AR204 ART AND INTERPRETATION

Art and Aesthetics
Module: Art Objects and Experience
Fall 2019

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman
Course Times: Wednesday, 9:00-10:30 and Friday, 10:45-12:15 (9:00-12:15 for museum visits)

Email: g.lehman@berlin.bard.edu
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, aesthetism, 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
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, Wölflin,
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 2019-2020 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 4**  
Introduction  
No reading assignment

**Friday, September 6**  
Linear and Painterly  
Reading:  

**Wednesday, September 11**  
Space and Surface: Mirza Ali  
Reading:  
Norris Kelly Smith, *Here I Stand: Perspective from Another Point of View*, Chapter 4

**Friday, September 13**  
Grebo Sculpture and Picasso's Collages  
Reading:  
Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, “Kahnweiler’s Lesson”

**Wednesday, September 18**  
Abstraction: Form and the Formless  
Reading:  
Clement Greenberg, “The Role of Nature in Modern Painting”  
Meyer Schapiro, “On the Humanity of Abstract Painting”  
Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, pp. 244-260

**Friday, September 20**  
Visit to the Museum of Islamic Art  
Reading:  
Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*, Chapter 6, pp. 111-123, 252-261

II. Iconography and Counter-Iconography  
(iconography and iconology; text and image)

**Wednesday, September 25**  
Ovid and Renaissance Art  
Visual assignment: group presentations  
Reading:  
Ovid, *The Art of Love*, I, 525-630  
Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, Book I, 25  
Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, “Introductory,” Section 1
Friday, September 27                  Counter-Iconography: Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Reading:
   Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 9
   Erwin Panofsky, Studies in Iconology, "Introductory," Section 2

Wednesday, October 2                  Cindy Sherman and the Society of Spectacle
Reading:
   Norman Bryson, “House of Wax”

Friday, October 4                     Visit to the Scharf-Gerstenberg Collection
Reading:
   Selected poems (contributed by the group)

III. Experience and Imagination
(aestheticsm; phenomenology)

Wednesday, October 9                 Song Dynasty Landscape: Fan Kuan, Xia Gui
Reading:
   Hubert Damisch, A Theory of /Cloud/, Chapter 5, pp. 200-203, 207-218

Friday, October 11                    Aestheticsm: Giorgione and Whistler
Visual assignment: group presentations
Reading:
   Walter Pater, The Renaissance, “The School of Giorgione” and “Conclusion”

Wednesday, October 13                Henri Matisse
Reading:
   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” sections II, IV, and V

Friday, October 18                    Visit to the Hamburger Bahnhof
Reading:
   Donald Judd, “Specific Objects”

Wednesday, October 23                Agnes Martin, The Tree
Reading:
   Rosalind Krauss, Bachelors, “Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/”

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

Friday, October 25                    Hokusai and the Floating World
Visual assignment: look at Hokusai’s Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji
Reading:
Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Sunday, October 27

FALL BREAK (October 28-November 3)

Wednesday, November 6       Manet and Haussmann's Paris
Reading:
    Charles Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil*, "To a Passer-By"
    Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, "Crowds" and "The Eyes of the Poor"
    Edmond Duranty, *The New Painting*, selections

Friday, November 8            Eugène Atget
Visual assignment: group presentation
Reading:
    Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography"

V. Dialogue
(affect)

Wednesday, November 13       Las Meninas
Reading:
    Leo Steinberg, "Velázquez’ ‘Las Meninas’"

Friday, November 15           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 20        Camera obscura
Visual assignment: group presentation
Reading:
    Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Chapters 1-3, 8-10, 18-20, and 35-36

VI. Desire
(psychoanalysis)

Friday, November 22           Nature morte / Still Life
Reading:
    Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny"

Wednesday, November 27        Photography and Surrealism
Reading:
Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," pp. 45-72
Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, Volume One, Chapters I and V

Friday, November 29
Visit to the Berggruen Museum
Reading:

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Wednesday, December 4
Friday, December 6
Wednesday, December 11
Friday, December 13

Final essay due: 23:59 on Wednesday, December 18