

ARTZH 494 Contemporary Practices: Venice Biennale and Renaissance Art History

Art Department, Montana State University Billings

Study Abroad course – May 15 – 26, 2026

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Course Description

This class will use the 61st Venice Biennale *In Minor Keys* curated by Koyo Kouoh as the foundation for exploring contemporary art and the relationship between artist, artwork, and cultural context. Our study will place artworks within a social, historical, and political framework and students will learn to analyze art criticism and theories of contemporary art. Additionally, we will be investigating the lasting impact of the Italian renaissance in Florence, Italy including works of art, philosophy, science and technology.

Teaching Method

Instruction will take place during pre-trip meetings, on-site at the Venice Biennale, at various cultural museums in Venice and Florence and through group discussions. Participation in the discussion is expected and encouraged. Readings will be posted to the course Canvas site and Box Folder available before and during the on-site portion of the course.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Exhibit familiarity with major art works, makers, and movements in contemporary art and place them within the social, cultural, and political contexts of their making;
- Conduct original research on selected artworks and present information in a clear and concise manner to peers;
- Be conversant in the current artistic and cultural debates within the field of contemporary art and international art biennials.

Course Text/Readings

All readings will be available as PDF's on Canvas/Box or distributed to our class list via email.

Course Projects

- Personal research into art and artworks expected to experience in Venice and Florence
- Participation in group discussion during travel
- Journal/sketchbook that incorporates reading notes, sketches, exhibition inquiries, artist/cultural information, and responses to prompts and questions

Grading

As this class involves a great deal of class discussion and on-site activities a significant portion of your grade will be based on class participation. This include preparedness and participation in class discussions and activities. The following is the breakdown of grades:

Class Participation and Preparedness	70%
Journal/Sketchbook	20%
Personal Research	10%

Working Reading and Watch List:

Art Trip: Venice Biennale PBS – 2017 Biennale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXY7hslo2CM>

Need to see the film: Taking Venice by Director Amei Wallach

Seems to talk about the effort for Rauschenberg to win the grand prize at the 32nd Biennale. (I think we can rent this....)

Course Outline

- A. History of Venice Biennale and it's cultural significance
- B. 2026 Iteration of Venice Biennale (info avail late February 2026)
 - a. Statement from Juror
 - b. Exhibition Statement
 - c. Exhibiting Artists
 - d. Pavilions in Giardini
 - e. Arsenale Artists
 - f. Satellite venues
- C. Florentine Renaissance

Course Schedule

Pre-Trip Meetings 6-7 Tuesday Evenings TBD

Jan 20 Logistics Venice Biennale

Jan 27 History of the Biennale

Other meeting dates/topics to be announced

All class meetings pre-trip will include logistics and assistance with preparing for travel.