

# Philosophy of Art

Ph 240 Section A01 Fall 2020

Instructor: Thomas Heyd, Ph.D.  
Lectures live and posted as video  
Videos: posted weekly by TWF 12:30-13:20 on the Brightspaces website  
Office hrs: TF 11-11:30am (by Zoom)  
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**Provisional outline:** Given changing circumstances in relation to Covid-19, there may be some changes to this outline before the course starts.



Christo and Jean-Claude, Surrounded Islands (1983)

## Lectures

Normally lectures will be conducted over Zoom at the scheduled class time, **12:30 – 13:20 pm** Pacific Time. You will find the link to join the meetings on the Brightspaces website page. The same link will work for the duration of the course. **All lectures will be recorded and video recordings posted weekly** on the web page, in case that you cannot be present synchronously (no attendance taken). Lecture periods will give you an opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussion. Additional materials, including videos with essential course content, will also be posted on the Brightspaces website.

## Key questions

- 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 a special attitude required for aesthetic experience? Is aesthetic appreciation limited to 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'? does it result from a particular type of arrangement of materials?
- Is the meaning of artworks entirely 'open to interpretation'? Are there 'better' and 'worse' ways of interpreting art? What role should the artist's intention have when onlookers evaluate 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 everyday life? How do we appreciate the aesthetic value of nature?
- What is it to appreciate the cultural manifestations of other societies?

## Course description

This course will be an opportunity to consider issues and debates surrounding art and artworks. We will also engage with questions regarding beauty, what its importance is, and how it may or may not be related to art. As far as we can tell from the archaeological record, art-making goes back in time as far as our species has been active on this planet. In fact, evidence is accumulating that even our Neanderthal cousins decorated their bodies, and possibly expressed themselves artistically.

These facts raise the question what it exactly means to describe something as an artwork and why we value art. Evidence that human beings adorned their bodies and sometimes even designed their habitations going as far back as the Ice Ages also points toward the related, even if somewhat independent, enduring human interest in the creation and appreciation of beauty. Philosophical reflection about this interest and its significance is the proper field of aesthetics.

Although philosophy of art and aesthetics sometimes are thought of as a single subject, a little reflection shows that there are many things that are described as beautiful but are not artworks. Moreover, at least in contemporary times, many works are considered art even if there is no intention of endowing them with beauty.

Consequently, one of our aims will be to keep track of how, at times, reflection on art and beauty intersect and at other times go their own ways. Ultimately, the aim of this course is to facilitate a better grasp of the respective place of art and beauty for us as individuals in the present, and for people in collectivities throughout human history.

#### Course objectives

- To learn about theories of aesthetics and art, and their application to our contemporary world.
- To explore key debates in philosophy of art.
- To practice the use of argumentative reasoning in the context of Aesthetics and art.

#### Technical Help

You'll find a link to the Zoom Help Centre on Brightspaces website along with a link to UVic's Learn Anywhere site. That site is designed to help students navigate all aspects of UVic's online learning environment. Don't hesitate to ask me for help with any technical issues that you run into. If I can't help I'll find someone who can.

#### Textbook and additional readings

Required textbook: Steven M. Cahn and Aaron Meskin (eds.), *Aesthetics: a comprehensive anthology* (Blackwell, any edition). Some used copies are available for purchase at online providers, such as Amazon and Abe Books. The book will also be available as a paperback through the UVic Bookstore, and can be ordered online from Wiley, <https://www.wiley.com/en-ca>.

Additional readings will be available on the Brightspaces website. To access the Brightspaces website, log in with your regular network ID. Please let me know immediately if you have any difficulty accessing the readings. This page will also be used to post announcements, to give you online access to lecture notes, handouts and assignment sheets and to collect short answer assignments.

#### Course organisation and student engagement

To facilitate comprehension and class discussion, assigned weekly readings are to be read *ahead of lectures*. Constructive participation and tolerance of the views of others are expected. Everyone is encouraged to be self-reflective about his or her own beliefs, and to constructively contribute to class discussion. Throughout the course, work will be assessed on the basis of A) care in the explanation of key points, B) quality of development of points presented, C) effective and correct use of the English language and clarity, neatness, and organisation of points.

#### Tips for best performances

- Do readings *ahead of lectures*, read material attentively (by asking questions about the material), and do weekly assignments.
- *Participate* in class discussion with constructive contributions.
- *Contact the instructor* if failing to understand the material.

#### Graded student activities

1. Final take-home exam	40%
2. Mid-term test	30%
3. Experiential project	20%
4. Participation, including weekly assignments	10%

1. **The final exam** will be a comprehensive take-home exam with short answer and long answer questions. Questions will be handed out on the last day of classes, and the completed exam must be submitted on the Brightspaces website **by NOON, five (5) days after the last day of classes**. Late exams will **NOT** be accepted (they 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 and explanation of key points, (2) well-developed discussion of points presented, (3) effective and correct use of the English language and clarity, neatness, and organisation of points.

2. **The mid-term take-home test** will cover both readings and further points raised in lectures. Both understanding and reflective analysis will be expected. Test questions will likely consist of a combination of shorter and longer answer questions.

3. **Experiential project.** This project is to provide an *experiential* context for students to develop skills in reflecting on artworks and natural sites, processes or objects. We will establish groups of 4-6 students (depending on class size), which choose a type of artwork or natural site that they will consider on the basis of course content and a set of the questions provided. In view of precautions because of Covid-19, consideration of artworks and natural sites, processes and objects **should not require face to face interactions**. Options to consider include online art gallery exhibitions, public art installations, prehistoric rock art sites (petroglyphs or pictographs), as well as Japanese gardens and natural parks. In all cases, choices of sites need to be approved by the instructor. Groups are expected to produce a brief group report (worth 50% of the grade) on their reflections and analysis, later followed by a presentation in the final weeks of classes (worth another 50% of the grade).

Schedule: *By the end of the fourth week* a selection of site, process or object is to be approved by me. *By the end of the ninth week* written reports are due. Presentations will be scheduled for a date *within the last two weeks* of the course. Further information will be forthcoming after the start of the semester.

4. **Participation.** Assessed on the basis of a) *weekly assignments* based on the course readings, b) *constructive participation in course forums and live sessions*. A grade in the A range will be given if all required assignments were handed in, done up to a sufficient level for receiving a pass, combined with constructive course participation; a grade in the B range will be given if most of the assignments are handed in and course participation was constructive; a grade in the C range will be given if less than 2/3 of assignments have been handed in, while course participation was constructive; a grade in the D range will be given if half the required assignments, while course participation was constructive; any fewer assignments handed in or non-constructive participation, will receive a grade in the F range.

*Weekly response assignments.* You are expected to write up a brief response to a question regarding each week's readings to help you engage with the material and concepts before the lecture. Answers to questions posed should be in your own words (not copied from the textbook or other sources), be about a paragraph long, and submitted by Tuesday. At the head of the page please state, in this order, a) your last and first name (e.g. JONES, Peter), b) the date assignment is due (e.g. 9 January 2018), c) the particular readings discussed (e.g. Singer and Taylor). Feedback will be given on the first sets of assignments, and occasionally thereafter. At the end of the semester the total of the assignments minus the two with the lowest grades will be graded on a *pass or fail* basis. *Both quantity and quality of assignments will be taken into account in grading. (All assignments that pass will be assigned 85%.) No late assignments will be accepted.*

#### **Grading scale and interpretation**

Percentages will convert to a letter grade according to the standard University scheme:

A+ = 90-100	B+ = 77-79	C+ = 65-69	D = 50-59
A = 85-89	B = 73-76	C = 60-64	F = 0-49
A- = 80-84	B- = 70-72		

#### *What the Grading Scale Means:*

- A+, A, or A-** Earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.
- B+, B, or B-** Earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.
- C+ or C** Earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in course activities.

- D** Earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in course activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
- F** Work that is not worthy of course credit toward the degree.

Interpretation of these grade definitions is up to the discretion of the instructor. If you receive a grade during the course that you believe is unfair, please begin by discussing the matter with the instructor (or TA) in a respectful, open-minded manner. Rest assured that if you still believe the grade that you received is unfair you can appeal the matter to the chair of the department. For additional information regarding grades, please see the most recent edition of the *UVic Undergraduate Calendar*. All evaluations of tests and assignments will be calculated according to *percentage scores*. Letter grades and grade point scores are listed purely for reference.

### **Territory acknowledgment**

We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples, on whose traditional territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. This acknowledgment entails a commitment to ongoing dialogue and reconciliation with the peoples of these lands. For information about support for indigenous students and efforts to foster reconciliation, please visit the UVic Office of Indigenous Academic & Community Engagement.

### **Other matters**

#### *Late assignments and extensions*

Late weekly assignments will *not* be accepted and tests will *not* normally be rescheduled (no make-up exams). If a test is missed for serious, *documented*, reasons, the final exam will be weighted so as to incorporate the weighting of the missed exam. Documented evidence for having legitimately missed a test and an explanatory statement in writing have to be received *no more than ten days after the deadline or test missed*. Late assignments will have 5% subtracted per working day from grade unless documentation of illness or family emergency is provided.

#### *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/calendar2016-09/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html#>.

#### *Intellectual property of materials on the Brightspaces website*

Please note that all assignments for this course and all materials posted to the Brightspaces website are the intellectual property of myself and the University of Victoria. Do not circulate this material or post it to note-sharing sites without my permission. Posting course materials to note-sharing sites or otherwise circulating course materials without the permission of your instructor violates the Policy on Academic Integrity (<http://web.uvic.ca/calendar/FACS/UnIn/UARe/PoAcl.html>). Any evidence you are circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

#### *Transition and inclusivity/diversity*

Students who are new to the University and would like assistance may contact the Transition Office, [www.uvic.ca/transition](http://www.uvic.ca/transition). UVic is committed to providing a safe, supportive learning environment for all members. Information about UVic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are available at <https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policy/HkQ0pzdAN>. If you have any particular concerns about these matters in our course please don't hesitate to contact me.

#### *Religious Accommodation*

Information regarding accommodation of religious observance can be located in the UVic Calendar at <https://www.uvic.ca/equity/education/religious/index.php>.

### *Counselling Services*

Many, if not most, students experience some difficulties with their mental health during their years as undergraduate students. This may especially be the case during the present Covid-19 crisis. It is hard to shake the stigma associated with problems like depression and anxiety, but if at any point you believe that you could benefit from help with mental health issues, please contact UVic Counselling Services, which is an excellent resource at your disposal on campus. They genuinely want to help, so do consider taking advantage of this free resource.

### *Health Services and Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL)*

A note to remind you to take care of yourself, especially in these times. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating well, exercising, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress. All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. The sooner you let any of these on-campus services know your needs the quicker they can assist you in achieving your learning goals. Resources include

- Counselling Services, already mentioned above. See <https://www.uvic.ca/services/counselling/>.
- University Health Services (UHS) provides a full-service primary health clinic for students and coordinates healthy student and campus initiatives. <http://www.uvic.ca/services/health/>
- Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Center for Accessible Learning (CAL) as soon as possible. CAL staff members are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations: <https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal/>. Please note that instructors cannot provide CAL-type accommodations without CAL documentation.

### *Food bank and Community Cabbage*

Sometimes students run out of money for food. Health restrictions permitting, these two options are available at the Students' Union: 1) "The UVSS Food Bank & Free Store is run by a team of dedicated staff and volunteers and offers all UVic students access to food essentials and free household items", see <https://uvss.ca/foodbank/>. 2) "The Community Cabbage is a student organization at the University of Victoria. We serve a free weekly hot meal to the campus community prepared from reclaimed food – edible but unsellable food donated by grocery stores. A crew of volunteers turn these ingredients into a healthy and delightful vegetarian meal at a community kitchen. Anyone is welcome to come cook with us and/or eat with us!" See <https://uviccommunitycabbage.wordpress.com/about/>.

### *Important dates and academic advising*

Please consult the UVic Calendar's Academic Year Important Dates for information about last possible dates to withdraw from courses without penalty, examinations period start/end dates, etc. For information about declaring a program, academic concessions or interpreting your UVic CAPP report, please visit Undergraduate Advising or make an appointment with an advisor.

### **Tentative schedule of lectures and tests**

Please note that this schedule is tentative and will adjusted as we proceed through the semester. Any changes to the schedule will be announced on the Brightspaces website. *Informed* participation in class discussion will be expected, so *please read the assigned texts in advance*. Readings are from *our textbook*. Additional texts will be made available on the Brightspaces website.

Week 1

#### **Introduction**

7-13 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: Online: Art and Artworks, *Puzzles*

**\*9 Sept: first day of classes\***

Week 2

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

14-20 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: 36 Danto, 37 Dickie (What is Art? An Institutional Analysis), 35 Weitz. Online: Binkley  
**\*\*Assignments are due from this Tuesday 15 of September onwards\*\***

Week 3  
21-27 Sept

**Aesthetics, art, and aesthetic experience**

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: 23 Bullough, Dickie (Myth of Aesthetic Attitude). Online: Ziff  
\*25 Sept: last day for adding courses\*

Week 4  
28 Sept – 4 Oct

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

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

Readings: 24 Bell, 28 Langer, 26 Collingwood

Week 5  
5-11 Oct

**Beauty in art and aesthetic judgements**

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: TBA selections of 4 Plato, *Symposium*, on beauty and love, and 11 Hume. Online: selections of Beauty, Ugliness, and Aesthetic Experience, *Puzzles*.

Week 6  
12-18 Oct

**Aesthetic judgments (continued) and interpretation**

How can subjective aesthetic judgments claim universality?  
How does interpretation work? Is it necessarily subjective?

Readings: TBA selections of 14 Kant, 32 Gadamer. Online: selections from Meaning and Interpretation, *Puzzles*.

**\*\*12 October, Thanksgiving Day and Day of Columbus' Arrival in the Americas\*\***

Week 7  
19-25 Oct

**The role of intentions in art**

Are intention and historical context relevant for interpretation of artworks?  
Can computer programs make art?

Readings: 47 Wimsatt/Beardsley, TBA.

**\*\*20 October: Mid-term test\*\***

Week 8  
26 Oct-1 Nov

**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: 29 Benjamin, 18 Hegel. Online: Heyd, on performance art.

\*31 Oct: Last day for withdrawing from courses without penalty\*

Week 9  
2-8 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: 2 Plato, selections of 14 Kant on creativity and inspiration. Online: Nochlin.

Week 10  
9-15 Nov

**Aesthetics and the everyday, Reading Days**

How can everyday living have aesthetic value?

Readings: 27 Dewey

**\*\*9-11 November, READING DAYS, 11 November, Remembrance Day\*\***

Week 11 16-22 Nov	<b>Aesthetics and nature</b> What does aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment consist in? Readings: 46 Carlson, and TBA
Week 12 23-29 Nov	<b>Aesthetics and other cultures and student presentations</b> How do other cultures value their environments aesthetically? Is 'rock art' art? If not, why not? If yes, why? Readings: online: Heyd, Rock Art and Aesthetics
Week 13 30 Nov – 6 Dec	<b>Summary-conclusion, and student presentations, Course Experience Survey, and Final exam</b> <b>**4 December, Last Day of Classes. Final take-home exam questions handed out **</b> <b>**4 December, National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women**</b>
Week 14 7-13 Dec	<b>***9 December, before noon, Final Exam submission on the Brightspaces website***</b>