

AH162

Modernism in the Visual Arts: Experiment, Conflict, and Crisis

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

This class looks at the key works, movements and debates emerging from modernism and modern movements in the visual and plastic arts. Our survey addresses controversies that took place at the time when new works and techniques were first introduced, as well as later (post)modern criticisms. We will consider the ‘grand narratives’ and alternative explanatory tools that seek to understand and theorize modernist artistic practice, such as, for example, Marxist theory, and also (a considerable contrast) formalist approaches. An important theme in our journey will be the modernist artists’ entanglement with colonialism, where the freedom they claimed for their own creative adventures was often barred to their subjects and absent from the contexts in which they sought new inspiration. Modernist artists and movements also have a complex relationship to the phenomenon of totalitarian regimes, with some embracing and some resisting the pull of dictatorship. Modernism was the moment in which the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ or ‘mass’ culture first appeared, and we will look at the meaning of this fissure for modern art movements. Finally, we examine the role of new media—the revolutionary advent of film and photography—in modernist art production. Our case studies include the formative movements of the early 20th century, such as Expressionism, Dada, Bauhaus and Surrealism. The class ends with what we might call the “nervous breakdown” of modernism in the 1960s, when we witness the end of reigning concepts such as ‘originality’ and ‘authenticity’, and encounter the rise of postmodernism. Throughout the seminar we will make use of Berlin’s wide-ranging and diverse modernist art collections.

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.

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; 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: 1.) Line of argument with regard to essay question; 2.) Awareness of historical contexts and acknowledgement of existing literature on the topic; 3.) Structure and format (including consistent use of annotations, bibliography & list of illustrations)

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

03.02.2011, Friday, 14:00

BCB

Introduction: Experiment, Conflict, Crisis

Definitions and Debates: "Art": Modernism and Postmodernism

Narratives of Modernism, Notions of Difference, Art & Politics, Experiments and Techniques

Followed by a Sunday class in front of originals (please note that we have to schedule this Sunday class because the great show on Hungarian Modernism closes the following day)

Readings:

Please read the syllabus carefully and familiarize yourself with the padlet

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

10.02.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Alte Nationalgalerie: A Crisis in Representation?

Meet in front of the Old National Gallery on Museum Island

Readings:

Stephen Eisenman, "Introduction: Critical Art and History". In: *Nineteenth Century Art*, pp. 7-17;

Selected short letters and documents (TBC)

Stephen F. Eisenman, "The Intransigent Artist or How the Impressionists got their Name." Chapter 19 in *Anthology*, pp. 189-197

Reading in Class (Excerpts):

Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863)

Week 3

17.02.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15, BCB
Colonialism, Nationalism and German Expressionism

Reading:

Introduction of exhibition catalogue *Expressionism. Colonialism*

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

****19.02.2022, Sunday, 14:00 – 15:30****

Visit to Ethnographic Museum, Humboldt Forum (focus on Africa and Oceania sections with focus on reception through modernist art and politics of ownership)

Week 4

24.02.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Neue Nationalgalerie. "The Art of Society. 1900 – 1945" Exhibition visit (Picasso, Kirchner, Nolde, Modersohn-Becker)

Readings:

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

Week 5

03.03.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Neue Nationalgalerie continued: Conflicts in Society through the lens Hannah Höch, Otto Dix, George Grosz

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).

Week 6

10.03.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Art & Politics: Dada, Constructivism, The Readymade, Surrealism, BCB

Readings:

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

****12.03.2011, Sunday, 14:00-17:00****

Berlinische Galerie: Museum Excursion: Meet in the museum's foyer for a punctual start (check in bags and coats) Alte Jakobstraße 124-128, 10969 Berlin. Best way to get there: Take the U2 to Spittelmarkt and walk for ca. 15 minutes*

Week 7

24.03.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15
Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Charlottenburg
Museum Scharf-Gerstenberg, Charlottenburg

Readings:

Text by Käthe Kollwitz (TBC);

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);

Marcel Duchamp, The Richard Mutt Case, 1917. In: *Art in Theory, 1900-2000* (IIIb/2);

André Breton, Surrealism and Painting 1928. In: *Art in Theory, 1900-2000* (IVc/4)

Mid-term Essay due on 19 March, Sunday (please email essay directly to a.soika@berlin.bard.edu)

Week 8

31.03.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15, BCB
The Avantgardes and Politics;
New Media and the Crisis of the Original

Readings:

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

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

SPRING BREAK

07.04.2022, NO CLASS

Week 9

14.04.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15
The Bauhaus School of Art and Design (1919-1933)

**** 16.04.2022, Sunday (TBC) ****

Excursion to

Berlin Estate Buildings: Horseshoe-Estate

Or to Dessau Bauhaus Museum, Bauhaus Master Houses, Bauhaus School

10 Euros student contribution

Readings:

Walter Gropius: The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus, 1923. In: *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, pp. 309-314;
New York Times Article (published 24th May 2021): Alexandra Lange, "Was the Founder of the Bauhaus a

Doctrinaire Bore or a Brilliant Innovator?";

Film: BBC Documentary: Bauhaus 100

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2a45UBCibJc>

Week 11

21.04.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15, Lecture Hall BCB
"Kitsch", Propaganda and "Totalitarianism"

Site Visit of Soviet Memorial in Schönholz

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

Week 12

28.04.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15, Lecture Hall, BCB

The End of Art: Postmodernism on the Rise

Readings:

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

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

Week 13

05.05.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum visit

Exhibition "Daniel Boyd: Rainbow Serpent (Version) & Indigo Waves and other stories. Re-Navigating the Afrasian Sea and Notions of Diaspora" (starts 7 April)

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)

Week 14

13.05.2022, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15

Conclusion

Readings:

Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions". In: *October*, vol. 55, 1990, pp. 105-143

Essay Deadlines

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

The midterm essay is due on 19 March (Sunday), midnight.

The final term essay is due on 14 May (Sunday), midnight.

Library and Book Purchase Policies

Texts will be circulated beforehand.

The following course books can be picked up from the library (subject to availability):

Art in Theory. An anthology of changing ideas, 1900-2000, ed. by Charles Harrison, Christopher Wood, Oxford: Blackwell 1998);

Modern Art and Modernism, ed. by F. Frascina et al. (various editions);

Arthur Danto: *After the End of Art* (various editions);

Stephen Eisenman: *Nineteenth Century Art* (London: Thames and Hudson 1994, various editions);

Briony Fer et. al (ed.): *Modernity and Modernism. French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*;

Paul Wood (ed): *The Challenge of the Avantgarde*.