



ART CRITICISM AND METHODOLOGY

Course Syllabus

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Office Hours TBD

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Course Description

This class introduces you to the interpretive methods used in the study of art history as well as to the history of the discipline itself. Each week you will read a series of texts that formulate or adopt a particular methodological approach. The readings are selected to give you a sense of art historical method in practice, and to help you become a more critically aware reader and writer. The course employs two types of weekly written assignments. The first will ask you to respond to the assigned texts using a prompt. The second will require you to use each week's method to interpret a work of art or object that you have chosen to study for the entire semester. Looking at the same object through a variety of interpretive lenses enables you to see how interpretation is formed by one's own historical context, point of view, and ideological formation. Your final paper for the course will develop an original argument about your chosen object using the research you have done throughout the course. In addition to written work, you will do three short presentations. Readings, written assignments, and presentations will be supplemented by work on a portfolio (a collection of your work for the course and a series of short reflections) and workshops on a range of topics including research, footnotes and bibliography, thesis development, and public presentations.

Course Aims and Outcomes

At the end of the semester you should have a good basic knowledge of the way art history is approached in terms of method, an enhanced sense of what it means to develop an original argument in the discipline, and a better understanding of the mechanics of reading, writing, and research in art history.

While this course is designed as a major's seminar, the skills and knowledge you develop will be transferable to other subjects and ways of learning. At the end of the course, your reading, writing, and presentation skills will be sharpened. You will have developed the ability to engage with complex ideas, and the confidence to transfer or transform those ideas into your own arguments. You will have a better sense of how knowledge is generated, organized, and propagated, and will have improved capacities in visual analysis. Lastly, you will develop new communication skills, and will have enhanced understanding of working in, and responding to, a group of colleagues.

Course Requirements

- 1. Participation (includes discussion and weekly writing assignments) 40 percent**
- 2. Presentations (3) 15 percent**
- 3. Final Paper 25 percent**
- 4. Portfolio and portfolio assignments (3) 20 percent**

Course Materials

- 1. All readings (unless noted otherwise) are in the course reader, available for purchase the first day of class.**
- 2. All course handouts and slide shows will be available on the Moodle site.**

Course Policies for Assignments and Attendance

*Readings should be done for the date under which they are listed on the syllabus.

*Weekly writing assignments should be posted to Moodle for me to review by 5:00 pm on the Sunday before each class. Because the weekly papers are meant to shape class discussion, no late papers will be accepted. Even though the assignments are short, you should in each case focus on structure of argument, development of thesis, and use of evidence. Writing should be clear and free of grammatical and typographical errors. Papers will be graded on coherence (introduction, body, conclusion) and rigor (how carefully have you read the text and responded to the question). **ONCE MORE: No late weekly writing assignments will be accepted. You will be permitted to drop your lowest weekly assignment grade in your final average.**

*There is one final paper (15 pages; **due Friday December 18 by 5:00 pm, posted to Moodle**). You will be working on this paper beginning in the first week of class and then during the semester through the weekly writing assignments about your chosen object. In week 12 of the semester you will submit a proposal for the paper that will include a bibliography, a statement of the research question, and an abstract describing the project. This proposal will be graded as part of the final paper grade (10 percent). Requests for extensions for the final paper will only be granted under extraordinary circumstances. Papers turned in after the due date will be downgraded one grade increment per day, and you will receive an “F” for the course (changed once the paper is turned in).

*All of the written work for the course must be kept in a portfolio. To this portfolio will be added three assignments, each of which will require you to reflect on your relationship to the discipline of art history (and this class), your ideas about the relationship between art history and your education more generally, and your goals outside of Bard. Portfolio assignment 1 will be completed in the first class and then taken home for editing. Portfolio assignments 2 (due 10/25 by 5:00 pm via Moodle) and 3 (due 12/16 by 5:00 pm via Moodle) will require you to review and reflect on your work for the semester, including the work you have done for the final paper. You will meet with me during completion week to discuss your work for the course and the portfolio.

*All written work must be typed, double-spaced, using 12 point font (Times or similar). Sources must be cited (using footnotes and Chicago Style), and a bibliography is expected for the final paper. All images discussed in the final paper must be illustrated. Final papers using incorrect bibliographic form or lacking illustrations will be returned for corrections.

*Attendance and participation are an important part of this course. The instructor reserves the right to **FAIL** any student who misses more than two classes without a medical excuse (or equivalent). At the very least, expect that your grade will be lowered one increment per absence after two missed classes. In-class assignments cannot be made up.

*Incompletes will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances. Note: Failure to complete one aspect of course work may result in an “F” for the course.

General grading rubrics

Class Participation:

“A range”: A strong class participant does the reading before class and can contribute questions and comments about the reading to the class discussion. A strong participant does not overwhelm others during the conversation; rather, a strong participant listens to the

conversation and adjusts his or her comments accordingly. An “A range” class participant can respond well when asked a question and is never absorbed in texting or cellphone use.

“B range”: A “B range” class participant does the reading before class but may contribute less than a stronger, “A range” participant. A “B range” participant may not be as good a listener as an “A range” student. A “B range” student is never absorbed in texting or cellphone use.

“C range”: A “C range” participant fails to do the reading before class, but can contribute when asked questions about the images being shown.

“D range”: A “D range” participant has excessive absences or is frequently late and cannot participate fruitfully in discussions of the readings or the images.

Papers (note that I will distribute more explicit rubrics for each assignment)

Papers for this class will be graded on clear expression of ideas, strong argument or point of view, use of proper grammar, and use of correct footnote/bibliographic form.

“A” papers are nearly flawless. They are well organized and free of grammatical and formal errors. They have a strong, clearly expressed point of view or argument (depending on the assignment).

“A-” papers will be nearly perfect, but may have a few more grammatical errors, or slight organizational issues than an “A” paper. They have a strong, clearly expressed point of view or argument (depending on the assignment).

“B+” papers will be strong in all categories, but may have more errors in grammar or organization than an “A” or “A-” paper. They have a strong, clearly expressed point of view or argument (depending on the assignment).

“B” papers will have a good argument and will be clearly written, argued, and organized. They may have grammatical or organizational problems of a higher order than “A”-“B+” papers.

“B-” papers will show a good effort in terms of the assignment, but usually have relatively obvious problems with grammar or organization.

“C”-range papers will show effort in terms of the assignment, but usually have substantial problems with argument, grammar, or organization.

“D”-range papers show a lack of effort or very serious problems in terms of grammar, organization, and argument.

Presentations

I will distribute a detailed presentation rubric and we will discuss in class before the first assigned presentation.

Portfolios

“A” range portfolio assignments will show careful reflective thought about the questions. They will be well written and free of grammatical or typographical errors.

“B” range portfolio assignments will show reflective thought about the questions. They will be clearly written, but may have some grammatical or typographical errors.

“C” range portfolio assignments will show thought about the questions. They will be clearly written, but may have a number of grammatical or typographical errors.

“D” range portfolio assignments will demonstrate a lack of effort or very serious problems in terms of grammar and editing.

CLASS SCHEDULE

August 31 Class One Introduction: Before Art History (lecture, introductions, portfolio assignment)

Workshop: Reading critically

September 7 Class Two Art History as a Discipline (lecture, discussion and presentation of objects)

Readings:

Robert Nelson, "The Map of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* (March 1997), 28-40.

Kelsey Merriam, *Painting the in-between : the elision of interior and exterior in the work of Johannes Vermeer* (Bard College Senior Project, 2010) NOTE: This reading is on our Moodle site.

Workshop: Developing a Research Question (review of senior project and rubric)

Assignments (EXCEPTING #1, ALL DUE SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 6 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS):

1. Read and analyze the senior project using the rubric on Moodle. Be prepared to discuss the rubric in class.
2. Robert Nelson is interested in exposing the structures through which art history as a discipline is constructed. Go the Bard Library; on reserve for our class you will find a series of reprints of H.W. Janson's famous textbook on the history of art. How do these textbooks structure our understanding of art history? How do they change over time? 2-3 pages.
3. Pick an object (2-D or 3-D; if possible, a work you could visit in NYC or an area museum). You should pick an object on which you would like to focus the entire semester. Find the best digital image of your object that you can, and be prepared to discuss it in class. You should be able to tell the class: the maker and/or origin, the date, the place of origin, the place the object can currently be found, the object's original purpose, and your interest in it.
4. Research your object using all means you can think of (these should include, but are not limited to: the Bibliography of the History of Art, Jstor, New York Connect, and World Cat.), and put together a 15-item bibliography. See "Researching and Organizing a Bibliography" on Moodle for guidance).
SENIORS: you may select an object related to your senior project, but you are not allowed to turn in work done in this class for the project.

September 14 Class Three Biography (lecture and discussion)

Readings:

Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, (first edition 1550, 1568, trans. George Bull, 2nd. ed. London: Penguin Books, 1965): selections (Cimabue, Giotto, Michelangelo; SKIM THE LATTER)

Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, “The Heroization of the Artist in Biography,” in *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist* (New Haven, 1979): 30-60.

Assignments (DUE SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 13 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS)

1. What are the tropes and conventions outlined by Kris and Kurz? Can you think of modern or contemporary examples of these tropes? 2-3 pages.
2. Write a 2-page biography of your object’s maker. If your object does not have a single maker, describe the entity or group of people that created it (who are they, where did they come from, how did they work together, and why did they work together?) If your object has an anonymous maker, describe the culture from which the object came—why is the maker anonymous?

Workshop: Writing a Formal Analysis

September 21 Class Four Form, Style, Materials (lecture and discussion)

Readings:

Clement Greenberg. “Abstract, Representational, and So Forth,” (1954) in *Art and Culture* (Boston, 1961): 133-138.

Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, in *The Art of Art History*, Donald Preziosi ed. (Oxford, 1998): 115-126.

Michael Baxandall, “Material,” in *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven and London, 1980): 27-38.

Assignments (DUE SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 20 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS)

1. Compare Greenberg’s and Wölfflin’s approach to formal analysis. 2-3 pages.
2. Write a 2-3 page formal analysis of your object.

Workshop: Writing an annotated bibliography and a survey of the literature.

September 28 Class Five Art as Symbol: Iconography (lecture and discussion)

Readings:

Erwin Panofsky, “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art,” (1st publ. 1939) in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Princeton, 1955): 26-54.

Meyer Schapiro, “Muscipula Diaboli,’ The Symbolism of the Merode Altarpiece,” *Art Bulletin* 27 (1945): 182-187.

Assignments (DUE SUNDAY September 27 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS)

1. Describe Panofsky's three levels. What kinds of presumptions about art does the use of this method assume? 2-3 pages.
2. How might the use of an iconographic approach limit Meyer Schapiro's interpretation of the *Merode Altarpiece*? 2-3 pages.
3. Create a 10 item (minimum) annotated bibliography of your object.

Workshop: Conducting Research

October 5 Class Six Social History (lecture and discussion)

T.J. Clarke, "On the Social History of Art," in *Image of the People, Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London, 1973): 9-20.

T.J. Clarke, "Olympia's Choice," in *The Painting of Modern Life* (New York, 1984): 80-146.

Michael Baxandall, "Art, Society, and the Bouguer Principle," *Representations* 12, no. Fall (1983): 32-43.

Assignments (DUE SUNDAY OCTOBER 4 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS)

1. What evidence does T.J. Clarke use in his argument about Olympia? How does he use it to support his points? 2-3 pages.
2. What are Baxandall's reservations about social art history? 2-3 pages.

Workshop: Developing Context

October 12 FALL BREAK, NO CLASS

October 19 Class Seven Art and Identity

Readings:

Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Art News*, Vol. 69, No. 9 (January 1971), reprinted in L. Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row): 147-158.

Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," *New Formations* (Spring 1992): 1-24.

Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," in *Gender Trouble* (New York, 1999): 3-33.

Assignments (DUE SUNDAY OCTOBER 18 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS)

1. Write a 2-3 page description of the social context in which your object was created.
2. According to Linda Nochlin, why have there been no great women artists? What is one of the fundamental problems with Nochlin's argument? 2-3 pages.
3. Why did Mercer change his mind? 2-3 pages.

Workshop: Revisiting the Research Question

October 26 Class Eight Art as a System of Signs: Structuralism and Post Structuralism (lecture, discussion, presentations of images)

Readings:

Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 33-40.

Rosalind Krauss, 'In the Name of Picasso', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 23-40.

Norman Bryson, 'Semiology and Visual Interpretation', *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, ed. N. Bryson, M. A. Holly, and K. Moxey (New York 1991), pp. 61-73.

Assignments (DUE SUNDAY OCTOBER 25 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS)

1. Find an advertising image and be prepared to explain how it can be interpreted within Barthes' framework.
2. What is the difference between iconography and semiology? (Bryson will be most helpful here) 2-3 pages.
3. Second portfolio question: How has your thinking about art history, and your relationship to it as a thinker, changed since the first week of class? (2 pages)

Workshop: Presenting Your Work

November 2 Class Nine Reception (lecture, discussion, presentations)

Readings:

Michel Foucault, "Las Meninas," (1st publ. 1966) in *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1970): 3-16.

Michael Fried, "Painting and the Beholder," in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago, 1980): 107-160.

Michael Ann Holly, "Reciprocity and Reception Theory," in *A Companion to Art Theory*, P. Smith and Carolyn Wilde, eds (Oxford, 2002): 448-57.

Assignments (DUE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 1 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS)

1. What is the relationship between painting and the beholder, according to Fried? 2-3 pages.
2. In a paper of 2-3 pages discuss 1) how your object would have been seen in its original, intended context and who would have been its audiences, 2) how your object responds to or does not recognize its intended audience, 3) what kind of a relationship is set up between your work and the viewer today.

3. Present this paper to the class using a digital image (5 mins. max). Note: even though this presentation is short, it should be extremely polished. I will give you a template to follow. Plan on using either a written script, or notes on index cards.

November 9 Class Ten Psychoanalysis (lecture, discussion)

Readings:

Sigmund Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo", in *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997): 122-148

Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "David's Sabine Women: Body, Gender and Republican Culture under the Directory," *Art History* 14.3 (1991): 397-429.

Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," (1949).

Assignment (DUE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS)

1. How does Lajer-Burcharth use Lacan to support her argument? What methods does she use in addition to psychoanalysis? 2-3 pages.

Workshop: Citation and Bibliography

November 16 Class Eleven Phenomenology

Readings:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2014): 69-74, 209-213.

Amelia Jones, "Meaning, Identity, Embodiment: The Uses of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology in Art History," in *Art and Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 71-90.

Rosalind Krauss, "Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd," *Artforum* (May 1966), 24-26.

Gaston Bachelard, "The house. From Cellar to Garret. The Significance of the Hut," *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, 1994), pp. 3-37.

AssignmentS (TBA) DUE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS)

November 23 Class Twelve Curatorial Practice (lecture, discussion)

Readings:

Philip Fisher, "The Future's Past," *New Literary History* (Spring 1975), 587-606.

Martha Ward, "What is Important about the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?," in *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996): 451-464.

Bruce Altshuler, "Introduction," *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made Art History, Vol. I* (London: Phaidon, 2008): 11-19.

Assignments (DUE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 22 BY 5:00 PM—NO EXCEPTIONS)

1. How are objects transformed by their removal to a museum? 2-3 pages.
2. Why is curating considered a “method? 2-3 pages.
3. Final paper proposal including: a bibliography, a research question, and an abstract of the paper.

November 30 Class Thirteen Presentations

December 7 Class Fourteen Presentations

December 14 Class Fifteen Completion Days, no class