Critical Practice: Art in Conversation
Saturday 23 February 2013

All Yale MFA students take a required course in their first term entitled "Critical Practice." Dean Robert Storr is the lead faculty member for this course that included lectures by Gregory Crewdson, Sheila de Bretteville, Anoka Faruqee, Martin Kersels, Pamela Franks and Kobena Mercer, as well as group discussions led by Ian Alteveer, Julian Bittiner, Paulina Pobocha, and Mollen Theodore. The course aims to initiate informed discussions about contemporary art. It is about finding words that open up the meanings of images, objects, gestures, ideas and intuitions. Students have come up with panel topics and will be moderating and participating in a series of informal panel discussions with invited guests from Yale and beyond. The day of panels hopes to encourage conversation between current Yale students and leaders in their fields.

Schedule
10:00 – 10:10 Opening Remarks, Robert Storr, Dean, Yale School of Art

10:10 – 11:30 Exit Through the "Rear": Reframing Kitsch and Camp
Panelists: John Pilson and Elaine Reichek
Student Moderator: Ana Maria Gomez Lopez
Student Panelists: Cathleen Mooses and Emmy Thelander

In his essay ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’ (1939), Clement Greenberg describes kitsch as the ‘rear-garde’ of art and ‘the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our time.’ Centering on examples of ‘low art’ such as advertising, Hollywood cinema, jazz and popular music, Greenberg argued that kitsch stood in direct opposition to the tenets of Modernism. Like all writing, Greenberg’s arose from and responded to the contemporaneous cultural and intellectual milieu; nonetheless the tensions between high art and popular culture articulated in “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” have remained relevant issues of debate. More than six decades since the essay’s publication, the expansive boundaries of appropriation in visual and technological production, from art history, popular culture, and commercial sources make the identification of kitsch both as subject matter and form far more difficult to delineate. What is today’s version of kitsch, particularly in the face of other emerging forms for art such as YouTube videos and mash-ups? Does the framing of kitsch imply tension with the cultural production of the past and its contextualization in the present? Is the spurious or the false still an apt qualifier for artworks that incorporates everyday forms of media-based production?

11:30 – 12:50 Post Physical

1:00 – 2:00 Lunch Break

2:10 – 3:30 ‘Amateur’ Photography

3:30 – 4:50 New Media Before ‘New Media’
#Baudelaire:
Panelists: Manuel Miranda and Raúl Rozendaal
Student Moderator: Jerry Blackman
Student Panelists: Erin Henry and Kellie Konapelsky

The interactive digital interface has evolved over the last 30 years from a tool for creating and organizing information into a fully immersive, networked environment with its own culture, language, and logic. The search function has allowed for the streamlining of information exchange and enabled new information-based economies and currencies. Within a search there are residue, artifacts, and footprints analogous to a kind of flat monument whose amorphous form is defined by a list of keywords. This is but one example of a world we can no longer call strictly physical. We will discuss the implications and possibilities for such a post-physical world and posit the idea of web-based experience as an alternative to ‘genuine’ experience: one that is authentic and with its own mythology. The contemporary artist and designer must negotiate this increasingly pervasive experience. We hope to parse notions of authenticity within a world where form and meaning are unstable, and often authorless.

3:30 – 4:50 ‘Amateur’ Photography
Panelists: Roe Etheridge and Mia Fineman
Student Moderator: Maya Manvi
Student Panelists: Erin Desmond and Darja Bajagic

Since its invention more than 175 years ago, Photography has been able to establish itself as a viable and distinct artistic medium, independent of purely commercial or quotidian concerns. However, Photography’s inherent reproducibility and accessibility, as expressed in Walter Benjamin’s “Art After the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” has always been inextricably linked to its potential as an art form and its role in the broader culture. How does the advent of digital photography and now the omnipresence of cell phone cameras and video recorders affect art making today? Further, the distribution of the photographic medium is evermore accessible and immediate via social media sites such as Instagram, tumblr, facebook, etc. This panel explores the ease with which images, both still and moving, are captured and incorporated into art and culture, and the ubiquity of such imaging in painting, sculpture and installation work. What is the connection or opposition between photography as a distinct artistic medium with its own historical lineage and craftsmanship versus photography as an expedient shorthand to record and represent?

4:50 – 6:00 Wine & cheese reception at Yale School of Art
Green Hall Lobby (1156 Chapel Street), coinciding with Painting & Printmaking (Group 2), Thesis Exhibition Opening

If Baudelaire’s Flaneur responded to a new urban condition, what contemporary condition does today’s Flaneur respond to? “New media,” defined today primarily by digital exploration, questions the nature of artistic mediums and production, as well as the way institutions function. But long before digital art, artists have grappled with the changing landscapes offered by new media. How can an understanding of previous critical responses to new subjects, radical materials, and emerging technologies contextualize our current response to “new media” in the art world? How does the use of new media change the making and reception of art? This panel seeks to understand the making and reception of “new media” as part of a continuum of artists incorporating new materials, ideas, and processes into their practice. We hope to engage the audience through questions and we will be accepting questions and comments via Twitter #Baudelaire.