

# AH161 What is (modern) Art?

Seminar Leader: Prof. Dr. Aya Soika

Course Times: Fridays 14:00 – 17:15 (make sure you reserve enough time ahead and after class during our regular offsite visits, see syllabus)

Email: a.soika@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: by email appointment & Fridays 11:00-12:30 (please get in touch beforehand)

## **Course Description**

In the modern era artists have struggled continually to define what art actually is – and have asked for a radical reassessment of its traditional conceptualizations. Whether we look at Italian Futurism, German Expressionism, Russian Constructivism, Swiss-born Dada or French Surrealism we can assert that all these avantgarde movements, despite differences in aesthetics and agenda, were eager to question previous narratives and reassess the relation between art, the artist, and society. Our class aims to take a closer look at the aims of the European avantgardes, focusing on some of the crucial discourses to which they responded: urban growth and the machine age, the interest in “world” art and the question of colonialism, war and militarism, the human psyche and the role of individual or collective trauma, but also the challenges posed by new media such as film and photography and the wish that art should be accessible to the masses for the betterment of society. The Berlin art museums offer an outstanding range of relevant works which allow us the perusal of “originals” (yet another category that comes under scrutiny in the modern period!). Weekly readings consist of texts by artists and contemporary art critics, but also historians or philosophers who have retrospectively tried to analyze modern art’s attempts to theorize and produce itself.

## **Requirements**

### **Requirements**

(including expectations regarding participation and course assignments)

#### **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**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, an absence from a double session will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Beyond that, unexcused absences will affect the participation grade. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

In light of the special situation caused by the pandemic, students must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Please get in touch with me via email to discuss how best to catch up.

#### **Covid-regulations**

Due to group size restrictions in several Berlin museums the class will be divided into two groups (Group A: 13:30-15:30; Group B: 15:30-17:30) on several occasions.

#### **Punctuality**

Punctuality is also essential. Turning up late will therefore also affect the participation grade. For off campus visits please make sure you depart early in order to reach the museums and please lock in your coats and bags before the beginning of class. The itinerary can be checked on [www.bvg.de](http://www.bvg.de); in addition, it may be helpful to be equipped with a city map, digital or on paper.

#### **Class Etiquette**

In the case of unavoidable absence, a short notification via email sent before the beginning of class is appreciated. Please keep your bathroom breaks to a minimum. Also note that the use of smartphones and notebooks is not allowed during seminars on campus. When off campus you should stay with the group whilst the conversation is still going on. Please do your best to stay focused on the object of our discussion: This includes listening to students' presentations. In case of online teaching, you should stay in front of your screen, refrain from eating and avoid multitasking.

#### **Weekly Readings**

Weekly readings and other specific assignments will be confirmed in an email by the beginning of each week. Please check your bard emails and read my emails carefully.

### **Assessment**

The course assessment consists of the overall seminar work (occasional response papers, presentations, regular class participation and preparation of individual tutorials) and two essays. See also "Grade Breakdown."

### **Responses, Presentations and Participation**

Students are asked to regularly submit short responses to and/or to deliver presentations on works / texts which are uploaded on the class padlet. The responses and presentations count into the overall participation grade. **Grading Criteria:** Structure, Relevance to the topic and analysis; awareness of context and key debates; timing (in the case of presentations).

### **Writing Assignments**

There are two essays for this course, one mid-term essay and one final essay (ca. 2000 words each). A range of prompts will be provided in advance.

The midterm essay is due on 20 March (Sunday), midnight.

The final term essay is due on 15 May (Sunday), 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. Please note that prior consultation with the Bard in Berlin Writing Centre may be recommended in order to reflect upon writing and structure. Here are some basic points you should bear in mind:

**Title and Topic:** How does the title of your essay as well as your introduction reflect your objectives?

**Background Reading:** Have you researched the particular object (art work, building or historical event) sufficiently? What kinds of sources/articles have you found so far and where else could you try to find out more?

**Facts and contextual information:** Have you acquired sufficient foundational knowledge - e. g. are you aware of the object's date of origin, its technique/materials, size and location, subject-matter etc., and are you aware of further information which requires reading around the subject matter and topic, acquiring a sense of cultural and political debates at the time, of the work's public reception?

**Interpretations and overview of scholarship:** What kinds of interpretations have you encountered so far? How would you distinguish them in terms of the questions they ask and the methods they apply? How does your own line of argument relate to them? Don't be afraid to engage with and quote from articles you have read, this can show an awareness of the complexity of the topic, or quote from some primary sources such as artists' statements or contemporary reviews. Quotes should be accompanied by an annotation providing the source reference.

**Grading Criteria:** Line of argument with regard to essay question; Awareness of context and existing literature on the topic; structure and format (consistent use of annotations, bibliography & list of illustrations is desirable)

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

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Essays that are more than 24 hours late cannot receive a grade of higher than C (see also policy on late submission in the Bard College Berlin Student Handbook) and must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Students are welcome to make an appointment to discuss essay

assignments and/or feedback. They will also receive written feedback on their mid-term and final essays.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Listed below is the percentage grade allotted to each essay, and to classroom participation and assignments.

Seminar Grade = Attendance (participation/preparation of art works and texts, regular responses/tasks and presentations)

Seminar Grade: 33,3%

Essay 1: 33,3 %

Essay 2: 33,3 %

## Schedule

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:

<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/>

### **Week 1**

04.02.2011, Friday, 14:00

BCB, Lecture Hall

Introduction

Definitions and Debates: “Art”: Imitation, Modernism and Postmodernism

Readings:

\*\*\* Please read the Syllabus carefully and familiarize yourself with padlet and google drive \*\*\*

Briony Fer, Introduction, In: *Modernity and Modernism. French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 2-49

#### **Regular Task for all Class Participants:**

Add a response to the padlet and be prepared to give a short presentation in class

### **Week 2**

11.02.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Berlinische Galerie. Visit of permanent exhibition “Art in Berlin 1880-1980”

Narratives of Modernism: A discussion between originals

Meet in the museum’s foyer for a punctual start (check in bags and coats)

Alte Jakobstraße 124-128, 10969 Berlin

Readings:

Arthur Danto, Introduction: Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary (Chapter One). In: A. Danto, *After the End of Art*, pp. 2-19;

Clement Greenberg, *Modernist Painting* (1961). First published in: *Art and Literature*, 4, 1965

### **Week 3**

18.02.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Lecture Hall

Movements and Manifestos: Transcontinental Avantgardism?

Readings:

Paul Wood, Part 3, “The Point is to change it”, Case Study 9, The avant-garde in the early twentieth century. In: *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 183-272

Marinetti, The Manifesto of Futurism, first published in French in *Le Figaro*, 1909

Paul Wood (ed.), Gail Day, “The Futurists: transcontinental avantgardism”, Case Study 10, The avant-garde in the early twentieth century. In: *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 204-225

**Week 4**

25.02.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Neue Nationalgalerie (New National Gallery)

“The Art of Society. 1900 – 1945” Exhibition visit

Group A: 13:30-15:30; Group B: 15:30-17:30

Readings:

Paul Wood, Part 3, “The Point is to change it”, Case Study 9, The avant-garde in the early twentieth century.

In: *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 183-272;

Jean Metzinger, Note on Painting (1910); Guillaume Apollinaire, The Cubists (1911); Guillaume Apollinaire, On the Subject of Modern Painting (1912); Guillaume Apollinaire, The New Painting: Art Notes (1912); Guillaume Apollinaire, from: The Cubist Painters (1912). All in: *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*.

27.02.2022, Sunday

Visit to Berggruen Museum

Cubism and the Problem of Space

Group A: 13:30-15:00; Group B: 15:00-16:30

**Week 5**

04.03.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Lecture Hall

“Primitivism”, Nationalism and Colonialism: The Example of German Expressionism

Readings:

Hal Foster, “The ‘primitive’ Unconscious of modern Art.” In: *October*, 34, Fall 1985, pp. 45-70 (here extracts from Reader, pp. 199-209)

**Week 6**

11.03.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Brücke Museum in Berlin-Dahlem, Bussardsteig

“Whose Expression? The artists of Brücke and Colonialism”: Exhibition Visit

Readings:

Texts from the exhibition catalogue *Expressionism. Colonialism* (TBC)

**Week 7**

18.03.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Humboldt Forum, Visit of Ethnological Museum

Ethnological Objects as “Art” and the (ongoing) problem of Context

Group A: 13:30-15:30; Group B: 15:30-17:30

Readings:

Opening Speeches of the Ethnological Museum at Humboldt Forum, Frank Walter Steinmeier (German President); Chimamanda Adichie

**Mid-term Essay due on 20 March, Sunday (please email directly to a.soika@berlin.bard.edu)**

**Week 8**

25.03.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Paul Gauguin: Why are you angry? Alte Nationalgalerie Exhibition Visit

Readings:

Stephen Eisenman, "Symbolism and the Dialectics of Retreat." In: *Nineteenth Century Art*, pp. 431-439 (Gauguin and Symbolism in Tahiti);

Hans Belting, "Marco Polo and other Cultures." In: *Art History after Modernism*, pp. 192-200

**Week 9**

01.04.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

BCB, Lecture Hall

Dada, The Readymade & Surrealism

Readings:

David Batchelor, Dada / From Littérature to La Révolution Surréaliste. In: *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism. Art between the Wars*, pp. 30-61;

Paul Wood, The Revolutionary Avantgardes: Dada, Constructivism and Surrealism. In: Paul Wood (ed.), *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 226-256 (part on Dada, Constructivism and Surrealism).

Tristan Tzara, Dada Manifesto 1918, In: *Art in Theory, 1900-2000* (IIIb/3);

Briony Fer, Surrealism, Myth and Psychoanalysis. In: *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism. Art between the Wars*, pp. 170-203

**Week 10**

08.04.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

The interwar period: Dada and Weimar Photomontage, Photography & Film as "Art"

The Bauhaus School of Art and Design (1919-1933)

Readings:

Walter Benjamin, The Art Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1935);

Walter Gropius: The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus, 1923. In: *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, pp. 309-314

**15.04.2022: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS**

**Week 11**

**22.04.2022, NO Class \* NOTE CHANGE OF SCHEDULE\***

**24.04.2022, Sunday, 09:00 – 17:00**

Excursion to Dessau

Bauhaus Museum, Bauhaus Master Houses, Bauhaus School

10 Euros student contribution

Readings:

*New York Times* Article (published 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021): Alexandra Lange, "Was the Founder of the Bauhaus a Doctrinaire Bore or a Brilliant Innovator?";

Hannes Meyer, "The New World" (1926), in: *The Weimar Sourcebook*, p. 445ff.

Film:

BBC Documentary: Bauhaus 100

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2a45UBClbJc>

### **Week 12**

29.04.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Lecture Hall, BCB\*

Modernism vs. “Kitsch” / Reactionary Modernism

Artistic Production, Propaganda and “Totalitarianism”

Readings:

Clement Greenberg: Avantgarde and Kitsch (1939). In: *Art in Theory, 1900-2000* (IVD/10);

Paul Wood, Conclusion: for and against the avant-garde. In: Paul Wood (ed.), *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 257-271

\*Alternatively, if the weather allows and if there is sufficient student interest, we can combine our discussion of Greenberg’s text with a visit of the Soviet War Memorial (TBC)

### **Week 13**

06.05.2022, Friday, NO CLASS

Please note change of schedule

**08.05.2022, Sunday**

**Hamburger Bahnhof, off campus**

The Transfiguration of the Commonplace (Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol and other works on display)

Group A: 13:30-15:30; Group B: 15:30-17:30

Readings:

Oskar Bätschmann, *The Artist in the modern World. The Conflict between Market and Self-Expression*, Cologne 1997 (on Warhol and Beuys), pp. 205-219;

Arthur Danto, “Pop Art and Past Futures”. In: Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art*, pp. 116-133

### **Week 14**

13.05.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Art after Philosophy, Conceptual Art & Conclusion

Readings:

Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy” (1969). In: *Art in Theory. 1900-2000* (VIIa/10);

Sol Lewitt, Paragraphs on Conceptual Art, 1969; Sol Le Witt, Sentences on Conceptual Art, 1969. In: *Art in Theory. 1900-2000* (VIIa/7 and VIIa/8)

### **Essay Deadlines**

For further information on essay guidelines and grading criteria see above (pp. 2-3)

The midterm essay is due on 20 March (Sunday), midnight.

The final term essay is due on 15 May (Sunday), midnight.



### **Library and Book Purchase Policies**

All texts will be made accessible through our class padlet, additional background readings for essays and presentations will also be made available via a drive. A useful range of course books can be found in the BCB library.

The course book, *Art in Theory. 1900-2000* should be picked up from the library (*Art in Theory. An anthology of changing ideas, 1900-2000*, ed. by Charles Harrison, Christopher Wood, Oxford: Blackwell 1998