

Skidmore College
Department of Philosophy and Religion

Spring, 2009
R. Lilly

PH 210: Aesthetics
TUTH 11:10-12:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is an introduction to philosophical thinking about art. The artworld is extremely diverse, and it is impossible to do survey the variety of artforms or even the variety within various artforms much less the highly nuanced thinking that has been dedicated to them. Therefore, the content of this course is by nature eclectic. We will try to make a virtue of necessity: beginning with basic and formative readings in the early history of the philosophy of art, we will consider issues that seem to me to be at the core of the diasporadic condition of the arts today with special attention to two essential issues: the status of the ‘artist’ and that of the ‘work.’

Our focus during class periods will be first to come to terms with the ideas presented in the readings, and then to discuss their implications. Therefore, although I will certainly have something to say each class, the emphasis is on discussion. Students are especially encouraged to immerse themselves in the arts and to **think** about them, and to introduce relevant works of art into the class discussion.

This syllabus will undoubtedly be modified as the class progresses. Therefore, it should be taken only as an approximate indication of the course of the course.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern (PA), ed. A. Neill & A Ridley
Theories of Contemporary Art (CA) ed. Richard Hertz
Selected Readings (handout)

READING ASSIGNMENTS:

1/20: Introduction

Historical Texts

1/22: PA, pp. 6-23, Plato, “The Ion”; Wordsworth, “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*”

1/27: PA, pp. 466-483, From Plato’s *Republic*

1/29: PA, pp. 488-505, From Aristotle’s *Poetics*

2/3: PA pp. 254-268, Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”

2/5: PA pp. 269-280, Kant, “Analytic of the Beautiful”

2/10: PA pp. 280-296, Kant, “Analytic of the Beautiful”

2/12: PA, pp. 75-81, Gadamer, “The Play of Art,”

2/17: Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” (handout)

2/19: Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” (handout) **(First Paper Assigned)**

Art and Subjectivity

2/24: PA, pp. 506-521, Tolstoy, “What is Art?” Dewey, “Art as Experience” (handout)

- 2/26: PA, pp. 98-117: Bell, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis"; Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" **(First Paper Due)**
- 3/3: PA, pp. 374-90, Wimsatt & Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy"; Barthes, "The Death of the Author"
- 3/5: PA, pp. 390-413, Hirsch, "In Defense of the Author"; Wollheim, "Criticism as Retrieval"¹

Spring Break

- 3/17: Levinson, "Messages in Art"² (handout); **(First Review Due)**
- 3/19: PA, pp. 415-45 Baxendall, "Intentional Visual Interest: Picasso's 'Portrait of Kahnweiler'"; ~~Robinson, "Style and Personality in the Literary Work"~~
- 3/24: PA, pp. 53-58; pp. 522-538. T. S. Elliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; Dewey, "Art and Civilization"; Adorno, "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening"

Art? Whose Art? The End of Art?

- 3/26: PA 457-65.; Sontag, "Against Interpretation"; Kraus, "Poststructuralism and the Paraliterary"; ~~Margolis, "Reinterpreting Interpretation"~~ **(handout). (Second Paper Assigned)**
- 3/31: Danto, "The End of Art" and "Works of Art and Mere Real Things," **(handout)**
- 4/2: Shiff, "Art and Life: A Metaphoric Relationship"; Butterfield, "The State of the Real and Reshaping the Shape of Things" **(handouts) (Second Paper Due)**
- 4/7: Levin, "Farewell to Modernism" (CA pp. 1-9); Rosenblum, "Andy Warhol: Court Painter to the 70s"; **(handout)** Rose, "American Painting: The Eighties" (CA, pp. 17-30).
- 4/9: Lawson, "Last Exit: Painting" (CA 79-91); Schjeldahl, "Death and the Painter," 123-131;
- 4/14: "The Marriage of Art and Money" (Ratcliff); "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum" (Krauss), (CA 269-298.)
- 4/16: Jones, "Postmodernism, Subjectivity, and Body Art: A Trajectory" **(handout)**
- 4/21: Hickey, "Air Guitar" **(handout)(Second Review Due)**
- 4/23: Elkins, "Envoi" **(handout) (Third Paper Assigned)**
- 4/28: Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones,"; Carroll, "Cage and Philosophy" **(Third Paper Due)**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) There are **three short papers** of ca 5 pages (1250 words). These must be submitted in electronic media by email as either a Microsoft Word or Wordperfect attachment. If possible, please send in Rich Text Format (rft).
- 2) Also required will be **two 'reviews'** of approximately 400 words. These may be completed at

¹ This is a lot for one class. Both articles are substantial

² Reading a bit thin, but provokes discussion.

any point during the semester; however, there are absolute “due dates” for each review. See above. The guidelines for writing a review are included in this syllabus.

3) Participation in class discussion is expected.

4) Attendance in class is required; absences and latenesses will lower one’s grade. Come to class **On Time!!**

GRADES:

Each of the three papers are worth 25% of the final grade.

Each of the two reviews are 10% each of the final grade.

Participation counts for 5% of the final grade

OFFICE HOURS:

TU 3:30-4:30; W 9:30-12:00 & 1:00-2:30; and by appointment (Ladd 218). Phone: 5406; email: rlilly

Questions In Art Criticism

Art critics help viewers perceive, interpret, and judge artworks. Art critics and art historians share a strong interest in constructing meaning from artworks. While critics tend to focus more on modern and contemporary art from cultures close to their own, art historians tend to study works made in cultures that are more distant in time and space.

Your reviews should be of works in two different media. Every attempt should be made to include a reproduction of the work under review.

Review*

1. **DESCRIPTION:** What do I see? (feel, hear, smell, taste)?
 - a. **Subject Matter:** Does the artwork depict anything? If so, what?
 - b. **Medium:** What tools, materials, or processes did the art maker use?
 - c. **Form:** What elements did the maker choose and how did the maker organize the elements?
2. **INTERPRETATION:** What is the artwork about?
 - a. **Interpretive Statement:** Can I express what I think the artwork is about in one sentence?
 - b. **Evidence:** What evidence inside or outside the artwork supports my interpretation?
2. **JUDGMENT:** Is it a good artwork?
 - a. **Criteria:** What criteria do you think are most appropriate for judging the artwork?
 - b. **Evidence:** What evidence inside or outside the artwork relates to each criterion?
 - c. **Judgment:** Based on the criteria and evidence, what is your judgment about the quality of the artwork?

* based roughly on Terry Barrett's Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary, Mountain View, CA:, 1994; summary of Getty Institute.