

# AH301 VISION AND PERSPECTIVE

Art and Aesthetics  
Module: Aesthetics and Art Theory  
Spring 2023

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman  
Course Times: Wednesday, 15:45-19:00

Email: [g.lehman@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:g.lehman@berlin.bard.edu)  
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 13:00-15:00

## Course Description

In this course, we explore the problem of painter's perspective, as it emerged in the Renaissance, and its implications for picture making and for the understanding of vision in the Western tradition up until the present day. Through sustained attention to individual works of art, we will consider how the re-conception of painting as a window, through which we look upon a space that is both measurable and potentially infinite, gives rise to new ideas of subjectivity and objectivity and new modes of subjective experience, shapes the depiction of the human and of human (social, affective, and intellectual) interactions, and provided a structural basis for the expression of religious meaning and of (scientific) curiosity. Topics for the course include: subjectivity and the gaze; the origins of landscape painting and the mathematization of nature; embodied experience and the phenomenology of vision; and the relationship of perspectival representation to its alternatives, both inside and outside the Western tradition. The origins and development of photography, as a perspectival medium, and its role within modernity, as well as its relationship to digital mediums of the contemporary period, will be carefully considered. Among the artists whose work we will examine are Jan van Eyck, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, Leonardo da Vinci, Bruegel, Xia Gui, Nadar, Atget, Lawler, and Eliasson. Readings will focus on philosophical and literary texts (Alberti, Nicholas of Cusa, Leonardo, Shakespeare, Descartes, Merleau-Ponty) as well as art historical writing on perspective (Panofsky, Damisch, Belting). Visits to museums and sites to encounter works of art firsthand will be an integral part of the course.

## Course Books

Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*  
Course Reader

## Library and book purchase policies

The college book policy for 2022-2023 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 highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. 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, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

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. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

### Use of Electronics

To facilitate a focused and engaging seminar discussion the use of electronic devices during class time is not allowed, unless for disability accommodation. If you have a disability accommodation please inform your instructor at the beginning of the rotation.

### Museum Visits

Three of our scheduled classes will be museum visits. Since it is not possible to go to a museum during our scheduled class time, museum classes will be on the weekends and each museum class will replace a regular Wednesday class.

### 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

February 1 REPRESENTATION AND RATIONAL SPACE

Reading:

Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, Book I, pp. 51-59

Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Section I

February 8 ANCIENTS AND MODERNS

Reading:

Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Section II and III

February 15 VISION AND/AS KNOWLEDGE

Reading:

Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Section IV

Leonardo da Vinci, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, edited by I. Richter: I. True Science: 4-8; II.

The Universe: 6-9 and 13-19; IV. The Arts: 4-9, 16-46, 53-54, 78-83, and 192-93; V. Tales and Allegories: 50-51; VI. Reflections on Life: 20-23

Sunday, February 19,

14:00-17:00

**Visit to the Gemäldegalerie**

Reading:

Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, Chapter 14, pp. 279-280 and 287-312

Norris Kelly Smith, *Here I Stand: Perspective from Another Point of View*, Chapter 4

February 22 LANDSCAPE AND INFINITY

Reading:

Hesiod, *Works and Days*, ll. 383-617 (Nelson trans., pp. 84-91)

Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, I, 1 and 3; II, 4-5 and 11-12

Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, pp. 40-42

William Wordsworth, *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*

Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, part 2, 1-16

March 1 LIGHT AND DIVINITY

Reading:

Hans Belting, "Perspective: Arab Mathematics and Renaissance Western Art"

Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*, Chapter 6, pp. 111-123 and 252-261

March 8 No class (state holiday)

March 15 PORTRAITURE AND THE GAZE

Reading:

- Shakespeare, *Richard II*, II, ii, 1-40
- Riegl, "The Dutch Group Portrait," pp.3-20, 25-31
- Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Chapter 1: Las Meninas
- Leo Steinberg, "Velázquez' 'Las Meninas'"

**Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Sunday, March 19**

March 22 THE CAMERA AND THE EYE

Reading:

- François Arago, "Report to the Academies of Arts and Sciences"
- Charles Baudelaire, *Petits poèmes en prose* (English edition: *Paris Spleen*), I, XII, XXVI, XXXV, XL, XLI, and Epilogue
- Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, Chapter 4, pp. 102-18, 124-36
- Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Chapters 1-3, 8-10, 18-20, and 35-36

Sunday, March 26. Visit to the Alte Nationalgalerie

14:00-17:00

Reading:

- Edmond Duranty, *The New Painting*, selections
- Jules LaForgue, "Impressionism"
- Leo Steinberg, "Monet's Water Lilies"
- T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth*, Chapter 2: "Room," pp. 61-94

March 29 No class

**SPRING BREAK (April 3-7)**

April 12 EMBODIED VISION

Reading:

- Shakespeare, *King Lear*, IV, vi, 1-79
- Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, I, iv, 1-24
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind"
- Rosalind Krauss, "Louise Lawler: Souvenir Memories"

April 19 SPACE AS PLACE

Reading:

- Yve-Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll Around Clara-Clara"

April 23 Visit to the Hamburger Bahnhof, or Contemporary Galleries

Reading:

- Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, "Art and Objecthood"
- Donald Judd, "Specific Objects"

March 29 No class

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

May 3

May 10

*Final essay due: 23:59 on Wednesday, May 17*