

DEvised THEATER: Adapting *Citizen*

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UMass Theater 393N, spring 2018, 3 credits

Mon & Wed, 2:30 – 5:15

Office Hours, Wednesday 12:30-1:30 and by appt., Rand Lobby 027B

"What the times demand, and in an unprecedented fashion, is that one be - not seem - outrageous, independent, anarchical. That one be thoroughly disciplined - as a means of being spontaneous. That one resist at whatever cost the fearful pressures placed on one to lie about one's own experience. For in the same way that the writer (artist) scarcely ever had a more uneasy time, s/he/they have never been needed more."

James Baldwin, 1959

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the collaborative process of Devised Theater; original work created by a group of artists who in many instances are also the performers. In the past sixty years this approach to theater-making has increased among professional companies and more recently has gained popularity in the fields of education and community engagement.

Our class will continue research begun in fall 2017 to adapt the book *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine for the stage. This profound and provocative text was published in 2014 to unanimous acclaim, the book demands our attention as this nation grapples with defining who we are as a society. Our studio work will explore how this essentially poetic text can be crafted for performance.

The class meets twice a week for two hours and 45 minutes. The process of devising work requires more frequent sessions and we will be presenting the work at the end of the semester.

Please note that substantial rehearsal time outside of our scheduled times is required to adequately prepare material.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Research methods and techniques of selected devised theater companies
- Engage in studio practice and research towards development of devised theater pieces
- Evaluate the use of devising as a tool for social transformation
- Build ensemble and strengthen collaborative skills

“Play is the antidote for the mechanical and fascist body. Play is what resurrects the body and delivers it from the confines of the fixed discipline of the gymnastic [athletic] body. It is what allows forms and ideas to change and transform. Play announces the future.”

Jennie Reznick, *Magnet Theatre: Two Decades of Making Space*

REQUIRED TEXT

Citizen: An American Lyric – Claudia Rankine

FILMS & VIDEO

Devising Gilgamesh and *13th* – in-class screenings

The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution, *Get Out*, *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*, *Anne Braden: Southern Patriot* – available on Moodle

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Punctuality, Attendance and Class Participation (Individual 30%)

As appropriate to training in the theatre attendance and punctuality are mandatory. This is a studio class in a collaborative art form and as a member of the ensemble you are expected to be on time, arrive prepared to work and remain for the duration of the class. Promptness is essential in all theatre work. Late arrival to class will disrupt the warm-up and the focus of the ensemble. Repeated lateness will affect the final grade. For each unexcused absence your grade will be lowered one half letter grade. Absences are excused at the discretion of the instructor, advanced email notification is expected, if possible. Medical absences require a note, either from a private physician or from the UMass Health Center.

- ***turn off cell phones and all electronic devices for the entire class including breaks***
- dress for movement and comfort including appropriate footwear
- water only in the studio, bring food or beverages for breaks
- respect all ensemble members’ time, space and contributions to class
- performers must schedule outside rehearsals and book practice space as necessary

Class Attendance/Participation in Final Open Studio Reading 50% (group)

Being on time and present for class sessions is the most important requirement.

Gallery Visit 10% (individual)

Attendance at the University Museum of Contemporary Art (UMCA) shows ‘5 Takes on African Art: Exploring the Charles Derby Collection’ and ‘42 Flags: Paintings by Fred Wilson’ and a Moodle forum response to the exhibits. A Moodle response is required.

Moodle Forum 20% (individual)

An interactive forum to weekly on-responses to *Citizen* as we develop our staged reading. Your posts are based on the weekly assigned reading and due the following Friday by 5:00.

Also required is a response to the University Museum of Contemporary Arts (UMCA) exhibit.

Outline for Script and Staging 20% (individual)

Based on our conversations, discoveries and expanding on the material generated in the Performance + Research class script each company member will share suggestions for our final staged reading. This outline will include excerpts from the *Citizen* text (listed according to page), design ideas including lighting, costume and sound plus concepts for staging. This is due as hard copy; double spaced, 12 point font, submitted at the beginning of class.

Maintaining a Journal

Maintaining a journal, also called an artists' notebook, is crucial to success in this course. The journal is not for submission or grading, rather it is for you to chart your creative development. It contains notes from class, dreams, observations of human behavior, useful references for script development, photos, pictures, conversations, your own drawings, etc. An artists' notebook requires consistent writing. Please bring your journal to class.

Written Assignments

All written assignments are double spaced in 12 point font. Assignments turned in late will be discounted one half grade for each class they are late and will not be accepted if they are late more than one class periods.

Email Policy

Email will be answered during the week within 24 hours, email sent over the weekend will be answered on Monday.

Individual Needs

This course must be as inclusive as possible and your communication is appreciated. Please notify the instructors if there is anything to be aware of regarding your particular needs or characteristics, such as a medical condition, a hidden disability, etc. that may influence your participation or your personal well-being. This disclosure is optional, or if you wish, only for selected individuals. UMass Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS) you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course.

Open Door Policy

If the requirements for the course are unclear please consult with the instructors during office after class times. Every effort is made to create a safe environment and a comfortable learning community for everyone. If at any time you feel it necessary, please feel free to address these issues with the instructors.

Student Conduct and Academic Honesty

Students are responsible for complying with University of Massachusetts' standards of student conduct and academic honesty.

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Week 1:

Mon 1/22 – Greeting the Ensemble, discuss syllabus
Wed 1/24 – In-class screening *Devising Gilgamesh*

Week 2:

Mon 1/29 – Discuss *Devising Gilgamesh*
Wed 1/31 - Discuss *Citizen* pages 5-55
(Moodle response due Fri 2/2)

Week 3:

Mon 2/5 - Discuss *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*
Wed 2/7- Discuss *Citizen* pages 59-95
(Moodle response due Fri 2/9)

Week 4:

Mon 2/12 - Discuss *Anne Braden: Southern Patriot*
Wed 2/14 - Discuss *Citizen* pages 99-129
(Moodle response due Fri 2/16)

Week 5:

Mon 2/19 – President's Day Holiday
Wed 2/21 - Discuss *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*

Week 6:

Mon 2/26 - Discuss *Get Out!*
Wed 2/28 - Discuss *Citizen* pages 131-156
(Moodle response due Fri 3/2)

Week 7:

Mon 3/5 - In-class screening *13th*
Wed 3/7 - Script and Staging Outlines due
Discuss *13th*

Week 8: SPRING BREAK, 3/10 – 3/18

Weeks 9-14:

Classes after Spring Break will be rehearsals for our final Open Studio presentation at the end of the semester. Moodle response for the UMCA gallery exhibit is due on the last class Mon 4/30.