

Seeing through Making: Constructing a Visual World **University Honors Program Junior/Senior Seminar**

Taught in Fall 2000; may be offered in the future

Janine Vannata, '02, was awarded the Hofstra Undergraduate Library Research Award for the year 2000 for her seminar paper on the artist Jasper Johns that was written for this course.

Course Description (See end for syllabus)

This course is a seminar/discussion course, combined with five specific studio projects. It culminates in individual seminar presentations.

We study five art models from the history of Western art (from the renaissance through modernism). Although there is some art history, the course mainly studies the meaning of the selected visual inventions. Each model helps students understand how art makes as well as describes the world, and each model is explored in reading, seminar discussion, and studio work. The course is designed for the non-studio major. The studio problems teach a fuller understanding of the ideas encountered in the reading and discussions, and studio projects are not assessed for their quality. The seminar discussions are based on the reading assignments, which emphasize the philosophical implications of the different visual models that we examine.

The studio projects are mostly concerned with the “objective” parts of art, such as linear perspective or the modeling of form, rather than the “subjective” parts of art. The readings range from writings by individual artists (such as Leonardo and Cézanne on painting, as translated by Martin Kemp and Herschel Chipp, respectively) to philosophical and art historical essays (such as David Hume’s inquiry into whether or not judgments about art are relative, Gombrich’s analysis of Leonardo’s working methods, or Anthony Grafton’s study of the relevance of renaissance humanism to the renaissance artist).

Purpose

The purpose of the course is to teach students that art is not something “out there,” already defined. Rather, it is something artists continuously change, throughout history, in order to speak to and about their own times. The course aims to increase the overall cultural awareness of the student, and to challenge clichés and unexamined opinions about art. The emphasis is on 1) analyzing how art works *as art*; 2) the meaning of art as artists respond to the specific problems of their times.

Course requirements/assignments

Studio work (approx. 25% of in-class time)
 Slide lectures and discussion seminars (approx. 75% of in-class time)
 based on the reading assignments
 Outside studio assignments (approximately 1-2 hours per project: this
 consists primarily of completing unfinished class work)
 Outside reading assignments (approximately 5 hours per week)
 In-class critiques of studio work
 10-page research/thinking paper on a particular artist's visual
 vocabulary and the meaning of the art
 Occasional paragraphs or short essays, written either in class or due in
 class

A. Studio Work

The studio work in this course is different from usual studio courses in that it stresses mastery of concepts. It does not attempt to develop skills. Continued practice in studio courses is what leads to projects that display excellence on all fronts, but this course does not do this. Even so, some students will inevitably display more accomplished skills that will yield superior projects. Grading of studio projects is based on whether or not the student masters the conceptual issues at stake, rather than makes a work of art of a certain quality. Because there is a wide range of projects, students might be pleasantly surprised to find out they have a few areas of strength.

The following is a broad description of what the *studio* work entails:

1. Linear perspective. Students will first be taught the basic principles of linear perspective: convergence, diminution in size, and proportion. They will also be taught specific concepts which enable them to draw in perspective—the picture plane, horizon line, eye level, viewpoint, ground plane, orthogonals and vanishing points. They will then “follow” the instructor at the blackboard, using a straight edge, pencil and eraser on their white drawing paper, constructing cubes in 1-pt, 2-pt and 3-pt perspective, above, on, and below the horizon line. Once this is mastered, they will learn to draw to scale and in perspective a pavimento and a circle (following Alberti. They will draw a little room with a tile floor and a table with a few items on it in one-point, scaled perspective. 1-2 studio sessions.
2. Modeling of form through chiaroscuro and the use of sfumato. Students will learn about how tonality adds to the perception of

illusionistic depth and roundness, and how softening the contours of a form helps the illusion of roundness. They will draw a “schema” first (the ideal modeled sphere), and then draw from observation a cylinder in linear perspective (which they will have learned) with a cast shadow and gradual transitions from light to dark. The drawing will be done in using continuous tone. Success depends on the student producing several tones, ranging from light to dark, and controlling the transitions from one tone to another.

3. Modeling of form through color. This project requires students understand, through reading and a slide lecture, the importance of Cézanne’s revolution. Using brushes, paper and a pre-stretched, gessoed canvas (9 x 12 inches), students will use Cézanne’s approach to paint a few apples sitting on a ground plane, from observation. They will have to structure the mass and give weight to the apples according to principles of warm and cool and bright and dull, rather than dark and light. They will learn about the basic working of hues in this section of the course—a simple color wheel, primaries, secondaries and tertiaries, and a little of the science of optics and psychology of color that informed so much late 19th-century French art.
4. Cubism. The slide lecture on cubism, along with the reading, is necessary for students to understand the philosophical implications of this radical revolution in Western art. In the studio work, students will do analytic cubism with pencil on paper and learn how to create ambiguous space by making shapes which are not completely closed and can be “read” as simultaneously in front of and behind what is next to them. They will also do a synthetic cubist project, reconstructing an image through collage.
5. Dada. The readings and slide lecture on Marcel Duchamp and Dada will give students the foundation for understanding the philosophical assault on art that Dada represents. The studio project, which is actually an outside project later presented in class, requires students think up a work of conceptual art.

B. 10-15 page Seminar Paper and Seminar Presentation

The most important part of this course is the seminar paper and report. Early in the course, students select an artist from a list of artists, provided by the instructor, whose visual vocabulary can be understood because of what we study in the course. All artists on the list are well-represented in the Hofstra Library, and their work is in museums in New York City.

The paper requires library research and an incorporation of the ideas and concepts learned in class. The paper combines research on the individual artist

(including a brief summation of the artist's biography, the place of the artist within the particular art historical moment, the overarching social/historical moment of the artist and art movement to which he or she belonged, and the understanding of what the art means) with formal analysis of the artist's work. The student also gives a seminar report to the class.

The seminar paper, although briefly summing up the biography, art historical and social/historical situation of the artist, should be a study of the formal elements in the art.

The seminar paper requires an outline, based on preliminary research, due about a third of the way through the course. The first draft is due just after midterm, and the final draft due during finals week. *The instructor's main written response is to the first draft*, and students are expected to fully develop the first draft. The instructor is available during office hours for individual consultations on research, ideas and analysis, and writing.

Grading criteria

Grading for the course follows Hofstra standards, as per the Hofstra Bulletin. More specifically, it is based on the instructor's evaluation of the mastery of topics studied in the course as displayed in the following: seminar participation, studio work, the occasional short paragraphs or essays based on the reading, and the final seminar paper and seminar presentation.

Grading of the studio work stays close to the objective criteria of the problems. At a minimum, students must be focused, work hard, complete the assigned projects, and accept and incorporate criticism in order to do well. Studio project grades are pass/fail.

Grading for the paper is based on the quality of research, the organization and clarity of the paper, the quality of analysis, and the grammar and spelling. The oral presentation and leading of discussion during the seminar presentation is also a significant part of the final course grade. Students are expected to display oral mastery of their topics.

Grading distribution is as follows:

studio work approximately 10%

paper approximately 50%

seminar presentation approximately 10%

class participation, class preparation, approx. 20%

attendance and quizzes, short essays 10%

Syllabus

Texts for purchase:

1. Kemp, Martin, Ed. Leonardo on Painting. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
2. Chipp, Herschel P., Ed. Theories of Modern Art. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. Selections from, esp. Cezanne, Picasso, Braque, Duchamp.

Handout

David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" (handed out the first day of class).

Electronic Reserve Reading (at the Hofstra Library web site, organized in order of reading assignments)

J.V. Field, "Building, Drawing and 'Artificial Perspective,'" pp. 20-42 in J.V. Field, The Invention of Infinity

E.H. Gombrich, "Leonardo's Method for Working out Compositions," pp. 211-221, in Gombrich, The Essential Gombrich

E.H. Gombrich, "From the Revival of Letters to the Reform of the Arts..." pp. 411-435, in Gombrich, The Essential Gombrich

Anthony Grafton, Ch. II: Humanism: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Scholarship, pp. 31-70, in Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance.

Paul Smith, "Cézanne and the Problem of Form," pp. 145-163, in Paul Smith, Impressionism

Paul Smith, "Cézanne's Optic," pp. 40-75, in Smith, Interpreting Cézanne

John Golding, "Cubism," pp. 50-78, in Golding, Concepts of Modern Art

Dawn Ades, "Dada and Surrealism," pp. 110-137, in Concepts of Modern Art

William A. Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain:..." pp. 64-94, in Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century

Jerrold Siegel, "Desire, Delay, and the Fourth Dimension," pp.86-114, in Siegel, The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp

Studio Materials

1 pad "good" white drawing paper, 13 x 24 inches (20 sheets);
1 H pencil; 1 4B pencil or 6B pencil; 1 pink eraser; 1 kneaded eraser
1 15-inch straight edge; 1 bottle rubber cement; 1 pre-stretched 9 x 12
inch gessoed canvas (readily available at an art store); Acrylic paints: (25
ml tubes) white, ultramarine blue, cerulean blue, alizaron crimson,
cadmium red light, vermilion green, raw umber, cadmium yellow light
(NOTE: we will pool resources for the paints so that students will need
purchase only one or two tubes of paint); Acrylic brushes: 2 brights, $\frac{1}{4}$
inch width; or 1 bright and 1 round