



**ARTH/ENV/PSCI 375 Green Art: The Aesthetics, Ethics, and Politics of
Creativity in Today's World
Course Syllabus
Spring Semester 2026**

Instructor: Maddalena Vantaggi, MA, PMC

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: none

Office Hours: by appointment after a class or via Zoom (see Moodle site)

Course Type: Standard Course

Course Fee: USD \$80

Course Description

This class will examine the interrelationship between ecology, aesthetics, politics, and ethics as they have been and are being reflected in modern and contemporary art. It will take a perspective on issues that are inevitably global in scope by looking at how artists have been addressing environmental and cultural crises since the two World Wars. We will discover the relationship between creativity and sustainability, focus on artistic action as an instrument to change society, in relationship with environmental and cultural justice. We will discuss and explore these themes through both creative and analytic acts of discussing and making. In particular, we will experience the artistic act aimed at cultural and social change through personal and practical research.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

Below are the course's learning outcomes, followed by the methods that will be used to assess students' achievement for each learning outcome. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- *identify* the artist's historical and cultural process of becoming an activist (Practical Exercise).
- *summarize* relationships between political ethics and environmental aesthetics (Projects 1-3).
- *distinguish* the various kinds of responses that artists can take to impact environmental change and political crisis (Practical Exercise, Projects 1-3).
- *analyze* works of art and how they relate to contemporary political, ethical, and environmental issues and crises (Projects 1-3).
- *integrate* multiple readings, media, and resources working in group to ideate an act of art activism (Final Project).

Course Materials

Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available. The course's Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments.

Assessment

Attendance	10%
Practical Exercises	20%
Project 1	20%
Project 2	20%
Project 3 - Final	30%

Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Please note: decimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Course Requirements

Grades are based on the following criteria.

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an essential part of this course. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences per course without penalty, per Institute policy. If you attend all the other meetings, you will receive 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Practical Exercises (20%)

Students will be assigned a practical exercise following each theoretical lesson during the first weeks of the course. The exercise description will be available on Moodle, and the completed work must be submitted before the next class or directly presented in the next class. Each exercise is designed to allow students to experiment with the artistic approaches studied in class. The results will be always briefly presented by the students during class and discussed collectively.

Project 1: Art in Landscape (20%)

Students will reflect on course material about "art in and on the environment" to create their own piece of land art, made of nature as trees, water, or wind. The project must be accompanied by an artist statement explaining the meaning of the work (circa 300 words), and then documented in photographs and/or video to be explained in a class presentation. The work must be impermanent and use natural materials. Students will present their project in class explaining its motivations and inspirations. See the full prompt on Moodle.

Project 2: Re(f)used (20%)

Students will reflect on course material and ideas about "garbage and creativity" by creating an artwork or a design object made of recycled materials (plastics, cloth, glass) accompanied by a description of all the materials used in the piece. The statement (approximately 300 words) should discuss the industrial production process, origin, meaning, and environmental impact of each material. Students will display their creations in an in-class exhibition and present their work to the class, explaining their creative process and the significance of their piece.

See the full prompt on Moodle.

Project 3: Useful activism (30%)

Students will envision, plan, and create their own piece of *useful activist artwork* as installation, performance, public service which promoting environmental, social, and cultural sustainability. Students must address a specific issue, if necessary identify a specific place in Perugia where to act (with the Umbra Institute support), summarize the action, describe the needed circumstances and materials, and above all elaborate a specific intended goal of their intervention. Students will write a plan of action and manifesto (circa 300 words), act and document their projects, and present the results (graphic presentation, video, photo, etc.) during the final class. See the full prompt on Moodle.

Extension & Submitting Late Work

Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. This can be used for any assignment but the final project. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Any work submitted after the 24-hour extension will be marked zero. As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused “sick days” and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student’s academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student’s final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students’ grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided.

Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute’s Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person, or an AI generator, for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Laptop & Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be set on silent mode before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices (for example, ear buds) cannot be used during class lectures and discussions, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation.

As an instructor and as a person, I am dependent on both my computer and my telephone. That said: An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, I have a physical notebook policy: I ask you to leave your computers in your bags and phones in your pockets and use a regular notebook. There are four exceptions: 1) if you have an accommodation; 2) if you're using a tablet to take notes, 3) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer; or 4) if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools.

U.N. Sustainable Development Goals

This course contributes to the achievement of one or more goals of U.N. Agenda for Sustainable Development



Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1 JANUARY 20 - 22

Week 1: Creativity for Sustainability

Meeting 1:

Introducing the course.

Icebreaker activity.

Practical exercise: “My Creativity” (full prompt on Moodle).

Meeting 2:

Discussing the results of the practical exercise “My Creativity”.

Relationship between creativity and sustainability: the role of fantasy.

Practical exercise: “Connecting stories”.

Readings and resources for the week:

Rodari, Gianni. *The Grammar of Fantasy: An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories*. Translated by Jack Zipes. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1996. Read chapter 4 “The Fantastic Binomial”, pp. 12-15.

Perrone, Raffaella. *Integrating fantasy into the creative process*. Conference Paper of “LearnxDesign. 3rd International Conference for Design Education Researchers.” 14 July 2015, pp. 4-7.

WEEK 2 JANUARY 27 - 29

Week 2: From Mimetic to Abstract Art

Meeting 1:

Discussing the results of the practical exercise “Connecting Stories”.

From prehistoric art to Courbet’s “Realist Manifesto”.

Meeting 2:

Twentieth-century avant-garde: from Impressionism to Abstractionism.

Practical exercise: “Being an artist #1”.

Readings and resources for the week:

Gustave Courbet, *Realist Manifesto*, Gustave Courbet (1861).

Wassily Kandinsky, *On the spiritual in art*, 1912, Read chapter 5 “The effect of Colour”, pp 39-45.

WEEK 3 FEBRUARY 3 - 5

Week 3: From Conceptual Art to Action

Meeting 1:

Discussing the results of the practical exercise “Being an Artist #1”.
The Dada revolution and Duchamp’s conceptual art.
Practical exercise: “Being an artist #2”.

Meeting 2:

Discussing the results of the practical exercise “Being an artist #2”.
The art of the gesture: from Manzoni’s irony to Pollock’s action painting.
Practical exercise: “Being an artist #3”. (full prompt on Moodle)

Readings and resources for the week:

Tristan Tzara, *Dada Manifesto*, 1918.

WEEK 4 FEBRUARY 10 - 12

Week 4: Art Breaks into Public Space

Meeting 1:

Discussing the results of the practical exercise “Being an Artist #3”.
Pop art as a critique of consumerism: Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol.

Meeting 2:

The birth of the happening: Allan Kaprow.
Artists’ reaction to May '68: Joseph Beuys and art as social action.

Readings and resources for the week:

“7000 oaks”, Lynne Cook (2004).

WEEK 5 FEBRUARY 17 - 19

Week 5: Land Art

Meeting 1:

The birth of environmental art.
Introducing *Project 1 - Art in the Landscape*.
Creation of working groups (3 students per group).

Meeting 2:

Land art: from Richard Long to Smithson’s “Spiral Jetty”.
Contemporary land art, between political and poetic acts: Burri’s “Cretto” in Gibellina,
Christo and Andy Goldsworthy.
Project 1 - Art in the Landscape development review.

Readings and resources for the week:

“Process and Participation in the Work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude” Selections from the Shunk-Kender
Photography Collection (2017).

“The Nazca Lines”, Dr. Austin Mardon, Jasrita Singh, Mackenzie Schuler, Hareem Bilal, NatalieJean-Marie, Mya Elisabeth George, Nawshin Haq, Mical Habtemikael, Michael Tang, Nataliya Raza (2021).

WEEK 6 FEBRUARY 24 - 26

Week 6: Garbage and Creativity

Meeting 1:

Students submission and presentation of *Project 1 – Art in Landscape*.

The birth of the “throwaway society” and the junk art.

Introducing the practical exercise “Find your Junk Art” (full prompt on Moodle).

Meeting 2:

Discussing the results of the practical exercise “Find Your Junk Art”.

The “Three R’s” approach.

Case studies: “Ecolo vase” by Enzo Mari; “di(af)fetti” and “Rivedro” by Maddalena Vantaggi.

Introducing *Project 2 - Re(f)used*.

Readings and resources for the week:

“These artists transform garbage into garb to take a stand”, Ayodeji Rotinwa (2022).

“The value of imperfection in sustainable design”, Giuseppe Salvia, Francesca Ostuzzi, Valentina Rognoli, Marinella Levi (2010).

Semester Break: NO CLASS

WEEK 7 MARCH 10 - 12

Week 7: Reuse between Art and Design

Meeting 1:

Art and design for sustainability.

Paolo Ulian: reuse and designing from scraps.

Project 2 development review and in-class work.

Meeting 2:

Student submission and presentation of *Project 2 – Refused*.

Introducing activism and useful art: Tania Bruguera and the “Art Util” project.

Readings and resources for the week:

“Paolo Ulian: thinking in marble”, Matilde Battistini (2011).

“Art and Creativity: Essential Components of Sustainability”, Lukas Gutierrez (2023).

“Anger and Art”, Andre Démuth, Slávka Démuthov (2024).

WEEK 8 MARCH 17 - 19

Week 8: Useful Activism

Meeting 1:

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
Introducing *Project 3 – Useful Artivism*.

Meeting 2:

Contemporary activist projects, between ecology and protection of human rights.
Project 3 development review.

Readings and resources for the week:

“Reflexions on arte útil (useful art)”, Tania Bruguera (2012)
“The Artist as Activist: Tania Bruguera in Conversation with Claire Bishop”, conference
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4raYhes7OwI>

WEEK 9 MARCH 24 - 26

Week 9: Becoming an Artist

Meeting 1:

Visit to “Palazzo della Penna” Museum (Perugia).

Meeting 2:

Project 3 development review.

Readings and resources for the week:

“Weiwei on reclaiming art from capitalism”, Ai Weiwei (2021).

WEEK 10 MARCH 31 - APRIL 2

Week 10: Final Project Definition

Meeting 1:

Workshop with Monica Grelli and visit to her laboratory in Via dei Priori

Meeting 2:

Project 3 development review.

Readings and resources for the week:

“Designing for change. Chicago protest art of the 1960s–70s”, exhibition catalogue (2024).
www.chicagohistory.org/exhibition/designing-for-change-chicago-protest-art-of-the-1960s-70s/

WEEK 11 APRIL 7 - 9

Week 11: Final Project Development

Meeting 1

Work in class: planning and organizing the activist action; planning how to collect and organize documentation

materials (photos, video, interviews).

Meeting 2

NO CLASS

Readings and resources for the week:

“Understanding Art-Making as Documentation”, Tim Gorichanaz (2017)

In this week, students must carry out their useful activist projects and create documentation (photos, videos, graphics, collages, etc.) for the final presentation. Depending on how the research progresses, this week may include further theoretical or practical explorations aimed at implementing students' projects.

WEEK 12 APRIL 14 - 16

Final Class and Presentation

Meeting 1:

Work in class for the final project presentation.

Meeting 2:

Student submission and presentation of *Project 3 – Useful Activism*.

WEEK 13 APRIL 21 - 24

Special Academic Events Week

NO CLASS