

# AH215 Exceeding the Frame: Approaches to the Contemporary Sublime in Art

**Module: Art and Artists in Context**

Seminar Leader: Dr. Laura López Paniagua

Course Times: Tuesdays, 9:00 - 12:15

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Office hours: by appointment.

## Course Description

As Edmund Burke suggested in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), there is a type of intense aesthetic experience that cannot be described as merely beautiful, and that, despite it involving a certain form of pleasure, is much darker and psychologically complex – it can be horrible, disorienting, unsettling, it can take you beyond the limits of the imaginable or the bearable...

Starting with a revision of the main ideas around the sublime established in the Romantic era, this course will explore how the art and theory of the last third of the twentieth century have revisited it and finally speculate on the possible emergence of a new form of sublimity in the latest art-forms. In what way are the works of Caspar David Friedrich, Frederic Edwin Church, or William Blake, sublime? How are theoretical concepts such as transcendence, the unrepresentable, and the uncanny associated to this category? How do theoreticians from different fields, such as the art historian Barbara Novak or the post-modern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard approach it? How is the concept of the sublime reflected in the neo-marxist, psychoanalytically informed writings of Slavoj Žižek? Finally, how do contemporary artists such as Mike Kelley, John Miller, Bill Viola, Marina Abramović, or Walter de Maria relate to the sublime? And could we say that artists today like Hito Steyerl, Ed Atkins, or Slavs and Tatars are defining a new form of sublimity?

Please note: Students will need to bring their own laptops to class.

This course is organized with Google Classroom. All the readings will be provided in this portal.

### **Week 1**

28.01.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

#### **1. Introduction**

Overview of the course

Proposal of Sublime Exercise I (due on 03.03.20) – “Anonymous sublime stories”

William Blake, “Jerusalem The Emanation of the Great Albion” (1804)

Edmund Burke, “A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful” (1757) *Excerpts*

Home reading:

Barbara Novak, "Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting", 1825-1875 (1980) *Excerpts*

### **Week 2**

04.02.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of home reading.

Cassius Longinus, "On the Sublime" (1<sup>st</sup> Century AD) *Excerpts*

Mike Kelley, "Ajax", 1984.

Preparation for the excursion to the Alte Nationalgalerie (*Goethezeit, Romantik, Deutschrömer*).

### **Week 3**

11.02.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Attention:

Excursion to the Alte Nationalgalerie. Meeting time: 9:50 at the museum.

Home reading: Immanuel Kant, "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (1764) *Excerpts*

### **Week 4**

18.02.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of home reading.

## ***2. Introduction to Contemporary Perspectives on the Sublime***

Jean-François Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition", (1979)

Simon Morley, "The Contemporary Sublime", (2010)

Screening of film documentation of Tate's research project "The Art of the Sublime" (2008)

Home readings:

1. Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now", (1948)
2. Essays of Tate's research project "The Art of the Sublime" (2008) divided by groups:
  - Contemporary Art and the Sublime Julian Bell
  - Damien Hirst's Shark: Nature, Capitalism and the Sublime Luke White
  - Video Games and the Technological Sublime Eugénie Shinkle
  - Bill Viola and the Sublime Rina Arya

**Week 5**

25.02.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion in groups of Tate's essays.

***3. The Sublime: The Unpresentable***

Screening of David Lynch, "Lost Highway" (1997)

Home reading:

Slavoj Žižek, "The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway" (2000)

**Week 6**

03.03.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of home reading.

Slavoj Žižek, "The Sublime Object of Ideology" (1989)

Work on Sublime Exercise I (anonymous sublime stories)

Proposal of Sublime Exercise II (due on 14.04.20) – "Sublime photographs"

***4. The Sublime: The Uncanny***

Mike Kelley, "Language and Psychology" (2005)

Home Reading:

Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919)

**Week 7**

10.03.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of home reading.

Mike Kelley, "Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny" (1993) – Work in groups on the different concepts conceptualised in the essay (PART I)

Screening of: Terry Zwigoff, "Crumb" (1994)

(No home reading)

1<sup>st</sup> Essay due on the 11.03.2020

**Week 8**

17.03.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Mike Kelley, "Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny" (1993) – Work in groups on the different concepts conceptualised in the essay (PART II)

***5. The Sublime: The Limits of the Body***

Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection" (1980)

Genesis P-Orridge (Pandrogyn), Paul McCarthy (video work)

Home reading: Mario Praz, "The Romantic Agony" (1951) *Excerpts*

**Week 9**

24.03.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of home reading.

Orlan. Marina Abramović.

Screening of: Kathe Burkhart, "Sick: The Life & Death of Bob Flanagan" (1997) *Excerpts*

Home reading:

John Miller, "The Weather Is Here; Wish You Were Beautiful" (1990)

**Week 10**

31.03.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion of home reading.

John Miller, Richard Hoeck, "Mannequin Death" (2015)

John Miller, Richard Hoeck, "Something for Everyone" (2005)

Speaker Visit: John Miller

**Week 11**

14.04.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

***6. The Sublime: The Contemporary Sublime***

Preparation for visit to: "Magical Soup. Media artworks in the collection of the Nationalgalerie, the Friedrich Christian Flick collection and selected loans"

**Week 12**

21.04.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Attention:

Visit to Hamburger Bahnhof. Analysis of works in the terms studied. Meeting time: 9:50 at the museum.

Home reading: Julian Irlinger: "Props" (2017) / "Gift" (2020)

### **Week 13**

28.04.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Discussion and speculation of emerging forms of the sublime.

Speaker Visit: Julian Irlinger

### **Week 14**

05.05.2020, Tuesday, 9.00 – 12.15

Wrap-up session.

2<sup>nd</sup> Essay due on the 16.05.2020

## **Requirements**

### **Attendance**

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than one absence in the seminar (e.g. one double session) will significantly affect the grade for the course. Please also make sure you depart early in order to reach the museums and exhibition spaces in time.

If absent, a short notification via email, sent before the beginning of class, is expected. Please note that punctuality is essential.

Students are advised to consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

### **Assessment**

The course assessment consists of the overall seminar and two essays. See also "Grade Breakdown".

### **Writing Assignments**

There are two essays for this course, one mid-term essay (ca. 2000 words) and one longer final essay (ca. 3000 words).

The mid-term essay is due on 11.03.2020, midnight.

The final essay is due on 16.05.2020, midnight.

Essays should include footnotes/references, bibliography and a list of illustrations. The structure and draft of your essays can be discussed in individual tutorials.

### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

All written work must be submitted electronically and on time. Please note that 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**

#### **Seminar Grade**

Midterm grade:

Attendance (preparation of texts/participation in discussions, exercises) 50%

Essay 1: 50%

Second grade:

Attendance (preparation of texts/participation in discussions, exercises) 50%

Essay 2: 50%

Final grade submitted to the registrar:

Midterm grade: 50%

Second Grade: 50%