

THINKING ABOUT ART

Course Description

This course studies the nature of art and artists, and how art and artists fit into society. Although the course follows a rough chronological sequence, its structure is thematic. Readings range from political philosophy and art criticism to short fiction. The course begins with the philosophical writings of Leonardo, Lessing, Rousseau and Tocqueville and then moves to two works of fiction—a short story by Balzac and a novella by John Fowles. This is followed by a close reading of two essays by the great 20th-century American critic, Clement Greenberg. The last readings in the course are about a controversial court case involving the removal of a public work of art in the Federal Plaza in New York. The course finishes with a Woody Allen movie.

Class discussions focus closely on the assigned readings, and involve all of us generating and discussing questions from close study of the readings. We'll be asking probing questions about whether painting is superior to sculpture, how painting and literature affect people differently, and whether or not art and artists are necessarily good for society. We'll look at how art fits into a democracy, as opposed to an aristocracy, and how mass culture affects both contemporary art and artists. And we'll ask hard questions surrounding the place of public art in a democracy—such as whether or not public funds should be used for art, and if so, who should decide what art should be funded and exhibited.

Course Requirements

There are three **SHORT** papers in this course (2-3 pages each), one open-book midterm examination, and a final exam. The first paper **REQUIRES** two drafts. The first draft will receive a grade which will be lifted a half grade after you write your second draft. Papers that are handed in late are graded down. There is a **REQUIRED** field trip to a museum in New York on a Sunday to be announced.

Attendance is critical in this course. Missing a seminar meeting is equivalent to missing almost a week of an ordinary class. Grading will be adversely affected if you miss three seminar meetings.

Participation in the seminar is important, but participation comes in many forms: Attendance accompanied by alert listening to the discussion, and the occasional intelligent question or comment, is counted as participation.

Advisement

An important part of our FYC seminar includes advisement. As your assigned Hofstra University adviser, I am eager to work with you in discussing both your long-term goals, as well as your short-term plans. I have posted office hours, and you are welcome to drop by. Unfortunately, because I am so frequently called out of my office, it is always best to make an appointment to see me either by email, or after class. Everyone should make plans to see *me sometime during the first three weeks of the semester.*

Weekly Syllabus

Wed. Sep. 6	Introduction; (Gombrich handout)
Mon. Sep. 11	E.H. Gombrich, "Leonardo's Method for Working out Compositions," from <i>The Essential Gombrich</i> (handout) <i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , ed. Martin Kemp Acknowledgements; Editor's Introduction; Preface; pp. 13-22
Wed. Sep. 13	<i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , ed. Martin Kemp, pp. 22-46
Mon Sep. 18	<i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , ed. Martin Kemp, pp. 193-227
Wed. Sep. 20	Lessing, <i>Laocoon</i> Foreward, Translator's Introduction, Preface Chs 1-7
Mon. Sep. 25	Lessing, <i>Laocoon</i> , Chs. 8-15
Wed. Sep. 27	Lessing, <i>Laocoon</i> , Chs. 15-25
Mon. Oct. 2	NO CLASS
Weds. Oct. 4	Lessing, <i>Laocoon</i> , Chs. 15-25 FIRST ESSAY DUE (on Lessing)
Mon. Oct. 9	Rousseau, <i>The Letter to D'Alembert</i> (Introduction; first half)
Wed. Oct. 11	Rousseau, <i>The Letter to D'Alembert</i> (begin second half)
Mon. Oct. 16	Rousseau, <i>The Letter to D'Alembert</i> (finish second half)

Wed. Oct. 18	MIDTERM EXAMINATION: Rousseau (Open Book)
Mon. Oct. 23	Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> (selections)
Wed. Oct. 25	Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> (selections)
Mon. Oct. 30	Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> (selections)
Wed. Nov. 1	Balzac, <i>The Unknown Masterpiece</i> (handout)
Mon. Nov. 6	SECOND ESSAY DUE (on Tocqueville) Fowles, <i>The Ebony Tower</i>
Weds. Nov. 8	Fowles, <i>The Ebony Tower</i>
Mon. Nov. 13	Clement Greenberg (selected essays, handouts)
Weds. Nov. 15	Clement Greenberg (selected essays, handouts)
Mon. Nov. 20	NO CLASS FIELD TRIP EXCHANGE
Weds. Nov. 22	NO CLASS THANKSGIVING RECESS
Mon. Nov. 27	THIRD ESSAY DUE (on Greenberg) Public Art Slide Lecture
Weds. Nov. 29	Public Art; (handouts). Slide Lecture
Mon. Dec. 4	Public Art: Debate
Weds. Dec. 6	Woody Allen, <i>Bullets Over Broadway</i> (movie)
Weds. Dec. 6	Discussion: Connecting the movie to our readings.
Mon. Dec. 11	Last Class: Review for final examination