

PHILOSOPHY OF ART

Gustavus Adolphus College
Spring Semester, 2005
MWF, 2:30
Confer 128

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Required Texts

Aesthetics: A Reader in Philosophy of the Arts
Art on My Mind

ed. Goldblatt and Brown
bell hooks

Other Readings (provided in class)

“Photography in the Age of Falsification”
Essays from *On Looking*

Kenneth Brower
John Berger

Course Description: Philosophy of Art is a middle level course. However, since it is also a course that attracts students from a variety of backgrounds, we cannot assume a foundation of common knowledge about the arts. If we are to have productive discussions about the philosophy of art, therefore, we need to develop a common language for responding to artworks. As the philosopher Immanuel Kant said, all aesthetic judgments are particular. “Roses are beautiful” is not an aesthetic judgment. “This rose is beautiful” may express an aesthetic judgment. Therefore, we will spend considerable time in this class looking at works of visual art together. This is a philosophy course, not an art appreciation course. Nevertheless, I believe that at the end of the course you will be able to visit an art museum with a far greater sense of appreciation than you have now. One reason for this, as Arthur Danto has reasoned, is that much contemporary art is deeply philosophical.

There are two major goals for the course, therefore: 1. To introduce you to the major theories about what makes something a work of art, and 2. To use these approaches as avenues through which works of original art can be experienced and appreciated. The course will regularly alternate between abstract and very concrete thinking about the arts.

Although we will make some attempt to look at a broad range of art forms, we will focus primarily on the visual arts, especially painting, sculpture, and photography.

Note: This course fulfills the Arts Appreciation requirement for Curriculum I.

Requirements

Three papers:

Papers will be five page critical/interpretive essays. They will be due one week after we finish the relevant sections of the course. Note the due dates below. Everyone will write the first two papers. On the third paper you will have a choice between options 3a and 3b. When the first paper opportunity arrives you will receive ample information on how to write a philosophy paper.

Class contribution, informal writing:

As Socrates understood, philosophy is inherently conversational. It is a public art in the sense that the only way to determine the worth of an idea is to test it against other opinions. Philosophy goes on *in class*, therefore, not just in the comfortable solitude of your dorm room as you read class assignments. Class attendance and participation are expected of everyone. Participation in class includes everything from informed conversation to the look on your face as others speak. Enthusiastic, regular participation in class will affect your grade favorably. Excessive absences will count against your final grade.

As preparation for class discussion and for papers I will also ask you to write informal responses to class readings. Since the point of these is to encourage you to read critically and think about the issues creatively, these assignments are not graded. However, I do collect them at the beginning of class, and failure to hand them in will affect your grade for class participation.

Midterm and final:

There will be essay exams at midterm and at the end of the semester. Please note the dates and times today. No alterations will be made in the schedule without a written excuse from your doctor.

Grading:

The three papers and two tests will each count for 20% of the final grade. I reserve the right to raise or lower the average of the five major factors by up to half a grade depending on class contribution and informal writing.

.Class Schedule

I. Introduction: 2/7 – 2/11

(What to look for in a work of art: slides/discussion, etc.)
Video: Wegmans' World

II. Traditional Theories of Art.

A. Art as Imitation 2/14-2/23

Plato, *Against Imitation*
Plato, *The Allegory of the Cave*
Aristotle, *On Tragedy*
Gombrich, "The Limits of Likeness"

Video: *The Secret of Marcel Duchamp*

3/2 – first paper due; the theory of art as representation

B. Art as the Expression of Emotion 2/25 – 2/28

Collingwood, *The Poetic Expression of Emotion*

C. Art as Form 3/2 – 3/7

Kant, *Judgements About the Beautiful*
Bell, *Form in Modern Painting*

D: The Artworld 3/9 – 3/18

Video: Robert Rauschenberg: Inventive Genius
Arthur C. Danto, "Works of Art and Mere Real Things"
Film: *Basquiat*

Review for Midterm Examination: 3/21

Midterm Examination: Wednesday, March 23

4/8– second paper due

E. Taste 4/4 – 4/6

Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste*

III. The Specific Arts

A. Painting 4/8 – 4/18

Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting"
Film: *Pollock*
Video: Jasper Johns: Take an Object

3/25 – paper option 3a is due

B. Photography 4/20 – 4/29

Video: *Henri Cartier-Bresson ?*

Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical
Reproduction”

Kenneth Brower, “Photography in the Age of Falsification” (handout)

John Berger, essays from *About Looking* (handouts)

5/6 – paper option 3b is due

C: Architecture 5/2 – 5/4

Roger Scruton, “The Problem of Architecture”

Robert Venturi, “Architecture as Decorated Shelter”

Finale: 5/6 - 5/16 -

Nochlin, “Why Are There No Great Woman Artists”

Film: *Frida*

bell hooks, *Art on My Mind*

5/18 – review for final

Final Examination: Tuesday, May 24, 3:30, in the classroom

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please observe the above dates carefully; no alternate dates for papers and exams will be scheduled because of early flights home, late arrivals, run-ins with St. Peter’s finest, near death experiences, etc.