



ARTH/ENV/PSCI 375 Green Art: The Aesthetics, Ethics, and Politics of Creativity in Today's World

Course Syllabus Spring Semester 2025

Instructor: Maddalena Vantaggi, MA, PMC

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: none

Class Meeting Days & Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Office Hours: by appointment after a class or via Zoom (see Moodle site)

Course Type: Standard Course

Course Fee: \$80.00

Course Description

This class will examine the interrelationship between ecology, aesthetics, politics, and ethics as they have been and are being reflected in modern and contemporary art. It will take a perspective on issues that are inevitably global in scope by looking at how artists have been addressing environmental and cultural crises since the two World Wars. We will discover the relationship between creativity and sustainability, focus on artistic action as instrument to change society, in relationship with environmental and cultural justice. We will discuss and explore these themes through both creative and analytic acts of discussing and making. In particular, we will experience the artistic act aimed at cultural and social change through personal and practical research.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

Below are the course's learning outcomes, followed by the methods that will be used to assess students' achievement for each learning outcome. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- *identify* the artist's historical and cultural process of becoming an activist (Practical Exercise).
- *summarize* relationships between political ethics and environmental aesthetics (Projects 1-3).
- *distinguish* the various kinds of responses that artists can take to impact environmental change and political crisis (Practical Exercise, Projects 1-3).
- *analyze* works of art and how they relate to contemporary political, ethical, and environmental issues and crises (Projects 1-3).
- *integrate* multiple readings, media, and resources working in group to ideate an act of art activism (Final Project).

Course Materials

Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available. The course's Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments.

Assessment

Attendance	10%
Practical Exercises	20%
Project 1	20%
Project 2	20%
Project 3 - Final	30%

Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Please note: decimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Course Requirements

Grades are based on the following criteria.

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an essential part of this course. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences per course without penalty, per Institute policy. If you attend all the other meetings, you will receive 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Practical Exercises (20%)

Students will be assigned a practical exercise following each theoretical lesson during the first weeks of the course. The exercise description will be available on Moodle, and the completed work must be submitted before the next class or directly presented in the next class. Each exercise is designed to allow students to experiment with the artistic approaches studied in class. The results will be always briefly presented by the students during class and discussed collectively.

Project 1: Art in Landscape (20%)

Students will reflect on course material about “art in and on the environment” to create their own piece of land art, made of nature as trees, water, or wind. The project must be accompanied by an artist statement explaining the meaning of the work (circa 300 words), and then documented in photographs and/or video to be explained in a class presentation. The work must be impermanent and use natural materials. Students will present their project in class explaining its motivations and inspirations. See the full prompt on Moodle.

Project 2: Re(f)used (20%)

Students will reflect on course material and ideas about “garbage and creativity” by creating an artwork or a design object made of recycled materials (plastics, cloth, glass) accompanied by a description of all the materials used in the piece. The statement (approximately 300 words) should discuss the industrial production process, origin, meaning, and environmental impact of each material. Students will display their creations in an in-class exhibition and present their work to the class, explaining their creative process and the significance of their piece.

See the full prompt on Moodle.

Project 3: Useful activism (30%)

Students will envision, plan, and create their own piece of *useful activist artwork* as installation, performance, public service which promoting environmental, social, and cultural sustainability. Students must address a specific issue, if necessary identify a specific place in Perugia where to act (with the Umbra Institute support), summarize the action, describe the needed circumstances and materials, and above all elaborate a specific intended goal of their intervention. Students will write a plan of action and manifesto (circa 300 words), act and document their projects, and present the results (graphic presentation, video, photo, etc.) during the final class. See the full prompt on Moodle.

Extension & Submitting Late Work

Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. This can be used for any assignment but the final project. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Any work submitted after the 24-hour extension will be marked zero. As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused "sick days" and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student's academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student's final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students' grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided.

Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute's Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person, or an AI generator, for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Laptop & Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be set on silent mode before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices (for example, ear buds) cannot be used during class lectures and discussions, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation.

As an instructor and as a person, I am dependent on both my computer and my telephone. That said: An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, I have a physical notebook policy: I ask you to leave your computers in your bags and phones in your pockets and use a regular notebook. There are four exceptions: 1) if you have an accommodation; 2) if you're using a tablet to take notes, 3) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer; or 4) if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools.

U.N. Sustainable Development Goals

This course contributes to the achievement of one or more goals of U.N. Agenda for Sustainable Development



Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1 JAN 21-23

Week 1: Creativity for sustainability

Meeting 1:

Introducing the course.

Icebreaker experience.

Introducing practical exercise: “My Creativity” (full prompt on Moodle).

Meeting 2:

Discussing practical exercise “My Creativity” results.

Relationship between creativity and sustainability: the role of fantasy.

Introducing practical exercise: “Connecting stories” (full prompt on Moodle).

Readings and resources for the week:

Rodari, Gianni. *The Grammar of Fantasy: An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories*. Translated by Jack Zipes. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1996. Read chapter 4 “The Fantastic Binomial”, pp. 12-15.

Perrone, Raffaella. *Integrating fantasy into the creative process*. Conference Paper of “LearnxDesign. 3rd International Conference for Design Education Researchers.” 14 July 2015, pp. 4-7.

WEEK 2 JAN 28-30

Week 2: From mimetic to abstract art

Meeting 1:

Discussing the practical exercise “Connecting stories” results.

From prehistoric art to Courbet’s “Realist Manifesto”.

Syllabus quiz.

Meeting 2:

‘900 Avant-garde: from Impressionism to Abstractionism.

Introducing practical exercise (full prompt on Moodle): “Being an artist #1”.

Readings and resources for the week:

Gustave Courbet, *Realist Manifesto*, Gustave Courbet (1861)

Wassily Kandinsky, *On the spiritual in art*, 1912, Read chapter 5 “The effect of Colour”, pp 39-45.

WEEK 3 FEB 4-6

Week 3: From conceptual art to the action

Meeting 1:

Discussing the practical exercise “Being an artist #1” results.

The Dada revolution and Duchamp’s conceptual art.

Introducing practical exercise (full prompt on Moodle): “Being an artist #2”.

Meeting 2:

Discussing practical exercise “Being an artist #2” results.

The art of the gesture: from Manzoni’s irony to Pollock’s action painting.

Introducing the practical exercise (full prompt on Moodle): “Being an artist #3”.

Readings and resources for the week:

Tristan Tzara, *Dada Manifesto*, 1918.

WEEK 4 FEB 11-13

Week 4: Art breaks into public space

Meeting 1:

Discussing practical exercise “Being an artist #3” results.

Pop art as a critique of consumerism: Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol.

The birth of happening: Allan Kaprow.

Meeting 2:

The birth of public art: Christo and Joseph Beuys.

“Being an artist: final reflection”

Readings and resources for the week:

“7000 oaks”, Lynne Cook (2004).

“Process and Participation in the Work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude” Selections from the Shunk-Kender Photography Collection (2017).

WEEK 5 FEB 18-20

Week 5: Land Art

Meeting 1:

Discussing the practical exercise results.

Working group creation (3 students per group).

Land art: from Nazca Lines to Smithsonian’s “Spiral Jetty”.

Introducing *Project 1 - Art in Landscape*

Meeting 2:

Project 1 development review.

Case studies: Burri's "Cretto" in Gibellina and "The Persistence of Value" in collaboration with Joseph Beuys.

Readings and resources for the week:

"Spiral Jetty", James Paine, documentary (2021).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=LQv3YqIiisZc&t=5s>

"Spiral Jetty", Robert Smithson, documentary (1970).

https://vk.com/video-136471876_456242781

"The Nazca Lines", Dr. Austin Mardon, Jasrita Singh, Mackenzie Schuler, Hareem Bilal, NatalieJean-Marie, Mya Elisabeth George, Nawshin Haq, Mical Habtemikael, Michael Tang, Nataliya Raza (2021).

WEEK 6 FEB 25-27

MIDTERM WEEK

Week 6: Garbage and creativity

Meeting 1:

Students submission and presentation of *Project 1 – Art in Landscape*.

From trash art to upcycling.

Introducing *Project 2 - Refused*

Meeting 2:

Practical experience in class: "Exploring garbage".

Design and re-use case studies: "Ecolo vase" and "Autoproduzione" by Enzo Mari; "Rivedro", "Design Possivel", "di(af)fetti" by Maddalena Vantaggi.

Readings and resources for the week:

"These artists transform garbage into garb to take a stand", Ayodeji Rotinwa (2022)

"The value of imperfection in sustainable design", Giuseppe Salvia, Francesca Ostuzzi, Valentina Rognoli, Marinella Levi (2010).

"Autoprogettazione", Enzo Mari (1974).

Semester Break

NO CLASS

WEEK 7 MAR 11-13

Week 7: Reuse between art and design

Meeting 1:

Project 2 development review.

Art for sustainability.

Paolo Ulian: designing from scraps.

Meeting 2:

Students submission and presentation of *Project 2 – Refused*.

Practical experience in class: the “UFFA” chair.

Introducing *Project 3 – Useful Artivism*

Readings and resources for the week:

“Paolo Ulian: thinking in marble”, Matilde Battistini (2011).

“Art and Creativity: Essential Components of Sustainability”, Lukas Gutierrez (2023).

“Anger and Art”, Andre Démuth, Slávka Démuthov (2024).

WEEK 8 MAR 18-20

Week 8: Useful Artivism

Meeting 1:

Discussing the practical exercise results.

Useful art in political dynamics, Urban development and Environment preservation.

Lecture: “Alma Futura” by Giulia Tomasello.

Meeting 2:

Project 2 development review.

Tania Bruguera and the Useful Art.

Useful art in science and pedagogical project.

Readings and resources for the week:

“Empowerment and Self-Care: Designing for the Female Body”, Giulia Tomasello and Teresa Almeida (2020).

“Reflexions on arte útil (useful art)”, Tania Bruguera (2012)

“The Artist as Activist: Tania Bruguera in Conversation with Claire Bishop”, conference

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4raYhes7OwI>

WEEK 9 MAR 25-27

Week 9: Becoming activist

Meeting 1:

Visit to the “Palazzo della Penna” Museum (Perugia).

Meeting 2:

No class.

Readings and resources for the week:

“Weiwei on reclaiming art from capitalism”, Ai Weiwei (2021).

WEEK 10 APR 1

Week 10: Final project definition

Meeting 1:

Project 3 development review.

Presentation of the 3 useful artwork concept for each group.

Discussion and selection of the best one.

Readings and resources for the week:

“Designing for change. Chicago protest art of the 1960s–70s”, exhibition catalogue (2024).

www.chicagohistory.org/exhibition/designing-for-change-chicago-protest-art-of-the-1960s-70s/

WEEK 11 APR 8-10

*** Week 11: Final project development**

Meeting 1 & Meeting 2

Work in class.

Planning how to collect documentation materials (photo, video, interview).

Planning the organization and handing back of the documentation material.

Readings and resources for the week:

“Understanding Art-Making as Documentation”, Tim Gorichanaz (2017)

* This week, the professor will not be in class, so students have to work to plan how to create their activist project and how to document it.

WEEK 12 APR 15-17

**** Week 12: Useful artist in action**

Meeting 1:

Students’ “artist action” in Perugia.

Meeting 2:

Work in class.

Organizing documentation materials to create final project presentations.

** In this week students have to “act” their useful activist projects, to create documentation (photos, videos, graphics, collage, etc.) for the final presentation.

WEEK 13 APR 22

Final Class, Exams, & Special Academic Events Week

Meeting 1 (Tuesday, April 22)

Final project presentations