

# Philosophy of Art

Ph 240 Section A01 Fall 2017

CRN 12506

Instructor: Thomas Heyd, Ph.D.  
Office: Clearihue B 309  
Class meetings: TWF 10:30 – 11:20  
Classroom: ECS 108  
Office Hours: Tue, Fri [1.30-2.20](#), or by appt.  
Tel.: (250) 853 3767  
e-mail: heydt@uvic.ca



Christo and Jean-Claude, Surrounded Islands (1983)

## Course description

In this course we will explore fundamental questions in the philosophy of art, such as

- Is art anything that we choose to call 'art'? Is it something determined by 'art experts'? Or is there something that 'essentially' makes something art?
- Is art based on an expression of feeling? Is it a way of representing the world? Or is it symbolic of something intrinsic of the human spirit?
- What is beauty? Is it merely 'in the eye of the beholder'? Is it only a certain arrangement of materials?
- Is the meaning of art entirely 'open to interpretation'? Are there 'better' and 'worse' ways of interpreting art? What is the role of 'artist intention' when evaluating artworks?
- Does technology change what art is? Is art capable of changing society? Do historical art periods signify stages of human development?
- Is aesthetics relevant in ordinary life? How do we appreciate the aesthetic value of nature?

## Course objectives

The objective of this course is to facilitate the understanding of key debates in philosophy of art through readings and critical discussion of diverging perspectives. To complement class-based work, an off-campus studio visit with an outstanding artist and emeritus art professor, a visit of a challenging artwork on campus, attendance of a socially engaged theatre piece, and gallery visits are planned.

## Texts and Coursespaces

**Required reading:** Kathleen M. Higgins, *Aesthetics in Perspective* (Harcourt/Nelson, 1996/2003). Some used copies are available for purchase at online providers, such as Amazon. Also viewable at the McPherson Library, RESERVE Room, Call Number: NX620 H54. Online versions of articles will be placed on Coursespaces, insofar as available. Further reading materials may be placed on reserve at the McPherson Library or handed out in class, as the course progresses. Please be attentive to announcements in class and on Coursespaces.

## Course organisation and student engagement

It is expected that assigned weekly readings be done *ahead of class lectures*. Attendance during class periods, constructive participation, and tolerance with regard to the views of others, will be expected. Students are responsible for materials covered, and for informing themselves about announcements missed, while absent. Constructive engagement in discussion and doing weekly short assignments are essential in earning credit toward the participation grade.

## Tips for best performances

1. *Do readings* ahead of class periods and read material attentively (by asking questions about the material), and *do weekly assignments*.
2. *Come to class*, and participate in class discussion with constructive points.
3. *Speak to the instructor* if failing to understand the material.

### Grading

Mid-term test, worth	30%
A final, comprehensive, take-home exam, worth	40%
Participation, including weekly assignments, worth	20%
Experiential group project	10%

1. **The mid-term test** will cover both readings and lectures. Both understanding and recall of material covered, and reflective analysis, will be expected. Test questions will consist of a combination of shorter and longer answer, and possibly some true-false and multiple choice, questions.

2. **The final exam** will be a comprehensive take-home exam with long as well as short answer questions. Questions will be handed out on the last day of classes, and the completed exam must be delivered to the Dept. of Philosophy **no later than 5 days after exam questions hand-out, before noon (12am)**. Exams also have to be submitted **simultaneously through Coursespaces**. Late exams will **NOT** be accepted (late exams will receive 0%). Understanding of material covered and reflective analysis will be expected. Answers to questions will be assessed on the basis of the following three criteria: (1) accurate presentation of the views discussed, (2) presentation of valid arguments, (3) effective and correct use of the English language.

3. **Participation** is assessed on the basis of *regular attendance*, through constructive participation in class discussion (including regarding end of semester class presentations), and especially through *weekly assignments* based on the course readings and personal analysis of the issues under discussion. *Class attendance will be taken*. Attendance will be *particularly encouraged* in the case of **guest speakers, studio and artsite visits**. Justified absences should be discussed with the instructor ahead of time. Participation grades will be assigned at the end of the semester. *Weekly assignments* consist of questions are based on each week's readings or on studio and artsite visits. Answers should be in your own words (not copied from the textbook or other texts), be about a paragraph long, and handed in on the first day of classes every week (usually Tuesdays). On the left side of the head of the page please state, **in this order**, 1) your last and first name, 2) the week it is for, 3) the particular readings being discussed, and 4) the date on which it is due. **No late assignments will be accepted**. Feedback will be given on the first sets of assignments, and occasionally thereafter. The total minus two assignments will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

4. **Experiential group project**: to explore one course topic together with other group members a) by visiting relevant sites or live arts events in the Victoria area, b) by writing up a one-page report (per group) about observations, and c) class presentation in the final week of classes of insights of the group. Possibilities: The art sites or events can be a gallery showing, an artistic installation, a petroglyph or pictograph site, a concert, a play, an opera, a poetry reading, performance art event or similar. By **6<sup>th</sup> October** groups select a site/activity to visit. On **3 November** one page reports on realised visits to be handed in. Presentations will be evaluated on completeness and engagement in the (on site and background) research, and clarity of presentation to the class.

### Other matters

#### *Numerical and letter grades*

Grades will be given as percentile marks. The percentile mark for the course will be converted to a letter grade in the following manner: A+ = 90 - 100, A = 85 - 89, A- = 80 - 84, B+ = 77 - 79, B = 73 - 76, B- = 70 - 72, C+ = 65 - 69, C = 60 - 64, D = 50 - 59, F = 0 - 49. The A range means exceptional, outstanding and excellent performance. A grade in the B range means a very good, good and solid performance. A grade in the C+ or C range means satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory, performance. A grade of D or D- indicates merely passable or marginal performance. An F indicates unsatisfactory performance.

#### *Late assignments, plagiarism and other policies*

Late assignments will **not** be accepted and exams will **not** be rescheduled. **There will not be make-up exams**. If an exam is missed for significant reasons of a medical sort (provide medical certificate), or for other serious, **documented** personal reasons, the final exam will be weighted so as to incorporate the weighting of the missed exam. Documented evidence for

having legitimately missed an exam and an explanatory statement in writing have to be received **no more than ten days after the deadline or exam missed.**

### *Academic integrity*

The University Calendar states that “Academic integrity requires commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. ... Any action that contravenes this standard, including misrepresentation, falsification or deception, undermines the intention and worth of scholarly work and violates the fundamental academic rights of members of our community.” Violations of academic integrity include plagiarism, multiple submissions, falsifying materials subject to academic evaluation, cheating on work, tests and examinations, and aiding others to cheat. Penalties for these violations vary, with first violations generally resulting in a failing grade on the work. Please familiarise yourselves with the policies at <http://web.uvic.ca/calendar2017-05/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html>

### *Transition and inclusivity/diversity*

New students needing assistance may contact the Transition Office, [www.uvic.ca/transition](http://www.uvic.ca/transition). This course is committed to inclusivity and diversity, in line with University Senate policy (1999) that “UVic is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a supportive and safe learning and working environment for all its members.”

### **Schedule of lectures and tests**

This schedule is *subject to change*. Weekly reading assignments will be confirmed during class periods, so please be attentive to announcements in class and on Coursespaces. Class time will be divided between lectures and discussion. *Informed* participation in class discussion will be expected, so *you should read the assigned texts in advance*. Readings are from **our textbook** or to be downloaded from **Coursespaces** unless indicated otherwise. Dates of studio and gallery visits will be re-confirmed in class.

Week 1

#### **Introduction**

4-10 Sept

What is aesthetics? What is Philosophy of art  
Is art only found in galleries and concert halls?  
Is art only found in modern Western society?  
Do other societies and people from other times also have art?

Readings: Chapter 1, Art and Artworks, *Puzzles about Art*

Week 2

#### **Definition of art and artworks**

11-17 Sept

Do artworks have a fundamental nature?  
Is it possible to define art?  
Is art just a matter of historical accident?  
Is art whatever the artworld decides on?

Readings: Danto, Weitz, Dickie, Binkley

Week 3

#### **Aesthetics, art, and aesthetic experience**

18-24 Sept

Is a special attitude required for aesthetic experience?  
Is aesthetic appreciation limited to art?  
If not, then, what distinguishes art from other things in our world?

Readings: Bullough, Dickie, Ziff

\*22 Sept: last day for adding courses\*

**FIELD TRIP to art studio of Prof. Emer. Mowry Baden's: Saturday, 23 Sept, 11am-12pm. Meet in Saanich. Travelling instructions and carpooling arrangements to be made in class**

Week 4

#### **Art: expression, emotion, and significant form**

25 Sept – 1 Oct

Is a certain emotion the indicator-sign of artworks?  
Is art a symbol of feeling?  
Is art the expression of emotion?

Readings: Bell, Langer, Collingwood

Week 5

#### **Beauty in art and aesthetic judgements**

2-8 Oct

What is beauty? What has love got to do with beauty?  
Is beauty 'in the eye of the beholder'? And, if not, then where?

What is the basis of taste? How can some artworks be 'better' than others?  
Readings: Plato on beauty and love. Selected readings from Chapter 2, Beauty, Ugliness, and Aesthetic Experience, *Puzzles about Art*. Hume

- Week 6  
9-15 Oct      **Aesthetic judgments (continued) and interpretation**  
How can subjective aesthetic judgments claim universality?  
How does interpretation work? Is it necessarily subjective?  
Readings: Kant, Gadamer. Selections from Ch. 3, Meaning and Interpretation, *Puzzles about Art*  
**\*9 October, Monday, Thanksgiving Day\***  
**\*\*12 October, Columbus' Arrival in the Americas\*\***
- Week 7  
16-22 Oct      **The role of intentions in art**  
Are intention and historical context relevant for interpretation of artworks?  
Can computer programs make art?  
Readings: Wimsatt/Beardsley, Juhl  
**\*\*19 October: Mid-term in-class test \*\***
- Week 8  
23-29 Oct      **Can art change society? Does art reflect or critique the values of society?**  
Does mechanical reproduction rob art of its aura and turn it into a tool for social change?  
Can art become a tool for activism? How so?  
Does art signal stages in world history?  
Readings: Benjamin, Heyd on performance art, Hegel  
**ON-CAMPUS VISIT of Bob Wise's *The office: a portable amenity kiosk for female outdoor sex workers*, with Prof. Daniel Laskarin, Friday 24 September; meet in the Foyer, Visual Arts Building**
- Week 9  
30 Oct -5 Nov      **Artworks: inspiration and genius, women artists and institutions**  
What is the role of inspiration in art?  
Does one need to have genius to be creative?  
Why are so few women included in the history of art?  
Readings: Plato, Kant on creativity and inspiration, Nochlin  
**\*31 Oct: Last day for withdrawing from courses without penalty\***
- Week 10  
6-12 Nov      **Aesthetics and the everyday, aesthetics and nature**  
How can everyday living have aesthetic value?  
What does aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment consist in?  
How do other cultures value their environments aesthetically?  
Readings: Dewey, Carlson. Selected readings from Ch. 5, Art and Other Values, *Puzzles about Art*  
**\*\*11 November, Saturday, Remembrance Day\*\***
- Week 11  
13-19 Nov      **Aesthetics and other cultures**  
Is 'rock art' art? If not, why not? If yes, why?  
Readings: TBA  
**GUESTSPEAKER Aurora Skala, M.A., on First Nations rock art, 17 November, to be confirmed**  
**\*13-15 November, READING BREAK\***
- Week 12  
20-26 Nov      **Students-led discussion on selected topics**  
Suggested topics: Immorality and art, cultural appropriation, where are artworks for performance, why are copies valued less than originals?, is the functionality of art relevant to its value?
- Week 13  
27 Nov – 1 Dec      **Summary-conclusion, Course Experience Survey, and Final exam**  
**\*\*1 December, Last Day of Classes. Final take-home exam questions handed out \*\***  
**\*\*4 December, National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women\*\***  
**\*\*\*6 December, before noon, final exam submission (hardcopy AND on Coursespaces)\*\*\***