



## **“Take ’em down:” Monuments, Artist Interventions, and the Struggle for Memory in the Americas**

- Instructor:** Mya Dosch  
mdosch@cooper.edu  
or, after Dec 18: mdosch@gradcenter.cuny.edu
- Class Meetings:** Monday evenings, 6:00 PM – 7:50 PM (*Please check schedule for exceptions*)  
Classroom: Foundation Building, Room 215F
- Office Hours:** Monday afternoons, 4:00 PM – 5:00 PM, or by appointment  
Office: 41 Cooper Square Building, Room 307
- Course Description:** On August 12, white supremacist and Neo-Nazi groups converged on Charlottesville, Virginia to protest the city’s planned removal of a Robert E. Lee statue. In the aftermath of the violence in Charlottesville, citizens in Durham, North Carolina took matters into their own hands, felling a Confederate soldier monument.

This course considers the contentious debates involved in erecting and removing artworks that commemorate contested pasts. We will ask: What visual strategies have artists, activists, governments, and community groups used to commemorate controversial histories in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Americas? How have subsequent generations of artists questioned, reimagined, and subverted these strategies? What should be done with monuments deemed obsolete or harmful to the community? Should we even remember at all?

The course will center on recent debates over racial justice and monuments to the Civil War and slavery in the United States, but will also consider

memorials to other violent histories across the Americas, from disappearances in Argentina to the Sand Creek massacre in present-day Colorado to 9/11. Students will gain an understanding of the history of public sculpture since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, while also exploring more recent embodied and ephemeral practices such as parades, reenactments, performance, and graffiti.

The course emphasizes readings, group activities, discussions, and field trips in addition to lectures. Through the course of the semester, each student will develop and revise a concise written proposal for a memorial artwork or intervention, then justify their design based on examples discussed in class.

- Course Objectives:**
- 1) To further your ability to critically read about, write about, and discuss sculpture, architecture, performance, and ephemeral artist interventions.
  - 2) To learn to engage with and weigh multiple interpretations of history and art, and support your own arguments with historical and visual evidence.
  - 3) To draw connections between the memorials and interventions that we discuss in class and the needs of the present moment, and to creatively and professionally present your ideas as a concise written artist statement and polished presentation as part of your final course project.
  - 4) To refine your verbal presentation skills through graded and ungraded speeches in front of your peers

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**Grade:**

<b>Attendance/participation/in-class writings</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Reading responses (out-of-class)</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Projects</b>	<b>55%</b>

- Memorial landscape presentation	15%
- Memorial proposal	40%
First draft	5%
Final project texts	15%
Presentation	20%

90-92.9 <b>A-</b>	93-100 <b>A</b>	
80-82.9 <b>B-</b>	83-87.9 <b>B</b>	88-89.9 <b>B+</b>
70-72.9 <b>C-</b>	73-77.9 <b>C</b>	78-79.9 <b>C+</b>
60-62.9 <b>D-</b>	63-67.9 <b>D</b>	68-69.9 <b>D+</b>
Below 60 <b>F</b>		

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**Course Readings:** There are no required textbooks for this class: all readings and reading guide questions will be posted on the course Moodle page. Please complete course readings **by the day that they are listed on the syllabus**, and come to class that day ready to discuss. If you cannot access the readings, let me know ASAP via email.

**A note on readings:** Course readings are the primary way that you will gain basic background

information on each day's topic, as I will not lecture directly on material from the readings. Instead, I expect that you come to class with a preliminary understanding of the topic from the readings and questions about the things you did not understand. Reading response guides will help you to ensure that you understood the main ideas, and occasional in-class writings will test you to be sure you completed the reading. This will allow us to spend most of our class time discussing and debating issues and deeply engaging with artworks.

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**Projects:** In addition the short, informal reading responses, two projects are required:

**1) Local memorial landscapes: what *is* remembered**

For this presentation, you will be asked to select *one* space of local memory. You could consider the monuments in a park near you, a museum exhibition, a display of family pictures on your grandmother's wall, a wall of dorm room decorations, or something else altogether. Then, use visual analysis to tease out what is remembered (and forgotten) in that space. You might consider what values the space projects (through medium, color, composition, pose, etc), and how it relates to the surrounding environment. As part of your **five-minute presentation**, you will be asked to present an argument about what is remembered and how, supporting this argument with visual details, then draw connections to at least one commemoration that we have discussed in class.

**2) Memorial proposal: What *should be* remembered**

For this project, you will come up with the concept for an artwork or action that commemorates a history that you think warrants public attention, and then justify your design by comparing it to the strengths and shortcomings of artworks and interventions we discussed in class. You will write a description of the design and a short, polished artist statement 1) discussing its relevance to the political, social, or historical climate of the local community, drawing on your own research, and 2) comparing it, as in previous presentation, to artworks we discussed in class. **You will then present your proposal as a polished oral presentation (8 minutes)**. You will be asked to cite at least two additional sources to support your design.

**For assistance with writing and oral presentation:**

- Visit The Cooper Union Center for Writing: Drop-in at 41 Cooper Square, Room 306. Monday-Friday 10 AM – 6 PM *or* make an appointment at [cooper.mywconline.com](http://cooper.mywconline.com)
  - Consult the book *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, by Sylvan Barnet, available at the library reserve desk: N7476. B37 2005, or the resources posted on the course Moodle.
  - OR visit my office hours: I am happy to discuss your writing and presentations with you.
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## Other course policies

**Late Assignments:** If an emergency situation prevents you from being able to turn in an assignment, please contact me before the due date so that we can make alternative arrangements. All other late papers and projects will lose one-half letter grade (4 points) per day late (an A paper on Mon. becomes an A- on Tues.)

**Attendance:** Per the Humanities and Social Sciences regulations, students are expected to attend all classes and arrive on-time. No more than one unexcused absence will be permitted. In the event of absence a student should contact the instructor in advance. Students who miss more than the equivalent of one week of class, or who are repeatedly late for class, will receive a reduction of the final grade. If more than two classes are missed, you may be required to withdraw from the course.

**Classroom Environment:** Please help to maintain a respectful and collaborative classroom environment, which ensures that all students can “engage in free discussion, inquiry and expression.” This includes everything from respecting other students’ comments and opinions during discussions to turning off your cell phone and music when you enter the room.

**Computers:** I do not allow the use of computers in the classroom: please take notes the old-fashioned way, so that you can bring them on our field trips and stay focused during class.

**Counseling and Mental Health:** Our Student Care Coordinator and Counselor, Cassandra Jolicoeur, is here to meet with students to provide support and to discuss mental health and counseling needs. Cassandra can be reached at [jolicoeu@cooper.edu](mailto:jolicoeu@cooper.edu) or at 212.353.4006.

**Learning needs:** Students with any learning needs or concerns (including learning disabilities or chronic illness) should notify me, and must contact the Dean of Students at [chamber@cooper.edu](mailto:chamber@cooper.edu) to ensure that appropriate accommodations can be made.

**Plagiarism and cheating:** The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences expects all students to demonstrate the highest levels of academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College’s requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. Cheating or plagiarism in this class will result in a “0” grade on the project, and will be reported to the Dean of Students.

## Schedule of classes (Tentative)

1) Mon, Sept 11: Course Introduction

### **Unit I – Take ‘em down?**

2) Mon, Sept 18: **Setting the stage: The monument in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century**

- Savage, Kirk, "Slavery's Memorial" in *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) 129-145 & 148-155.
- Southern Poverty Law Center, sections on "Findings" and "Stone Mountain" in "Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy," April 21, 2016. <https://www.splcenter.org/20160421/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy>, 7-15.

Turn in:

- Reading Guide

3) Mon, Sept 25: **Setting the stage: The monument in New Orleans and Charlottesville, 2017**

- Landrieu, Mitch, "Speech on the Removal of Confederate Monuments in New Orleans," May 19, 2017.
- Monumental Task Committee, "Landrieu Erasing History," May 11, 2017.
- Tear 'em down NOLA Coalition, "Open Letter to the Residents of New Orleans," <http://takeemdownnola.org/why-it-matters/>
- Kytte, Ethan J. and Blain Roberts, "Take Down the Confederate Flag, but Not the Monuments" *The Atlantic*, June 25, 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/-confederate-monuments-flags-south-carolina/396836/>
- Abramowitz, Sophie, et. al, "Tools of Displacement" (on Charlottesville's statues), *Slate*, June 23, 2017.

Turn in:

- Reading Guide

4) Mon, Oct 2:

#### **Felling**

- Gaiter, Colette, "Bree Newsome's Confederate Flag Pole Climb was an Artistic Statement" *Time Magazine* (July 3, 2015).
- Maas, Peter, "The Toppling: How the Media inflated a minor moment in a long war" (on the U.S. Removal of the Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad) *The New Yorker*, January 10, 2011

Turn in:

- Reading Guide

## **Unit II – Build ‘em up?**

- 5) Mon, Oct 9:           **Celebrating**  
 Dwyer, Owen J. “Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation, and the Cultural Landscape” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 5-21.  
 Turn in:  
 Reading Guide, including reflection on course projects
- \*\*6) Sat, Oct 14**       **Uncovering/Recovering**  
**12:45 PM – 2:35 PM** Visit to African Burial Ground Nat. Monument and 9/11 memorial
- 7) Mon, Oct 16:       **Mourning**  
 Senie, Harriet, “The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: A Symbolic Cemetery on the National Mall” in *Memorials to Shattered Myths: Vietnam to 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 11-21 and 28-39.  
 Lerer, Marisa, “Introduction” and “Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism” in “Competing for Memory: Argentina’s *Parque de la Memoria*,” *Public Art Dialogue* 3, no. 1 (2013): 58-59 and 61-66.  
 Turn in:  
 Reading Guide, including reflection on oral presentation
- 8) Mon, Oct 23:       **Tentative date for Cooper Union panel discussion on Civil War monuments**
- 9) Mon, Oct 30:       **Student presentations: Local memorial landscapes**  
 Peer review of other presentations
- \*\*Mon, Nov 6:**       **NO CLASS – Instructor away**
- 10) Mon, Nov. 13:   **Negotiating/authoring: workshop on final project**  
 Kelman, Ari, “Looters,” in *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015): 44-86.  
 Dickenson, Sheila “A Seed of Healing and Change,” *ArtNews*, June 5, 2017.  
 Turn in:  
 Reading Guide

## **Unit III – Use ‘em?**

### **11) Mon, Nov 20: Intervening**

Turn in:

- First draft of design description and artist statement for final project

### **12) Mon, Nov 27: Enacting**

- Brundage, W. Fitzhugh, excerpt from “Celebrating Black Memory in the Postbellum South,” in *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* 55-88.

- Colectivo Situaciones, “Translator’s Note” and “12 Hypotheses/ Questions concerning the *Escraches*” in *Genocide in the Neighborhood* (Chainlinks, 2010): 20-29 and 97-106.

Turn in:

- Reading Guide

### **13) Mon, Dec 4: Reenacting**

- Apel, Dora, “Violence and Historical Reenactment: From the American Civil War to the Moore’s Ford Lynching” in *Violence and Visibility in Modern History*, ed. Jurgen Martschukat and Silvan Niedermeier (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 241-261.

Turn in:

- Reading Guide

### **14) Mon, Dec 11: Closing conference, including student final presentations**

Turn in:

- Final draft of design description and artist’s statement

### **15) Mon, Dec 18: Closing: In praise of forgetting?**

- Rieff, David, “Against Remembrance” in *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and its Ironies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016): 127-138.

- Halberstam, Jack, “Dude, Where’s My Phallus? Forgetting, Losing, Looping” in *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011): 68-86.

Turn in:

- Reading Guide