

NORTHWESTERN ART HISTORY 2026 SPRING COURSES



Image: Zoe Leonard (American, b. 1961), *1961* (2022-ongoing). Vintage suitcases for every year of the artist's life. Dimensions variable.
Photo: S. Heaton.

ART HIST 260-0

Introduction to Contemporary Art

Professor: Antawan I. Byrd

Day & Time: TTh 12:30pm-1:50pm

Contemporary art names a field of cultural practice defined by its relation to time—by being of, responsive to, and in dialogue with the social, political, and economic realities of a given moment. Proceeding in a roughly chronological fashion from the 1960s to the present, this introductory course surveys key artworks, exhibitions, movements, and debates that have shaped contemporary art across media and geographies. The course will emphasize the movement of artworks, exploring how meaning and value are produced across sites of encounter ranging from artist studios, galleries, museums, alternative art spaces, community centers, and the street to publications, the internet, auction blocks, and the domestic interior. Through this lens, students will examine how artworks are displayed, interpreted, and contested as they move through public and private, local and transnational contexts. Together, we will grapple with the illuminating and challenging questions artists ask of their audiences, examining how artworks can function as critical reflections on society and its values. By examining artistic responses to concerns including love and community, political conflict and catastrophe, and issues of attention, citizenship, humor, and justice, the course foregrounds contemporary art's potential to alter our ways of thinking and being. Assignments will include section presentations, short writing responses, a midterm exam, and an open-format final project.

FOUNDATIONAL DISCIPLINES AND OVERLAYS:
FD-HS, FD-LA

WEINBERG DISTRO AREA: Historical Studies,
Literature & Fine Arts