Project**

In consultation with the instructor, develop a final project that shows significant mastery of topics. The project may be of any kind of experimental art piece, sculpture, or creative project that is up to your design. The piece may also be an expansion of a previously attempted project from the course so long as it is sufficiently advanced. You may expand on a previous project so long as there is significant expansion in scope. The final project will consist of an artistic work or installation of your choosing utilizing inspired by course content accompanied by a 1 page paper and short presentation of your project in class. This can be a collaborative project, however, collaboration must be pre-approved. The final project must be pre-approved by the instructor. Be prepared to have ideas in mind for your final project in mind midway through the course.

You will be graded on the creativity, execution, and concept of your piece as well as your page paper and final presentation during our final class critique on the last day of the course. Your paper should discuss the work that you have produced. Please be sure to conceptually discuss your reasonings for your final piece as well as any inspirations that may have lead you to create the work and any other information you find important to your final project.

Deliverables:

- Completion of project for group critique
- 5 well composed images of final project
- Documentation: make a short (>5min) video documenting final project, your tools, techniques, and outcomes.

### **// Additional Resources //**

Additional links to open source or free readings, informational blogs, projects, and exhibition space / opportunities to work pertaining to the discussion and creative projects happening in this course can be found here:

More will also be posted on the course website as well as a comprehensive list of artists and collaborative groups that are covered in class.

### **Blogs & Websites //**

Antenna Magazine <http://www.antennae.org.uk/>

Next Nature Blog <http://nextnature.net/>

We Make Money Not Art <http://www.we-make-money-not-art.com/>

Steve Wilson Bio Art Links <http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~infoarts/links/wilson.artlinks2.bio.html>

### **Artists Covered Throughout Course //**

Amy Youngs

Ken Rinaldo

Phillip Ross

Marlena Novak

Robert Smithson

William Wegman

Mark Dion

Hupert Dufrat

David Bowen

Hunter Cole  
Theo Yansen (artists mimicking nature)  
Ned Kahn (collaborating with nature)  
Oron Catts  
Allison Kudla  
Paul Dickinson  
Brittany Ransom  
George Gessert  
Tiffany Holmes  
Olafur Eliasson  
Natalie Jeremijenko  
Ken Goldberg (moss project)  
Keith Bentley  
Nick Cave  
Tim Hawkinson  
Tracy Heneberger  
Billy Grace  
Simen Johan  
Levi van Veluw  
Julia Lohmann (made from pig stomach works)  
David Dunn  
C-Lab  
Ursula von Rydingsvard  
Robert Adams  
Inigo Mangiano-Ovallae  
Matthew Richie  
Richard Tuttle  
Stan Brakhage  
Hans Hacke  
Kathy High  
Andy Goldsworthy  
Joseph Beuys  
Sabrina Raaf  
Nina Katchadourian  
Robert Smithson  
Haans Hacke  
Andy Goldsworth

+ more

**Course Schedule //** Class will be held on the following days from 10am-6pm with instruction and open studio time

CLASS	DAY	DATE	Topic
1	W	5.13	Introductions: Nature as Material, Model, and Mentor
2	TH	5.14	How Will We Make Things
3	F	5.15	From Nature to Form
4	M	5.18	Collecting Matter as Material
5	T	5.19	The Specimen
6	W	5.20	Life: The Lives of the Non-Human and Nature
7	TH	5.21	When Animals Look Back
8	F	5.22	In the Company of the Trees
9	M	5.25	The Lab as Studio
10	T	5.26	Uncommon Life
11	W	5.27	When Art Becomes Science
12	TH	5.28	Animal-Human-Machine-Plant
13	F	5.29	Final Critiques