

AR204 Art and Interpretation

Art and Aesthetics
Module: Art Objects and Experience
Fall 2018

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman
Course Times: Wednesday, 14:00- 15:30 and Friday, 14:00-15:30 (until 17:15 for museum visits)
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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 14:00-16:00

Course Description

Describing a painting, the art historian Leo Steinberg wrote: “The picture conducts itself the way a vital presence behaves. It creates an encounter.” In this course, we will encounter works of art to explore the specific dialogue each creates with a viewer and the range of interpretive possibilities it offers. More specifically, the course will examine various interpretive approaches to art, including formal analysis, iconography, social and historical contextualism, aestheticism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis. Most importantly, we will engage interpretation in ways that are significant both within art historical discourse and in addressing larger questions of human experience and (self-)knowledge, considering the dialogue with the artwork in its affective (emotional) as well as its intellectual aspects. The course will be guided throughout by sustained discussion of a small number of individual artworks, with a focus on pictorial representation (painting, drawing, photography), although sculpture and installation art will also be considered. We will look at works from a range of different cultural traditions, and among the artists we will focus on are Xia Gui, Giorgione, Bruegel, Mirza Ali, Velázquez, Hokusai, Manet, Picasso, Man Ray, Martin, and Sherman. Readings will focus on texts in art history and theory but also include philosophical and psychoanalytic texts (Pater, Wölfflin, Freud, Merleau-Ponty, Barthes, Clark, and Krauss, among others). Visits to Berlin museums to experience works of art firsthand are an integral part of the course.

Course Books

Note that there is no reader required for the course. Readings will generally be handed out as photocopies before the class for which they are assigned.

Library and book purchase policies

The college book policy for 2018-2019 is that reserve stocks of books will be lent to students on the basis of need, or (thereafter) on a first come first served basis. Books not yet owned by the college will be purchased only to create a small library reserve collection, and for students receiving more than 70% financial aid. Otherwise, students must purchase all course books.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Attendance

For this class attendance is mandatory, and active participation in discussions will be an essential part of the course. More than two absences (that is, absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. Readings should be done in advance of the class for which they are assigned. Please refer to the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Museum Visits

Five of our scheduled classes will be museum visits. These will usually be on Friday, since the longer block of time scheduled for our course on Fridays allows us to make these visits during regular class time.

Assessment

Participation

Students should arrive to each class on time and prepared. Being prepared means

- (1) having completed the assigned reading (in the specific editions indicated above),
- (2) bringing to class a non-electronic copy of the assigned reading, and
- (3) being ready to initiate and to contribute to discussion.

Engagement in class discussion should be regular as well as productive; quantity alone will not favorably affect the participation grade.

Writing Assignments

There will be two principal assignments over the course of the term: a midterm essay of 6-7 pages (2000-2300 words) and a final presentation accompanied by an essay of 9-10 pages (3000-3300 words), due at the end of the term.

Policy on late submission of papers

From the Student Handbook on the submission of essays:

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example).

Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Class participation: 30%

Midterm essay: 30%

Final presentation: 10%

Final essay: 30%

Schedule

I. Form and Meaning

(Formal analysis; semiotics)

Wednesday, September 5 **Introduction: The Marriage at Cana**

No reading assignment

Friday, September 7 **Linear and Painterly**

Reading:

Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, "Linear and Painterly," pp.18-29, 41-53

Wednesday, September 12 **Space and Surface**

Reading:

Norris Kelly Smith, *Here I Stand: Perspective from Another Point of View*, Chapter 4

Friday, September 14 **Grebo Sculpture and Picasso's Collages**

Reading:

Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, "Kahnweiler's Lesson"

Sunday, September 16 **Visit to the Museum of Islamic Art**

Reading:

Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*, Chapter 6, pp. 111-123 and 252-261

Wednesday, September 19 **Abstraction: Form and the Formless**

Visual assignment: group presentations

Reading:

Clement Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational, and so forth"

Meyer Schapiro, "On the Humanity of Abstract Painting"

Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, pp. 244-263

II. Iconography and Counter-Iconography

(iconography and iconology; the *paragone*: text and image)

Friday, September 21 No class

Wednesday, September 26 **Ovid and Renaissance Art**

Reading:

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 568-750, II, 833-875, VI, 1-145, VIII, 152-182, and XIV, 623-771

Ovid, *The Art of Love*, I, 525-630

Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, "Introductory"

Friday, September 28 **Counter-Iconography: Pieter Bruegel the Elder**

Reading:

Selections from The Bible

Hans Sedlmayr, "Bruegel's 'Macchia,'" sections I-III and IX-XI (Wood trans., pp. 323-335, 356-370)

Wednesday, October 3 No class

Friday, October 5 Visit to the Scharf-Gerstenberg Collection

Reading:
 Selected poems (contributed by the group)

Wednesday, October 10 Cindy Sherman and the Society of Spectacle

Reading:
 Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors*, "Cindy Sherman: Untitled," pp. 101-113, 133-142, and 154-159
 Norman Bryson, "House of Wax"

III. Experience and Imagination (aestheticism; phenomenology)

Friday, October 12 Song Dynasty Landscape: Fan Kuan, Xia Gui

Reading:
 Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*, Chapter 5, pp. 200-225

Wednesday, October 17 Art and the Evocative: Giorgione and Whistler

Visual assignment: group presentations
Reading:
 Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, "The School of Giorgione" and "Conclusion"

Friday, October 19 Henri Matisse

Reading:
 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," sections II, IV, and V

Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Sunday, October 21

Wednesday, October 24 Agnes Martin

Reading:
 Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors*, "Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/"

Friday, October 26 Visit to the Hamburger Bahnhof

Reading:
 Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, selections
 Donald Judd, "Specific Objects"

FALL BREAK (October 29-November 4)

IV. The Painting of Modern Life (contextualism; Marxism and situationism)

Wednesday, November 7 **Hokusai and the Floating World**

Reading:

Katsushika Hokusai, *Views of Mount Fuji* (on the reserve shelf in the library)

T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, selections

Friday, November 9 **Manet and Haussmann's Paris**

Visual assignment: group presentations

Reading:

Edmond Duranty, *The New Painting*, selections

Jules LaForgue, "Impressionism"

T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, selections

Wednesday, November 14 **Atget: Photograph as Document?**

Reading:

Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography"

Molly Nesbit, *Atget's Seven Albums*, "Dust" (pp. 196-213)

V. Dialogue

(phenomenology and psychoanalysis)

Friday, November 16 **Visit to the Gemäldegalerie**

Reading:

David Rosand, "The Portrait, the Courtier, and Death," in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture* (ed. Hanning and Rosand)

Wednesday, November 21 **Las Meninas**

Reading:

Leo Steinberg, "Velázquez' 'Las Meninas'"

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Chapter 1: "Las Meninas"

Friday, November 23 **Camera obscura: Vermeer and photography**

Visual assignment: group presentations

Reading:

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Chapters 1-3, 8-10, 18-20, and 35-36

VI. Desire

(psychoanalysis, continued)

Wednesday, November 28 **Nature morte (Still Life)**

Reading:

Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"

Friday, November 30 **Visit to the Berggruen Museum**

Reading:

Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, selections

Wednesday, December 5 Photography and Surrealism

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism"

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Friday, December 7

Wednesday, December 12

Friday, December 14

Final essay due: 23:59 on Wednesday, December 19