

FA316 From natural history to after nature: Berlin as studio



Cover emblem of *Die Natur*, a 19th c. German periodical published in Halle a. S.
Ian Cheng, *Thousand Islands Thousand Laws*, 2013. Screenshot of a live simulation

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Saturdays 1:30 – 6:45 pm**

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Course Description

This studio-intensive course aims to strengthen students' artistic practice by engaging with ideas of the "natural" in present-day Berlin. Students will initiate work under this broad theme, responding individually with projects inspired by scientific collections, rare manuscripts, art exhibitions, and historic sites unique to Berlin. Direct contact with specimens, prints, artifacts, and media during site visits, as well as readings discussed in class sessions, will serve as prompts for hands-on exercises and independent work in studio. Themes that integrate class excursions, readings, and group discussions include the concept of wilderness, the relationship between the human and the non-human, the development of ecological thinking, and historic definitions of life.

Assignments during the first half of the course will focus on the body and inanimate matter,

examination of physical traces, and engagement with the surrounding environment; the second half is devoted entirely to each student's individual project. In-class critiques will help students identify the formal, subjective, and conceptual underpinnings that motivate their artwork. Experimentation with materials and across media is welcome; however, students are highly encouraged to concentrate on either two-dimensional, three-dimensional, or time-based media and performance for their final project, in order to better address concerns specific to each medium and support individual progress.

Requirements

This course requires the following commitments from each participant:

- Commitment to three hours of work per hour in each class session

The success of this course largely will depend on the effort of students who participate in the class. This point cannot be stressed enough: in order to advance one's practice, a serious commitment of time is required. The course was designed around intensive blocks of time rather than weekly session for this purpose: 15 hours of work per bi-weekly session becomes 7.5 hours a week, a little over an hour a day. This time estimate is meant for class assignments and your final project, but also to allow periods of incubation and reflection on patterns in your practice. Helping you learn *how* you work is as much a goal of the course as facilitating your creation of new work.

- Completion of readings and recommended outside activities

Sets of readings have been chosen for each class session that draw on histories of art and science. These are intended to act as "homing devices" for class discussion and individual reflection. You are expected to complete required reading assignments before coming to class. In addition, the course will take advantage of cultural events happening in Berlin, such as Transmediale 30 or the 67th Berlinale. You will be encouraged to attend exhibitions, film screenings, and other events throughout Berlin related to the course. Suggestions will be announced throughout the semester.

- Engaged participation and regular attendance to in-class sessions and excursions

All students are expected to participate in all bi-weekly sessions and class activities; this means coming prepared to class with your own work, but also displaying generosity and thoughtful consideration of that created by your peers, with whom you will be sharing class sessions and time outside of class in studio. In addition, punctual attendance is also required, with class starting exactly on the hour. This is particularly important for field visits, where you must work out in advance how to get to the sites (addresses are provided below). Transportation difficulties are not an excuse for an absence or late arrival. Absences that go beyond 180 minutes in a semester (the equivalent of two seminar sessions) will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. For information regarding periods of illness or leaves of absence, please consult the BCB Student Handbook.

Assignments

Students are responsible for creating in-depth aesthetic work in the form of three guided assignments and one final project. Each of the three assignments will center on a specific prompt; detailed instructions will be provided at the end of the preceding session before the assignment is due. Completed works will be critiqued in-class according to the schedule below. All assignments must be presented on time--no exceptions.

Each student will independently create his or her final project. This work can build on any of the previous three assignments, or constitute an entirely new piece. Students will be required to

provide a brief proposal halfway through the semester outlining the general concept of their final project, the medium and materials to be used, and the motivations behind this work, as well as initial thoughts on how to present this final project.

Grading criteria

The breakdown of grading percentages for this course is as follows:

- Participation and attendance: 20%
- Class assignments: 30%
- Final project (proposal, execution, and presentation): 50%

Schedule

All classes meet in the second floor seminar room of the Factory. Meeting points for excursions are specified below. To accommodate for institutional opening hours and travel time, two classes will start one hour earlier; please note variable starting times for these sessions, marked with a double asterisk below**.

1. Sat. 04.02

Introduction to the class; distribution of studio space and communal workspaces; security protocols for the Factory (Assignment 1)

2. Sat. 18.02

Jaguars and Eels, Julia Stoschek Collection (Leipziger Strasse 60, D-10117—entrance on Jerusalemer Strasse) ← **Class begins here promptly at 1:30 pm**
Alien Matters, “ever elusive” Transmediale 30 (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, John-Foster-Dulles-Allee 10, D-10557)

3. Sat. 25.02

Class session and studio critiques (Assignment 2)

4. Sat. 11.03**

Wunderkammer Olbricht, me Collectors Room (Auguststrasse 68, D-10117) ← **Class begins here 12:30 pm**
Archives of Life Collection, Museum für Naturkunde (Invalidenstraße 43, D-10115)
Joseph Beuys Collection, Hamburger Bahnhof (Invalidenstraße 50-51, D-10557)

5. Sat. 25.03

Class session and studio critiques (Assignment 3)

6. Sat. 08.04**

Class session and studio critiques (Final project proposal due today) ← **Class begins at the Factory at 12:30 pm; course will travel together to excursion**
Alchemy: The Great Art, Kulturforum (Matthäikirchplatz, D-10785)
Seen Through Flowers: The Legacy of Maria Sybilla Merian, Kupferstichkabinett (Matthäikirchplatz, D-10785)

7. Sat. 29.04

Class session and studio critiques (workshop of final project)

8. Sat. 13.05

Last class session and studio critiques of final project; preparation for BCB Open Studios

9. Fri. 19.05 – Sun. 21.05

BCB Open Studios; required studio clean-up after this event's completion

Note: This schedule is subject to slight changes. A final syllabus will be provided the first class that includes readings from the list below. All texts will be available as .pdf files on either Reserves Direct or Google Drive. Given that students will be required to purchase all art materials (of their choosing) used in class projects, as well as entrance fees for recommended outside activities, no course books or reader are required for purchase.

Students can expect to read excerpts from the following texts (among others), averaging 20-25 pp. per session:

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2012)

Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonder and the Orders of Nature* (MIT Press, 1998)

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*

(Routledge, 1997 [1966])

Peter Galison and Caroline Jones, *Picturing Science, Producing Art* (Routledge, 1998)

Jeffrey Kastner, *Nature: Documents of Contemporary Art*, (MIT Press, 2012)

Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*

(Harvard University Press, 2009)

Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015)

Pamela Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution*

(University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Sabine Wilke, *German Culture and the Modern Environmental Imagination* (Brill, 2016)

W.G. Sebald, *After Nature* [Nach der Natur] (Penguin Random House, 2003)