

# AR315 THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: ART AND THE ONEIRIC

Art and Aesthetics

Module: Aesthetics and Art Theory / Artists, Genres, Movements

Spring 2021

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman

Course Times: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:45-12:15

Email: [g.lehman@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:g.lehman@berlin.bard.edu)

Office Hours: Thursdays, 15:30-17:30

## Course Description

“He was part of my dream, of course—but then I was part of his dream, too!” (Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*). Alice’s reflection upon her dream evokes something of the oneiric experience that can be part of one’s encounter with a work of art: the dialogue between the specific universe the artwork invites us to enter—with its own logic, kinds of seeing, and means of expression—and the viewer as subject, bringing her or his own desires and experiences to its interpretation. One important aspect of this encounter could be described, in psychoanalytic terms, as a relationship between the unconscious wishes, drives, and memories of the viewing subject, on the one hand, and the unconscious qualities of the work itself, both in its production and—especially—in its visual character (its “optical unconscious”), on the other. Major topics for the course include: psychoanalytic interpretations of art; the relationship between the oneiric, the imaginative, and the theatrical; contemplation, daydreaming, schizophrenia, nightmares, and other altered states of consciousness in relation to the experience of artworks; the oneiric and visual narrativity; the place of (self-)reflexivity or its absence in immersive art. Artists whose works we study include Wang Ximeng, Fra Angelico, Mirza Ali, Goya, Redon, Picasso, Ernst, Miller, Kahlo, Fellini, Tarkovsky, Woodman, and Kusama. Readings will be from Lewis Carroll, De Quincey, Woolf, Freud, Jung, Caillois, Borges, Bachelard, and others.

## Course Books

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* (Norton Critical Edition), ISBN: 978-0393932348

Course reader

## Library and book purchase policies

The college book policy for 2020-2021 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. Syllabi should note that, instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### 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.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2021: Some students might need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

### Museum Visits

Two of our scheduled classes will be museum, gallery, or site visits. Since it is not possible to go to a museum during our scheduled class time, these excursions will be on Sunday afternoon and will replace a regular Tuesday or Thursday class for that week.

### 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, 2000-2500 words in length, and a final presentation accompanied by an essay, 3000-3500 words in length, due at the end of the term.

### Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Syllabi for core and elective classes should note or refer to the following policy 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. TIME

#### Week 1: The White Queen (oneiric narrativity)

Tuesday, February 2                      Mirza Ali, Hieronymus Bosch

Reading:

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: opening poems, Chapters 1-6

Thursday, February 4                      Max Klinger, *Paraphrase on the Finding of a Glove*

Reading:

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: Chapters 7-12

#### Week 2: The Garden of Live Flowers (text and image)

Tuesday, February 9                      Illustrating Alice

Reading:

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*: opening poem, Preface to the 1897 Edition, Chapters 1-6

Thursday, February 11                      Lewis Carroll, The *Alice* Books

Reading:

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*: Chapters 7-12, closing poem

#### Week 3: The Mock Turtle (*chronos* and *kairos*)

Tuesday, February 16 Dana Al Mojil, William Kentridge

Visual assignment (films):

*Wonderland: A True Story* (Al Mojil)

*Felix in Exile* (Kentridge)

Thursday, February 18 No class

Sunday, February 21,

15:00-16:30

Visit to Galleries of Contemporary Art

Reading:

Poems submitted by the group

## II. SUBJECTS

**Week 4: “Who Are You?” (states of [un]consciousness: daydreaming, contemplation, ecstasy)**

Tuesday, February 23 Room Space: Fra Angelico at San Marco, Edward Hopper

Reading:

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, “Corners”

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage International Edition, 2004), Part I, pp. 34-51

Thursday, February 25 Asad Faulwell and Islamic Art

Reading:

Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, “The Pleasures of Opium”

Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*, Chapter 3, pp. 111-123 (“Mathematics and Geometry in Islamic Art”)

**Week 5: Humpty Dumpty (personal iconography and free association)**

Tuesday, March 2 Pablo Picasso, *Vollard Suite*

Reading:

Carl Jung, “The Concept of the Collective Unconscious”

Leo Steinberg, “Picasso’s Sleepwatchers”

Thursday, March 4 Film screening: *8 ½* (Fellini)

Suggested reading (browsing): Federico Fellini, *The Book of Dreams*

**Week 6: The Looking-Glass (oneiric self-reflection)**

Tuesday, March 9 Frida Kahlo, Self-Portraits

Reading:

Carl Jung, “The Psychological Aspects of the Kore”

Thursday, March 11 Film screening: *Mirror* (Tarkovsky)  
Suggested reading: Andrej Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*

### III. OBJECTS

#### Week 7: The Old Sheep Shop (place as object / object as place)

Tuesday, March 16 Symbolism: Odilon Redon  
Reading:  
Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, “The Manifest Content of Dreams and the Latent Dream-Thoughts”

Thursday, March 18 Surrealism, I: Giorgio di Chirico, Salvador Dalí  
Reading:  
Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, “The Dream-Work”  
Suggested reading: Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Chapter VI: “The Dream-Work”

*Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Sunday, March 21*

#### Week 8: Mad Tea Party (surrealism and automatism)

Tuesday, March 23 Surrealism, II: Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning  
Reading:  
André Breton, “First Manifesto of Surrealism,” selections  
Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, Chapter 2, selections

Thursday, March 25 Surrealism, III: Remedios Varo  
Reading:  
Carl Jung, *The Red Book*, Liber Primus, pp. 118-126 (“The Way of What is to Come”) and Liber Secundus, pp. 361-374 (“Nox Quarta”)  
Suggested reading: Carl Jung, “Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy” (in Carl Jung, *Dreams* [Routledge Classics, 2002])

**SPRING BREAK (March 29-April 5)**

#### Week 9: A Game of Chess (the uncanny and the optical unconscious)

Tuesday, April 6 Surrealist Photography: Man Ray, Maurice Tabard, Lee Miller  
Reading:

Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," pp. 123-125 and 132-151  
Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," pp. 45-72

Thursday, April 8                      Film screening: *Alice* (Švankmajer)  
No reading assignment

## IV. SPACE

### Week 10: Drink Me (miniature worlds)

Tuesday, April 13                      Wang Ximeng, *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*  
Reading:

*Bhagavata Purana*, selections (looking into Krishna's mouth)  
Jorge Luis Borges, "The Aleph"

Suggested reading: Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*, Chapter 5, "The Hieroglyph of Breath"

Thursday, April 15                      Film discussion: *Céline and Julie Go Boating* (Rivette, Berto, Labourier)  
Visual assignment (film):

*Céline and Julie Go Boating* (Rivette, Berto, Labourier)

Suggested reading: Henry James, "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes"

### Week 11: Cheshire Cat ("the call of space": imagination, nightmare, schizophrenia)

Tuesday, April 20                      Francisco Goya y Lucientes, *Los Caprichos*

Visual assignment:

Francisco Goya y Lucientes, *Los Caprichos* (look at the 80 prints of the series)

Reading:

Francisco Goya y Lucientes, "Advertisement for *Los Caprichos*"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan"

Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, "The Pains of Opium," pp. 74-80

Thursday, April 22 Francesca Woodman

Reading:

Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia"

Suggested reading: Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Chapter 8 ("The Line and Light") and Chapter 9 ("What is a Picture?")

**Week 12: Down the Rabbit Hole (immersive art)**

Sunday, April 25,

15:00-16:30

Visit to the Martin Gropius Bau: Yayoi Kusama exhibition

Reading:

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, "Intimate Immensity"

Tuesday, April 27

No class

Thursday, April 29

Bill Viola

Reading:

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, Part Two ("Time Passes")

**Weeks 13-14: FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

Tuesday, May 4

Thursday, May 6

Tuesday, May 11

Friday, May 13

No class (federal holiday)

*Final essay due: 23:59 on Tuesday, May 18*