

AH210: Made in Germany? Art and National Identity, 1800-2000

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

Questions of belonging and national identity constitute a particularly complex issue in German art and culture. In the early 1800s, painters such as Caspar David Friedrich looked back to the Gothic period and promoted the ideal of the Holy Roman Empire. His work was part of attempts to create a kind of German national unity in the aftermath of the French invasions undertaken by Napoleon I. With the development of Germany into an industrial powerhouse and a unified national-imperial state from the 1870s onwards, artists felt the need to explore new ways of seeing. At the same time, they continued to struggle with questions of identity: was it 'appropriate' to look for aesthetic inspiration to Paris, to the 'enemy nation' defeated in 1871? And how did the so-called 'Expressionists' position themselves within the European art scene? Debates over art's social and political relevance intensified in the early decades of the twentieth century, and were taken up again with new fervor after the First World War. The legendary 'Weimar years' – which only lasted from 1919 until Hitler's rise to power in 1933 – saw the emergence of Berlin Dada, New Objectivity and the Bauhaus. The Nazi dictatorship followed a cultural agenda shaped by racial ideology. After its collapse in the wake of war and genocide, the relationship between art and its societal meaning became even more contested. Theodor Adorno proclaimed that it was barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz. Collective memories of the German past, and the Cold War conflict between capitalist democracy and socialist dictatorship, continued to influence artistic production. This class offers an introduction to Germany's difficult history through the examination of artistic positions from Romanticism over pre-World War one Expressionism, the Weimar Years, and Nazi Cultural Politics to the memorial discourses in the post-reunification period of the 1990s. Field trips to museums are an integral part of the course.

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.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability

Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

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 a once-per-week course will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Please inform Aya beforehand should you not be able to attend class. Unexcused absences will affect the participation grade and you will be asked to make up for it by submitting an 800-word response related to the readings of the missed class. Bard College Berlin may 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.

Punctuality

Punctuality is essential. Turning up late will also affect the participation grade. Since many of our visits will take place in different locations in the city, please make sure you depart early, before the beginning of class and make sure you join the class group chat so that we can share our location with you.

Class Etiquette

In the case of unavoidable absences, a short notification via email sent before the beginning of class is appreciated. Please keep your bathroom breaks to a minimum. When visiting museums, you should stay with the group while the conversation is still going on. Please do your best to stay focused: This includes listening to students' presentations and to any of our seminar guests. If you take notes in class (recommended) please make sure you only use a pencil in museums.

Weekly Readings

Weekly readings and other specific assignments will be confirmed by email by Tuesday prior to our class, and all materials are uploaded on our class drive or via links on the padlet.

Please check your BCB emails regularly. Please also make sure you can access the padlet. Should you not have received an email by Tuesday before our class please get in touch with Aya as there might have been a glitch.

Assessment

The course assessment includes the overall seminar work (response papers, regular class participation, short presentations, a visual quiz) and the final essay. See also "Grade Breakdown."

Padlet Responses

Students are asked to submit weekly responses of 200 words each to be uploaded on the class padlet by Thursday evening, 20:00. **Grading Criteria:** Punctuality of submission (!), structure, relevance to the prompt, readings and depth of analysis; awareness of context and key debates. You may refer to your classmates' uploads or present your own line of argument, ideally your responses can help pave the way to a lively classroom discussion.

Grading Criteria on Visual Quiz and Presentations

- Offer critical analysis of the work's meanings and functions
- Provide relevant and well-researched information, e. g. on the work's aesthetics & materiality, meanings, contexts of origin and its provenance, the artist, their life and career and artistic & political intentions (direct quotes encouraged)
- Draw links to our readings and class themes (where applicable)
- Ensure a clear and logical structure, think carefully about terminology

Preparing your Final Essays

In addition to the above, there is one more extensive writing assignment for the course: your final essay. Prompts and further instructions will be provided in advance. Your essay's structure, contents and arguments can be discussed in individual meetings beforehand.

Please note that your final essay should include references (e. g. in the form of footnotes), a bibliography and a list of illustrations. A preliminary outline of your final project (including a title, a research question, a structure outline and a bibliography) is due by May 6 (Wednesday). Your final, written-up piece is due on 13 May (Wednesday) at midnight. If you are a graduating student your final essay is due by May 6, midnight, and the preliminary outline by 2 May (Saturday). Final essays are to be emailed directly to Aya, alternatively you can send me a link via email.

Here are some basic points you should bear in mind:

Title and Topic: How does the title of your work as well as your introduction reflect your objectives? What is the aim of your essay? Be as clear as possible about aims and objectives.

Background Research: How can you include references to some of the required readings from our course in a meaningful way? Have you researched your topic sufficiently? What kinds of sources have you found and where else could you try to find out more about your topic?

Facts and contextual information: Have you acquired sufficient foundational knowledge - e. g. are you aware of the relevant historical contexts and theoretical debates? Have you been able to acquire a sense of the relevant cultural and political debates or issues related to your project's topic?

Interpretations, comparisons and/or overview of scholarship: What kinds of approaches to your topic 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 approach relate to them? Don't be afraid to engage with quotes and other references. These should be accompanied by an annotation providing the source reference.

Format: Your final project essay should be of circa 3.500 words of length (+- 10%), including captions, annotations and bibliography. The referencing style should be consistent, the format should be double-spaced with 12-point font. Please include page numbers, a title, captions, annotations, a list of illustrations and a bibliography.

Grading Criteria:

- Line of argument with regard to the question (organization, coherence and execution of the argument);
- Awareness of context and existing literature/scholarship on the topic including our class readings;
- Structure, quality of writing and format (consistent use of annotations, bibliography & list of illustrations).

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation (preparation, short presentations, questions, attendance): 25 %

Padlet Responses throughout Semester: 25 %

Visual Quiz: 15 %

Final Essay: 35 %

Schedule

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:
<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/search/>

Week 1

30.01.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, BCB seminar room

Introduction to the Class

“Art made in Germany”: Mini-presentation of class participants

Historical Overview and Themes

Weekly Task for all Participants:

Please add a response to the padlet and be prepared to give several short presentations in class.

For week 1: please email Aya an image of your choice – that you consider relevant, but not necessarily covered in our syllabus – which you'd like to briefly present (1-3 minutes) during our first session.

Readings:

*** Please read the Syllabus carefully and familiarize yourself with the padlet and google drive ***
Historical Background Reading:

Mary Fulbrook, “The Course of German History”, Chapter 1 in: Mary Fulbrook, *A History of Germany 1918-2014. The Divided Nation*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester 2015, pp. 1-12

Adam Tooze on German unification: Bismarck, Realpolitik and Birth of a Nation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yF4INCn-sew>

Week 2

06.02.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, Alte Nationalgalerie

Old National Gallery, Museum Island

German Romanticism

15:15 – 17:00: Visit of Roads not Taken Exhibition, German Historical Museum

Readings:

Françoise Forster-Hahn, „Art without a National Centre. German Painting in the Nineteenth Century”, in: *Spirit of an Age. Nineteenth-Century Paintings from the Nationalgalerie, Berlin*, London 2001, pp. 19-39;

William Vaughan, “Correcting Friderich (Friedrich): nature and society in post-Napoleonic Germany”, in: *Art in Bourgeois Society*, ed. by Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, pp. 208-228;

Visual Analysis Samples:

Catalogue Entries: “Romantic Landscape”, in: *Spirit of an Age. Nineteenth-Century Paintings from the Nationalgalerie, Berlin*, London 2001, pp. 58-77;

Contemporary Source:

Caspar David Friedrich, “Observations on Viewing a Collection of Paintings...”, ca. 1830, in: *Art in Theory. 1815-1900. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, pp. 48-54

Week 3

13.02.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, Alte Nationalgalerie

Old National Gallery: The Social Question Industrialization / The City

Readings:

Peter Paret, "Adolph Menzel from Different Perspectives", in: Peter Paret, *German Encounters with Modernism, 1840-1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, pp. 7-44

Marion Deshmukh, „Max Liebermann. Observations on the Politics of Painting in Imperial Germany, 1870-1914“, in: *German Studies Review*, 3.1980, pp. 171-226

Contemporary Sources:

Metropolis Berlin, 1880-1940, ed. By Iain Boyd Whyte and David Frisby, University of California Press, Part I, *The Metropolitan Panorama*, pp. 9-47

Week 4

20.02.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, BCB Seminar Room

Modernisms and Modernities: Debates

The Rural-Urban Divide; "Primitivism" & Colonialism, War & Revolution, Issues in Modernism

Readings:

Walter Grasskamp, A historical continuity of disjunctions, In: *The divided heritage. Themes and problems in German Modernism*, ed. by Irit Rogoff, Cambridge 1991, pp. 14-23;

Sherwin Simmons: Ernst Kirchner's Streetwalkers: Art, Luxury, and Immorality in Berlin, 1913-16. In: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Mar., 2000), pp. 117-148;

Bernhard Fulda and Aya Soika, Emil Nolde and the Nazi Dictatorship, in: exhibition catalogue Neue Galerie New York City, "Degenerate Art"

Week 5

27.02.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, Alte Jakobstraße 124-128, 10969 Berlin

Berlin. 1900 – ca. 1960 at Berlinische Galerie

Dada & Raoul Hausmann, Exhibition Visit

Readings:

Richard Hülsenbeck, First German Dada Manifesto, 1918; Hülsenbeck/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;

Wieland Herzfelde and Brigid Doherty, "Introduction to the First International Dada Fair";

Maria Makela, "New Women, New Men, New Objectivity", in: *New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic 1919–1933*, New York 2015, pp. 51-63

Week 6

06.03.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, Brücke Museum Berlin or BCB seminar room (tbc)

Brücke Museum and Kunsthaus Dahlem

Readings:

Aya Soika, "The Artist Collective Brücke From Today's Perspective". In: *German Expressionism. The Artist Group Brücke and the Beginnings of Modernism*. Exh. cat. Moderna Museet, Stockholm (21 September 2024 – 9 March 2025), Munich, pp. 63-80

Week 7

13.03.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, BCB Seminar Room

The Bauhaus School of Art and Design

Weimar Cultures

Readings:

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

Hannes Meyer, "The New World" (1926), in: *The Weimar Sourcebook*, p. 445;
New York Times Article (published 24th May 2026): Alexandra Lange, "Was the Founder of the Bauhaus a Doctrinaire Bore or a Brilliant Innovator?"

Shearer West, Chapter 6: "Commodity and Industry: From the Werkstatt to the Bauhaus", in: *Utopia and Despair*, Manchester

Film:

BBC Documentary: Bauhaus 100

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2a45UBCIbJc>

Week 8

20.03.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, BCB Seminar Room

The Rise of Nazism. / German Modernism during the Nazi Period

The Campaign against so-called "Degenerate Art"

Readings:

Hans-Ernst Mittig, "Art and oppression in fascist Germany", in: Irit Rogoff, *The Divided Heritage: Themes and Problems in German Modernism*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 191-215;

Peters, Olaf, "Genesis, Conception, and Consequences: the "Entartete Kunst" Exhibition in Munich in 1937", in: *Degenerate Art. The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, exh.cat., New York/Munich/London: Prestel 2014, ed. by Olaf Peters, 106-125;

Mary Fulbrook, Chapter 3: The Collapse of Democracy and the Rise of Hitler. In: *A History of Germany 1918-2014: The Divided Nation*, 2015, pp. 40-56;

Mary Fulbrook, Chapter 4: A "National Community"? State, Economy and Society, 1933-1939. In: *A History of Germany 1918-2014: The Divided Nation*, 2015, pp. 57-61

Contemporary Texts:

Walter Benjamin, Preface and Epilogue of his Essay "The Art Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936);

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

Week 9

27.03.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, Topography of Terror, Niederkirchnerstrasse 8, 10963 Berlin (off U-/S-Potsdamer Platz)

Historical Introduction / Documentary Photography

Propaganda in Nazi Film

Readings:

Eric Rentschler, „The Legacy of Nazi Cinema: Triumph of the Will and Jew Süss Revisited“, in: *The Arts in Nazi Germany. Continuity, conformity, change*, ed. by Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia, New York: Berghahn 2006, pp. 63-83

On historical background:

Ian Kershaw, „Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism“, in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 239-254;

Recorded Lecture with Mary Fulbrook, Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nh-0zEEkZ88>

03.04.2026
SPRING BREAK, No Class

Week 10

10.04.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, BCB Seminar Room
“Art after Auschwitz”
Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter, Katharina Sieverding

Readings:

Andreas Huyssen, „Figures of Memory in the course of Time“. In: *Art of Two Germanys. Cold War Cultures*, Exhibition catalogue Los Angeles County Museum of Art, pp. 225-239;
Frank Trommler, “Germany’s past as artifact”. In: *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 61, no 4, 1989, pp. 724-735;
Rainer Usselmann, „18. Oktober 1977: Gerhard Richter’s Work of Mourning and its new audience“, in: *Art Journal*, vol. 61, no. 1, Spring 2002, pp.4-25
Michael Rothberg, „After Adorno: Culture in the Wake of Catastrophe“, in: *New German Critique*, no. 72, autumn 1997, pp. 45-81;
Eichmann on Trial, Witness History, BBC Podcast
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00q89dy>
Paul B. Jaskot, Gerhard Richter and Adolf Eichmann, in: *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2005), pp. 459-478

Week 11

17.04.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, Hamburger Bahnhof, Foyer
Hamburger Bahnhof Visit: A Collection for the 21st Century
Joseph Beuys (1921-86), Das Kapital Raum 1970-1977 (1980) and other works

Readings:

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;
Oskar Bätschmann, The Artist in the Modern World (pages on Beuys), p. 212 (bottom) - 219

Week 12

24.04.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, BCB Seminar Room
Memory Cultures
Part 2: Visual Quiz, covering works discussed in weeks 1-11

Readings:

James E. Young, The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today, in: *Critical Inquiry* 18, Winter 1992, pp. 267-296;
Recorded Lecture with Michael Rothberg, Bard College Berlin (Multidirectional Memory and Postcolonial Studies in Contemporary Germany):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J9P-Clwk6Q>
Lecture by Michael Wildt, Debating Holocaust and Colonial Memory Culture: Historikerstreit 2.0:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syhu3J4FDX0>

Week 13

01.05.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15
NO CLASS DUE TO MAY HOLIDAY

06.05.2026

Final Essay Outlines due, including a title, research question and a bibliography

Week 14

08.05.2026, Friday, 14:00-17:15, Brandenburg Gate

Historical Authenticity and Citation

The Reichstag / Visit to Parliament (tbc)

Memorial Walk through Mitte

Readings:

Rolf J. Goebel, Berlin's Architectural Citations: Reconstruction, Simulation, and the Problem of Historical Authenticity, in: *PMLA*, vol. 118, no. 5, Oct. 2003, pp. 1268-1289;

Brian Ladd, Center and Periphery in the New Berlin: Architecture, Public Art, and the Search for Identity, in: *A Journal of Performance and Art*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Berlin 2000, pp. 7-21

Important Class Deadlines

Wednesday Evening each week: Your weekly response due

24 April: Visual Quiz, end of our class

6 May: Final Essay Outline due

13 May: Final Essay due

Library and Book Purchase Policies

There will be no book purchases for this class. All readings are provided in PDF format or via online links. Several hard copies of useful class books are available in the library.