

# AR204 ART AND INTERPRETATION

Art and Aesthetics  
Module: Art Objects and Experience  
Fall 2019

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman  
Course Times: Wednesday, 9:00- 10:30 and Friday, 10:45-12:15 (9:00-12:15 for museum visits)

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 14:00-16:00

## Course Description

Describing a painting, the art historian Leo Steinberg wrote: “The picture conducts itself the way a vital presence behaves. It creates an encounter.” In this course, we will encounter works of art to explore the specific dialogue each creates with a viewer and the range of interpretive possibilities it offers. More specifically, the course will examine various interpretive approaches to art, including formal analysis, iconography, social and historical contextualism, aestheticism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis. Most importantly, we will engage interpretation in ways that are significant both within art historical discourse and in addressing larger questions of human experience and (self-)knowledge, considering the dialogue with the artwork in its affective (emotional) as well as its intellectual aspects. The course will be guided throughout by sustained discussion of a small number of individual artworks, with a focus on pictorial representation (painting, drawing, photography), although sculpture and installation art will also be considered. We will look at works from a range of different cultural traditions, and among the artists we will focus on are Xia Gui, Giorgione, Bruegel, Mirza Ali, Velázquez, Hokusai, Manet, Picasso, Man Ray, Martin, and Sherman. Readings will focus on texts in art history and theory but also include philosophical and psychoanalytic texts (Pater, Wölfflin, Freud, Merleau-Ponty, Barthes, Clark, and Krauss, among others). Visits to Berlin museums to experience works of art firsthand are an integral part of the course.

## Course Books

Note that there is no reader required for the course. Readings will generally be handed out as photocopies before the class for which they are assigned.

## Library and book purchase policies

The college book policy for 2019-2020 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. Instances in which students fail to meet the

expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

### 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.

### Museum Visits

Five of our scheduled classes will be museum visits. These will usually be on Friday, since the longer block of time scheduled for our course on Fridays allows us to make these visits during regular class time.

### 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 of 6-7 pages (2000-2300 words) and a final presentation accompanied by an essay of 9-10 pages (3000-3300 words), due at the end of the term.

### Policy on late submission of papers

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. Form and Meaning

(Formal analysis; semiotics)

Wednesday, September 4      **Introduction**

No reading assignment

Friday, September 6      **Linear and Painterly**

Reading:

Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, "Linear and Painterly," pp.18-29, 41-53

Wednesday, September 11      **Space and Surface: Mirza Ali**

Reading:

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

Friday, September 13      **Grebo Sculpture and Picasso's Collages**

Reading:

Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, "Kahnweiler's Lesson"

Wednesday, September 18      **Abstraction: Form and the Formless**

Reading:

Clement Greenberg, "The Role of Nature in Modern Painting"

Meyer Schapiro, "On the Humanity of Abstract Painting"

Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, pp. 244-260

Friday, September 20      **Visit to the Museum of Islamic Art**

Reading:

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

### II. Iconography and Counter-Iconography

(iconography and iconology; text and image)

Wednesday, September 25      **Ovid and Renaissance Art**

Visual assignment: group presentations

Reading:

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 568-750; VIII, 152-259 (Penguin ed.: pp. 44-49 [top] and 183-186 [middle])

Ovid, *The Art of Love*, I, 525-630

Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, Book I, 25

Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, "Introductory," Section 1

Friday, September 27

**Counter-Iconography: Pieter Bruegel the Elder**

Reading:

Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 9

Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, "Introductory," Section 2

Wednesday, October 2

**Cindy Sherman and the Society of Spectacle**

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors*, "Cindy Sherman: Untitled," pp. 101-124, 133-142

Norman Bryson, "House of Wax"

Friday, October 4

**Visit to the Scharf-Gerstenberg Collection**

Reading:

Selected poems (contributed by the group)

### III. Experience and Imagination

(aestheticism; phenomenology)

Wednesday, October 9

**Song Dynasty Landscape: Fan Kuan, Xia Gui**

Reading:

Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*, Chapter 5, pp. 200-203, 207-218

Friday, October 11

**Aestheticism: Giorgione and Whistler**

Visual assignment: group presentations

Reading:

Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, "The School of Giorgione" and "Conclusion"

Wednesday, October 13

**Henri Matisse**

Reading:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," sections II, IV, and V

Friday, October 18

**Visit to the Hamburger Bahnhof**

Reading:

Donald Judd, "Specific Objects"

Wednesday, October 23

**Agnes Martin, *The Tree***

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors*, "Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/"

### IV. The Painting of Modern Life

(contextualism; Marxism and situationism)

Friday, October 25

**Hokusai and the Floating World**

Visual assignment: look at Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*

Reading:

T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère," pp. 205-234

Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Sunday, October 27

FALL BREAK (October 28-November 3)

Wednesday, November 6                      **Manet and Haussmann's Paris**

Reading:

Charles Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil*, "To a Passer-By"

Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, "Crowds" and "The Eyes of the Poor"

Edmond Duranty, *The New Painting*, selections

T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère," pp. 234-258

Friday, November 8                              **Eugène Atget**

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography"

## V. Dialogue

(affect)

Wednesday, November 13                      ***Las Meninas***

Reading:

Leo Steinberg, "Velázquez' 'Las Meninas'"

Friday, November 15                              **Visit to the Gemäldegalerie**

Reading:

David Rosand, "The Portrait, the Courtier, and Death," in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture* (ed. Hanning and Rosand)

Wednesday, November 20                      ***Camera obscura***

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Chapters 1-3, 8-10, 18-20, and 35-36

## VI. Desire

(psychoanalysis)

Friday, November 22                              ***Nature morte* / Still Life**

Reading:

Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"

Wednesday, November 27                      **Photography and Surrealism**

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," pp. 45-72  
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Volume One, Chapters I and V

Friday, November 29                      **Visit to the Berggruen Museum**

Reading:

Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, "The Sexual Aberrations," pp. 1-2, 19-33

### **FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

Wednesday, December 4

Friday, December 6

Wednesday, December 11

Friday, December 13

Final essay due: 23:59 on Wednesday, December 18