

## **AH227 Witness to the Age of Extremes: Art and Architecture in Berlin**

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](mailto:a.soika@berlin.bard.edu)

Office Hours: by email appointment & Friday 11:30-13:30 (please get in touch beforehand)

### **Module: Art and Artists in Context**

Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits

### **Course Description**

This course examines art works and buildings in the city of Berlin which have been, in one way or the other, witness to what historian Eric Hobsbawm has described as “The Age of Extremes.” The twentieth century was a uniquely destructive and creative era, marked by political extremism, two world wars, revolutions, divisions and radical social change. In art and architecture, the tension between avant-gardist experiment, traditionalist reaction and the increasing impact of popular culture and mass media led to an unprecedented variety of artistic production and architectural construction, turning Berlin into a cultural capital that is still defined by such dynamism, aesthetic pluralism and architectural eclecticism. Students will learn about historical developments through iconic works from Berlin’s unique art museums or buildings such as Libeskind’s Jewish Museum, the Berlin Parliament or the rebuilt City Palace. The New National Gallery’s exhibition “Extreme Tension. Art between Politics and Society 1945-2000” sets the tone for this exploration of some of the key debates of modernist theory and its subsequent dismantling since the late 1960s.

## **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, one absence from AH227 should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Beyond that, unexcused absences will affect the participation grade and you will be asked to make up for it by submitting a 800 word response, discussing the topic of the missed class. 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.

### **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.

### **Weekly Readings**

Weekly readings and other specific assignments will be confirmed in an email by the beginning of each week, all materials are uploaded on our class padlet. Please check your Bard emails, read my emails carefully and make sure you can access the padlet.

### **Assessment**

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

### **Participation / Seminar Grade**

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. Prompts will be provided in advance.

The midterm essay is due on 22 March (Friday) midnight.

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

Essays should engage with selected class readings and further relevant sources, 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 College Berlin Writing Centre may be recommended.

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:** How can you include reference to some of the required readings from our course in a meaningful way? Have you researched the objects of your discussion (art work, building or historical event) sufficiently? What kinds of sources/articles have you found and where else could you try to find out more about the topics you discuss?

**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.

**Format:** Your paper should be of circa 2.200 words length (+- 10%), including references, captions and bibliography. References should be added throughout, referencing style should be consistent, the format should be double-spaced with 12-point font. Please include page numbers and a title

**Grading Criteria:** Line of argument with regard to essay question (organisation, coherence and execution of the argument); Awareness of context and existing literature on the topic; structure, quality of writing and format (proofreading; 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 receive feedback on class progress, oral performance and written work. 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, 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**

02.02.2024, Friday, 14:00 – 17:15, BCB Campus

Themes and Overview

Round of student presentations (see padlet task below)

Eric Hobsbawm's "Age of Extremes" (1994)

Please read the Syllabus carefully and familiarize yourself with the Class Padlet

Preparatory Film to watch:

Robert Hughes, The Shock of the New, Episode 2, "The Powers that Be"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JEx6CDW6-o>

Erich Hobsbawm: The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991, London 1994, „The Century: A Bird's Eye View – Twelve People look at the Twentieth Century“, pp. 1-2, pp. 3-17

Further Background on Hobsbawm:

Eric Hobsbawm: The Consolations of History, film of London Review of Books (from 1:04 – ca. :1:10):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVQ4dfC34TI>

Eric Hobsbawm Interview: The Late Show, with Michael Ignatieff, of 24 October 1994:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nnd2Pu9NNPw>

Padlet Task for this session:

Upload and prepare one example of a work (site, art work, building, photo you've taken – anything goes!) in the city of Berlin that can be considered as a "Witness to the Age of Extremes", i. e. that you can discuss in relation to a historical event, an artistic movement or a socio-political or cultural phenomenon, past or present. Please upload your image **by Thursday, 14:00.**

### **Week 2**

09.02.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, Hamburger Bahnhof (TBC)

Tania Bruguera, "Where your Ideas become civic actions" (100 Hours of Reading "The origins of Totalitarianism"), Live Performance at Hamburger Bahnhof

First visit of exhibition "A Collection for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"

Reading:

Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 1951 (excerpts)

Preparatory Watching:

In our Time, BBC podcast, Hannah Arendt, with L. Stonebridge, F. Sheffield, R. Eaglestone, 2017:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08c2ljg>;

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/5NvjzbsFz59wRWgyBh8dBz/what-hannah-arendt-can-teach-us-about-totalitarianism> (Excerpt from above Podcast);

Roger Berkowitz, Bard College, on Hannah Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XvQwI89E2U>;

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_3nUstGXxU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_3nUstGXxU)

### **Week 3**

16.02.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, Berlinische Galerie

The Origins and Course of Artistic Modernism in Berlin

Art in the Aftermath of two World Wars (Dada, New Objectivity, Constructivism)

Reading:

Richard Huelsenbeck and Raoul Hausmann, "What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany?", in: *Art in Theory. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison et al., Oxford: Blackwell 1994, pp. 253-257;  
Shearer West, Community and personality: art on the left, Chapter 5 in: *Utopia and Despair. The visual Arts in Germany*, pp. 107-133;

Walter Gropius: The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus, 1923. In: *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, pp. 309-314;  
Hannes Meyer, *New Worlds*, 1926;

Maria Makela, *New Women, New Men, New Objectivity*. In: *New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic 1919-1933* (ed. Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann), pp. 51-63.

### **Week 4**

23.02.2024, BCB Campus

Walter Benjamin, *Art as Politics – Politics as Art* (1935)

John Heartfield's Collages & The Rise of Mass Media;

1920s/30s Architecture and Culture Wars

Reading:

Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1935 (various edns), Preface, epilogue & selected passages;

Adolf Hitler's Speech at the Opening of the House of Art in Munich, July 18<sup>th</sup> 1937, in: *Art in Theory. An Anthology of changing ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison et al., Oxford: Blackwell 1994, 423-426.

### **Week 5**

01.03.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, Foyer of Topography of Terror

Topographie des Terrors; Wilhelmstrasse Architecture

Propaganda in Film and Photography

Preparatory Film:

The Nazi Philosophy of Beauty: The Architecture of Doom, 1989 (Peter Cohen)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j\\_KmZsA5Pfs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_KmZsA5Pfs)

Readings:

Brian Ladd, "Nazi Berlin", in: Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, Chicago 1997, pp. 127-174;

Daniela Sandler, "Counterpreservation in Reverse", in: *Architectural Decay in Berlin since 1989*, 2016, pp. 169-196.

### **Week 6**

08.03.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, BCB Campus

Manifestations of "Totalitarianism"

Listening:

In our Time. BBC Podcast. Hitler in History. Conversation between Mary Fulbrook, Iain Kershaw and Niall Fergusson:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00546wh>

Reading:

Hans-Ernst Mittag, "Art and oppression in fascist Germany", in: Irit Rogoff (ed.), *The Divided Heritage. Themes and Problems in German Modernism*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 191-215;  
Ian Kershaw, "Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism", in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2004, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 239-254.

**Week 7**

15.03.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, Foyer of Humboldt Forum

The Politics of Space: City Palace, Palace of the Republic, Humboldt Forum

"Berlin Global" Exhibition: Revolutions and Ruptures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Reading:

Oliver Wainwright: Berlin's bizarre new museum: A Prussian palace rebuilt for Euro680m, in: *Guardian*, 9 September 2021:

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/sep/09/berlin-museum-humboldt-forum>

Film:

A Palace for Berlin and the World? DW Documentary:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P392ewvC\\_w4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P392ewvC_w4)

29.03.2024: Spring Break, NO CLASS

**Week 8**

22.03.2024, BCB Campus

Cold War Cultures, East and West

Reading:

Marshall Berman, *All that is solid melts into air*, Preface (13-14) and Introduction: Modernity – Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (16-36);

Brian Ladd, "Divided Berlin", in: Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, Chicago 1997, pp. 175-215;

David E. Barclay, *Division of the Spoils: Berlin as Symbol and as Prize*, in: Konrad Jarausch, Stefanie Eisenhuth, Scott H. Krause (eds), *Cold War Berlin. Confrontations, Cultures and Identities*, London 2021, pp. 31-44; Clara M. Oberle, *From Old War to Cold War: Berlin as Urban Planning Laboratory in the First Postwar Years*, in:

Konrad Jarausch, Stefanie Eisenhuth, Scott H. Krause (eds), *Cold War Berlin. Confrontations, Cultures and Identities*, London 2021, pp. 85-103.

**Week 9**

05.04.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, New National Gallery

"Extreme Tension"

Reading:

Andreas Huyssen, "Figures of Memory in the course of Time. German Painting. 1945-89". In: *Art of Two Germanys. Cold War Cultures*, pp. 224-39;

Peter Weibel, "Repression and Representation: The RAF in German Postwar Art", in: *Art of Two Germanys. Cold War Cultures* (selected texts from Exhibition Catalogue of Los Angeles County Museum of Art), pp. 257-260;

Svea Bräunert, "The RAF and the Phantom of Terrorism in West Germany", in: *Art of Two Germanys. Cold War Cultures* (selected texts from Exhibition Catalogue of Los Angeles County Museum of Art), pp. 261-273.

**Week 10**

12.04.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, Foyer of Jewish Museum

“Between the Lines” in Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum;  
The Permanent Exhibition

Preparatory Watching:

Daniel Libeskind “Jewish Museum Berlin”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNJ5rgebyEE>

Reading:

Andreas Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin”. In: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 57-81.

**Week 11**

19.04.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, BCB campus

The Arts, Architecture and Urban Planning in the Shadow of the Wall and After its Collapse  
“Bauhaus Bashing”: From Modernism to Postmodernism

Preparatory Lecture:

Philip Ursprung, “Bauhaus Bashing, Looking Back and Ahead”, Lecture at Harvard University, 16.09.2029

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jrsCDky7GE>;

Bauhaus 100, BBC Documentary, 2019:

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

Background Reading:

Walter Gropius, Bauhaus Manifesto, 1919;

Iain Boyd Whyte, “Berlin 1870-1945: An introduction framed by Architecture”, in: Irit Rogoff (ed.), *The Divided Heritage. Themes and Problems in German Modernism*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 223-252;

**Week 12**

26.04.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, Hamburger Bahnhof

“Endless Exhibition”; “Forum Hamburger Bahnhof”

“A Collection for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”

Reading:

Stephanie D’Alessandro, „History by Degrees: The Place of the Past in Contemporary German Art“. In: *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 66-81, 110-111.

**Week 13**

03.05.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, Meet at Berlinische Galerie

Kotti Shop Super Future – On Collective Art Production

Closer to Nature. Building with Fungi, Trees, Mud

Kader Attia, J’accuse; The Object’s Interlacing & Hannah Höch

Postmodern Architecture in Berlin-Kreuzberg

Reading: TBC

**Week 14**

10.04.2024, 14:00 – 17:15, Meet at Brandenburg Gate  
From Reichstag to Bundestag: A building in the Age of Extremes,  
Berlin Parliament Tour (TBC)

Reading:

Rolf J. Goebel, Berlin's Architectural Citations: Reconstruction, Simulation, and the Problem of Historical Authenticity, PMLA, vol. 118, no. 5 (Oct 20039), pp. 1268-1289

**Essay Deadlines**

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

The midterm essay is due on 22 March, Friday, midnight.

The final term essay is due on 15 May, Wednesday, 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. A useful range of books on our topics can be found in the BCB library.