INSTRUCTORS: Paul R. Abramson (Professor of Psychology @ UCLA) and Tania Love Abramson, MFA (Visual/Conceptual Artist)
COURSE WEBSITE: artandtrauma.com
INSTRUCTOR WEBSITES: abramsonuclapsych.com and tanialoveabramson.com
EMAILS: Abramson@psych.ucla.edu and tanialabramson@gmail.com
CLASSROOM: Weds. 1-4; Room: Bunche Hall A152
CREDITS: 5
OFFICE HOURS: TBA

INTRODUCTION

Trauma

Trauma is ubiquitous: a devastating diagnosis (e.g. amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)), a natural catastrophe (e.g. hurricane), an emotionally shattering crime (e.g. rape). A course on Art & Trauma is thus especially daunting because trauma is so inclusive, it can happen to anyone at any time. We are therefore limiting ourselves to four heterogeneous (though by no means antagonistic) categories of severe trauma: psychiatric institutionalization, slavery, child sexual abuse, and war.

Imaginative artists are the product of singular artistic visions. Though the antecedents (e.g. gender, race, education, historical epoch, etc.) and manifestations (painting, drawing, sculpture, music, etc.) may be disparate, the commonality among distinctive artists is the impassioned particularity of the work and the lucidity of the representation. The question addressed herein is how these four categories of severe trauma (psychiatric institutionalization, slavery, child sexual abuse, and war) shaped the artistic visions that developed in their wake.

Artists can depict severe trauma in many ways, an external event (e.g. war), an internal psychological process (e.g. depression), or a symbolic unfolding (e.g. the disintegration of individual). The manner in which trauma is embedded in the brain and stored in memory are also crucial questions that are integral to our understanding of how artistic visions evolve out of severe trauma.

Art and Psychology
This course is an aggregate of two disciplines: Art and Psychology. Art, Art History, and the Philosophy of Aesthetics are essential for descriptive, perceptual, methodological, and interpretive reasons, as well as the chronological depicting of Art & Trauma, the social history by which a visual representation was designated as Art, and equally importantly, who was considered an Artist. Though the manifestation of Art that evolved out of severe trauma is obviously the dominant theme herein, from both historical and contemporary perspectives, this subject matter is necessarily variegated.

Psychology plays an equally prominent role. The literatures on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), dissociation, trauma and memory, trauma and the brain, the psychiatric institutionalization movement, human rights, child sexual abuse, the trauma of war, adversity and creativity, and the science of aesthetics are also inescapably critical to the field of Art and Trauma.

**A Studio Component**

Lastly, this course includes a studio component in the form of individual and group projects. These depictions will not be graded or critiqued on artistic merit, but rather on creative engagement with the process. These exercises are meant to provide more tangible insight into the sequencing of Art and Trauma. If local museums, such as the Hammer in Westwood, have ongoing exhibitions that are relevant to Art and Trauma, we will also try to arrange for a class trip to see the show and (hopefully) talk to the curators.

**Required Readings (Books):**


**Recommended Reading (Book):**


**Grading:**

Grades are based on a take-home mid-term assignment, and a final essay take-home exam. The mid-term assignment is the creation of a *Zine*. As implied above, the
Zine will not be graded on artistic merit, but instead, will be graded on creative engagement with the assignment. Zines can be constructed as a solo project, or created by a dyad or triad. Many examples of Zines will be shown to the class on 10/17; and a full discussion of Zines will take place at that time as well.

As far as the practical details are concerned, the Zines need to include a cover (BW or Color), and they must incorporate visuals (e.g. drawings, photos, etc.) and text (e.g. prose, poetry, singular words/phrases). The binding of the Zine can be folded, stapled, or even sewn. A minimum of two copies of the Zine should be made; one to keep and one to turn into class. The Zines can be created in a Word or Google doc. Additionally, a PDF can be created and taken to a copy center. Fed Ex, for example, has a program that will convert a single PDF into a book format. You can then print your Zine on copy paper, or use your own paper if it works in the copy machine.

Finally, your Zine must cover a topic that is included in this class – either psychiatric institutionalization, slavery, child sexual abuse, or war. Zines should be at least 8 pages for a solo project and 12 pages for duos or triads. Zines are due no later than 11/14 (though they can be turned as soon as 11/7).

The Final Exam will include 4 comprehensive questions. It will be emailed to the class as a Word doc on 12/5. We must receive the Final Exam back, as a Word doc, no later than midnight on 12/10/18.

**Lectures:**

**October 3: Introduction to Art and Trauma.**

**Overview:** This lecture begins with a short music video (Broken Trajectories: Demons Come – Run Frank Run). The video is followed by an overview of the philosophy of aesthetics, the power of aesthetics in particular, and concludes with the aesthetics of severe trauma. Feminist perspectives on aesthetic depictions are also conveyed. Introductory comments, summaries of instructor credentials, and a course overview, are furnished thereafter. A detailed explanation of the mid-term assignment (i.e. the creation of a short Zine), and a synopsis of the final exam (essay format), are then provided. The criteria for grading are discussed as well. A short film (Short Term 12 (the original short)) completes this lecture.

**Additional Suggested Readings:**


October 10: The Dynamics of Severe Trauma/ The Science of Aesthetics/ Selected Artists Confronting Severe Trauma.

**Overview:** This lecture explores the psychological and neurological literatures on severe trauma. Topics include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociation, traumatic memories, trauma and the brain, resilience, and the association between adversity and creativity. The psychological and neurological literatures on aesthetics follow their wake. Immediately thereafter a sample of artists (e.g. AIDS Posters Collectives, Karen Finley, Luzene Hill, Edvard Munch, Richard Ross, Vincent Van Gogh, and David Wojnarowich) - known for the singularity of their artistic visions - and whose work actively confronts serve trauma - are examined herein.

**Additional Suggested Readings:**


**General Overview:** The onset and deprivations of mental illness are traumatic in and of themselves. These next two lectures (10/17 & 10/24) take that particular
trauma one step further by examining mentally ill artists who were confined to psychiatric institutions where the treatment was often superficial, antagonistic or brutal.

Overview: The 10/17 lecture begins with an in-class art project exploring how emotion can be represented by the use of line. The discussion then moves to the history of the psychiatric institutionalization movement, including the extreme measures of treatment offered therein, such as straight-jackets, bed restraints, electro-shock therapy, lobotomy, and more. Critics of the movement (e.g. Thomas Szasz & Michel Foucault) are introduced, and research on psychiatric institutional biases (e.g. On Being Sane in Insane Places) are discussed. The shift toward deinstitutionalization (and the relevant US Supreme Court cases) completes the lecture.

Additional Suggested Readings (General):


Overview: The 10/24 lecture begins with an in-depth overview of Zines. The remainder of the lecture focuses entirely on artists who were either confined to psychiatric institutions, or had spent considerable time therein. The discussion begins with the Prinzhorn Collection (largely created in 1919 by Hans Prinzhorn, a psychiatrist at the University of Heidelberg Psychiatric Clinic), and moves on to Adolph Wölfl, Henry Darger, Eugen Gabritschevsky, and the Outsider Art Museum in Amsterdam. The artwork (and writings) of Leonora Carrington and Sylvia Plath are then considered, followed by discussions of Martin Ramirez, Mary Barnes, and Herbert Baglione. Various video clips of the artists and their artwork complete the lecture.

Additional Suggested Readings (Artists):

October 31 & November 7th: Slavery.

General Overview: Slavery is best understood as complete domination, that is achieved through violence (physical and psychological), by a malevolent authority figure. Once made a slave, that person or child loses all claims and powers in self, things, and persons, becoming - in essence - an extension of the will of the slave-master. Art associated with slavery, needless to say, is an inquisition into atrocity and despair.

October 31st: Colonial Slavery (focused largely on the US).

Overview: The 10/31 lecture begins with a short clip from the movie Amistad. Following the movie clip, there will be a discussion of the slave trade in general, and then slavery in the United States. A trade route map, slave ship drawings, the Tomb of the Unknown Slave (New Orleans), and Kara Walker’s Calliope are among the topics also examined herein. The literatures on (or by) Frederick Douglass, Annette Gordon-Reed, Dred Scott/Supreme Court Justice Taney, and Brown v Board of Education follow. The lecture then moves to a discussion of the British Abolitionist’s Wedgwood medallion (Am I Not A Man), the I Am a Man placards used in the Memphis Sanitation Strike, and Martin Luther King’s involvement with – and assassination during – the Memphis strike. The remainder of the lecture is devoted to artists (e.g. Sanford Biggers, Sonya Clark, Billie Holiday, Glenn Ligon, Noah Purifoy, Dana Schutz, Hank Willis Thomas, and Kara Walker), artist collectives and exhibitions (e.g. Where We At, Black Women Artists Collective; We Wanted A Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985) and memorials (e.g. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice (The Lynching Museum)) relevant to the themes discussed herein.

Additional Suggested Readings: Colonial Slavery:


**November 7: Modern Slavery.**

**Overview:** The 11/7 lecture begins with an overview of the literature and statistics on Modern Slavery (e.g. Kim Kathleen, Orlando Patterson, the World Health Organization) and then shifts to an in-depth discussion of Vannak Prum’s *The Dead Eye and the Deep Blue Sea: A Graphic Memoir of Modern Slavery*. The remainder of the class is devoted to artists (e.g. Molly Gochman, Tari Ito, Yong Soon Min, Dawn Akemi Saito, Yoshiko Simada), exhibitions (e.g. *Enslaved Exhibitions: A human thread foundation project* by Lisa Kristine; *Trauma, Interrupted* curated by Flandette May Datuin) and writers (e.g. Thomas Estler) that depict Modern Slavery.

**Additional Suggested Readings: Contemporary Slavery:**


**November 14 & 21: Child Sexual Abuse.**

**General Overview:** In a recent World Health Organization study (using 24 countries and over 60,000 participants), the two most commonly reported severe traumas were: the death of a loved one, or witnessing death or serious injury of another person. Although sexual assault was a much less frequently reported severe trauma, the likelihood of developing PTSD in the aftermath of a sexual assault was the highest – by far – of any severely traumatic experience (e.g. war, natural disaster (tsunami)) included in the World Health Organization’s research. These two lectures examine artistic visions that were manifested in the wake of child sexual abuse.
November 14 & 21: Research, Artists, Exhibitions, and Graphic Memoirs

Overview: The lectures on 11/14 & 11/21 begin with an overview of the psychological and statistical literatures on child sexual abuse. The lecture then focuses on artists (e.g. Tania Love Abramson, Balthus, Billy Childish, Pierre Crocquet, Dennis Del Favero, Linda Dement, Phoebe Gloeckner, Karen Finley, Sarah Jane, Crying 4 Kafka, Ed and Nancy Kienholz, Eli Langer, Charlene Lutz, Joseph Newsome, Eric Ravelo, and Una), curators (e.g. Walter Hopps, Hans Ulbrich Obrist), exhibitions (e.g. Sex Crimes Against Black Girls, Witnesses: Against Our Despair), and graphic memoirs (e.g. Becoming Unbecoming, Hush, and Something Terrible) that have relevance to child sexual abuse. Various video clips of the artists and their artworks, plus clips from films such as The Tale and Precious, complete the lectures.

Additional Suggested Readings:

November 28 & December 5: War.

General Overview: War is the ultimate never-ending story. These lectures examine artistic visions anchored in specific wars, or the sequelae of specific wars (e.g. concentration camps, displacement, etc.) within a global, contemporary perspective.

November 28: War Through the Lens of Graphic Memoirs.

Overview: This lecture begins with an in-class Collage Project. Collage is defined, and the objective of this project is explained. Noteworthy collage artists (e.g. Romare Bearden, Max Ernst, John Hiltunen, Hannah Hoch, Nathaniel Mary Quinn, Robert
Rauschenberg, Man Ray, Martha Rosler, Annegret Soltau, and Nancy Spero) are then introduced, and the exercise follows thereafter. An in-depth discussion of graphic memoirs that depict war (Brothers of the Gun, Judenhass, Maus I & I, Persepolis I & II, The Arab of the Future, The Best We Could Do, and Yossel) occurs subsequently. The lecture ends with the film Waltz with Bashir (2008).

Additional Suggested Readings: Graphic Memoirs of War.

December 5: The Trauma of Modern Wars (Psychological Literatures and Artistic Renditions).

Overview: This lecture begins with the psychological literature on Modern Wars, including shell shock, war neurosis, combat stress, WWI, WWII, the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, PTSD, and Victor Frankl. The lecture then focuses on artists, exhibitions, and memorials, relevant to Modern Wars (e.g. Francisco Goya. WWI: Otto Dix, Kathe Kollwitz. WWII: Artists of the Holocaust: Edith Kiss, Jan Komski, Esther Lurie, Charlotte Salomon. Vietnam era: Anti-War poster Art, Leon Golub, Nancy Spero. Post-Vietnam era: Dinh Q. Lê, Melissa Walker. Examples of Exhibits and Performances on Art & War: Artist’s Responses to the Holocaust (Imperial War Museum, London), Sunken Red (BAM’s Next Wave Festival), World War I and the Visual Arts (The Met)). Examples of Video/Film Clips: Various video clips of the artists and artworks will be shown, plus a clip from the movie Apocalypse Now (1979). Concluding comments and discussion complete this Fall Quarter course.

Additional Suggested Readings: The Psychological Literature

**Additional Suggested Readings: Artists and Exhibitions on Contemporary Wars**


Sala, Ilaria Maria (2016). Drawn Out: The Vietnam War, as seen through the ethereal art of Vietnamese soldiers. *Quartz,* March 31st, 2016.


Stone, Andrea (2015). How art heals the wounds of war. *National Geographic,* February 15, 2015. (plus the link: the National Geographic story and videos titled *Behind the Mask: Revealing the Trauma of War.*)

**Endnote: A fragment of a poem by Anna Akhmatova:**

*And may the melting snow stream like tears*
*From my motionless lids of bronze*
*And a prison dove can coo in the distance*
*And the ships of the Neva sail calmly on.*

(These are the last four lines of the poem (circa 1936) *Requiem.* They were written while the poet repeatedly stood outside the walls of Kresty prison, desperately trying to see her son. Kresty prison is on the banks of the Neva River in St. Petersburg, Russia.)