

# Philosophy of Art

Philosophy 203  
TTH 150-320pm  
Howard 115  
Spring 2017



Morris Louis, *Number 99*, 1959-1960

## My Information

Here is my information:

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## Course Introduction

This course is an exploration of aesthetics and the philosophy of art. The first part of the course concerns core topics in the philosophy of art including DEPICTION, INTENTION, FICTION, and EXPRESSION in different artistic media such as painting, photography, film, and literature.

- How can a painting or sculpture represent or depict something? Do they do so by being similar to the pictured? For example, how is *La Femme-Fleur* a portrait of Françoise Gilot?<sup>1</sup>



Pablo Picasso, *La Femme-Fleur*, 1932

- Is the meaning of a work determined by the artist's intentions? If not, what does determine the meaning of an artwork's? For exam-

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<sup>1</sup>Picasso said, "No...a realistic portrait would not represent you at all").

ple, Jonathon Swift's *A Modest Proposal* advocates eating children to deal with the Irish famine.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled...

Of course, he isn't serious. But there are no clues in the text. The text's irony must be because he *intends* it to be read as ironic, right?

- How should we respond to fictions? Are we really afraid of Regan McNeil in *The Exorcist*? How can we feel empathy for the parents in *A Tokyo Story*? We know the events are not real so how can we feel genuine emotion?
- How can instrumental music express emotions? Why is Miles Davis' *Blue in Green* melancholy?<sup>2</sup>

The second part concerns the value of art thinking about twentieth century abstract art as case study. The twentieth century was a century of abstract art including movements such as Cubism, Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Pop Art, Conceptual Art, etc. In *The Painted Word*, Tom Wolfe makes fun of these works as basically *meaningless*.

All these years, along with countless kindred souls, I am certain, I had made my way into the galleries of Upper Madison and Lower Soho and the Art Gildo Midway of Fifty-seventh Street, and into the museums, into the Modern, the Whitney, and the Guggenheim, the Bastard Bauhaus, the New Brutalist, and the Fountainhead Baroque, into the lowliest storefront churches and grandest Robber Baronial temples of Modernism. All these years I, like so many others, had stood in front of a thousand, two thousand, God-knows-how-many thousand Pollocks, de Koonings, Newmans, Nolands, Rothkos, Rauschenbergs, Judds, Johnses, Olitskis, Louises, Stills, Franz Klines, Frankenthalers, Kellys, and Frank Stellas, now squinting, now popping the eye sockets open, now drawing back, now moving closer—waiting, waiting, forever

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<sup>2</sup>The piece is hyperlinked if you would like to hear it. Click the title.

waiting for...it...for it to come into focus, namely, the visual reward (for so much effort) which must be there, which everyone (tout le monde) knew to be there—waiting for something to radiate directly from the paintings on these invariably pure white walls, in this room, in this moment, into my own optic chiasma. All these years, in short, I had assumed that in art, if nowhere else, seeing is believing. Well—how very shortsighted!

Do these “pictures of nothing” have meaning? What does their value, if they have value, consist in?

The third part of the course considers how art is used in social protest and propaganda through case studies. During politically tumultuous times should art be done for its own sake or should it be politically engaged?



J. Howard Miller, *We Can Do It!*, 1943

## Course Materials

There are two textbooks for this course. The rest of our readings will be distributed electronically to you.

- Mesch, Claudia (2013) *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change*

- Varnedoe, Kirk (2006) *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock*. Princeton University Press.

## Course Requirements

In this course, your grade will be determined by your choice between the following 4 exams (or 3 exams and 1 paper) and 10 short one-page writing assignments. The four exams represent 60% of your grade and the 10 short writing assignments represent 40% of your grade.

### Exams

You will be given 4 exams ( $4 \times 25\%$ ). The final exam will be cumulative. I will circulate questions a week in advance (e.g. eight questions) and will pick a subset (e.g. four questions) to answer.

### Papers

If you prefer, you can *replace your final exam* with one 6-8 page paper that should have a well-defined thesis that is clearly argued. The essay should be without spelling and grammatical errors. What follows is a rough indication of what I look for in grading papers.

**A, 90+, Excellent** – Papers receiving a grade in this range clearly demonstrate advanced understanding of the basic concepts and issues in the text(s). In addition, these papers provide a sustained argument and critique of the text or provide substantial and interesting questions concerning the interpretation of the text. The paper as a whole is tightly focused and well-organized. Errors in grammar or spelling are nonexistent.

**B, 80-89, Good** – Papers receiving a grade in this range demonstrate a basic, but thorough, understanding of basic concepts and issues. Where understanding is lacking, an earnest attempt at interpreting the author is evident. In addition, these responses show a somewhat successful attempt at critical examination, argument, or questioning of the text. The paper as a whole is

mostly focused and well-organized. Errors in grammar and spelling are minimal.

**C, 2, 70-79, Satisfactory** – Papers receiving a grade in this range demonstrate some (possibly incomplete) understanding of basic concepts and issues. In addition, these responses show little or no earnest attempt at interpretation, critical examination, or questioning of the text. Paper lacks focus and is poorly organized. Errors in grammar or spelling are frequent.

**D - F, Unsatisfactory** – Papers receiving a grade in this range have failed to demonstrate any degree of real understanding of basic concepts and issues, and lack evidence of an earnest attempt to do so.

### **Short writing assignment**

I will ask you one question pertaining to the week's readings, and you will provide a one page answer at most. The writing tests your reading comprehension and your participation in class. We will have 10 such short writing assignments.

### **Late work**

All assignments are due on the scheduled dates. However, if you come to me at least *one full day in advance* you may have one week's extension, no excuse required. If you do not have an extension, for every day your assignment is not turned in, your assignment is lowered one letter grade. Be aware that turning in a paper by extension will delay feedback and that you may not have the time you need to improve and develop before the next assignment.

### **Attendance**

Philosophy can be difficult; however, the biggest difficulties arise because students get behind in the readings. To prevent this, you should attend class regularly. Thus, I will allow you to miss a maximum of five classes unpenalized but for each class thereafter you will lose 1% of your final grade.

## Grade Scale

The course grading scale is as follows:

A = 93 – 100, A- = 90 – 92, B+ = 86 – 89, B = 83 – 85, B- = 80 – 82, C+ = 76 – 79, C = 73 – 75, C- = 70 – 72, D+ = 66 – 69, D = 60 – 65, F = 0 – 59

It is impossible to do well in this course without reading and studying. I suggest that you *carefully* read the assigned material taking notes on what you read. You are strongly encouraged to discuss the course material with others outside of class. I am happy to help you outside of class. That is why I keep office hours.

## Plagiarism

All students are expected to follow Lewis & Clark College's Academic Integrity Policy. This is stated in Lewis Clark College's College Catalog. Generally, plagiarizers and cheaters will be given an F for the entire course (they will not be allowed to drop or withdraw from the course). Also, your case will be given to the Honor Board where in addition to a failing grade you will receive disciplinary action.

## Learning Differences

If you have been diagnosed with a learning difference and are seeking an accommodation, please provide me, as soon as possible, with a "Notice of Disability and Statement of Accommodation" from Dale Hollaway, Coordinator of Student Support Services.

## Tentative Schedule

Here is our schedule which is of course revisable.

### **Week 1 Depiction**

- Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation, Wollheim
- Pictorial Recognition, Lopes
- Pictorial Art and Visual Experience, Hopkins

### **Week 2 Photography**

- Transparent Pictures, Kendall L. Walton
- Why Photography Doesn't Represent Artistically, Roger Scruton
- What's Special About Photography? Ted Cohen

### **Week 3 Film**

- The Power of Movies, Noël Carroll
- Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look, Laura Mulvey
- Beauty and Evil: the Case of Leni Riefenstahl, Mary Devereaux

### **Week 4 Expression in Music**

- Representation of Feeling Is Not the Content of Music, Eduard Hanslick
- The Expression of Emotion in Music, Stephen Davis
- A New Romantic Theory of Expression, Jenefer Robinson

### **FIRST EXAM**

### **Week 5 Literature**

- What Is Literature? Terry Eagleton
- The Intention of the Author, Monroe Beardsley
- Criticism as Retrieval, Richard Wollheim

### **Week 6 Literary Intentions**

- An Intentional Demonstration? Gary Iseminger
- A Paradox in Intentionalism, Daniel O. Nathan
- On What a Text Is and How It Means, William E. Tolhurst

### **Week 7 Fiction Make-Believe**

- What Is Fiction? Gregory Currie
- How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions? Peter Lamarque
- Spelunking, Simulation, and Slime: On Being Moved by Fiction, Kendall L. Walton

### **Week 8 What is Music?**

- On the Concept of Music, Jerrold Levinson
- Ontology of Music, Ben Caplan and Carl Matheson
- Making Tracks, Andrew Kania

## **SECOND EXAM**

### **Week 9 *Pictures of Nothing***

- Introduction
- Ch 1 Why Abstract Art?
- Ch 2 Survivals and Fresh Starts

### **Week 10 *Pictures of Nothing***

- Ch 3 Minimalism
- Ch 4 After Minimalism

**Week 11 *Pictures of Nothing***

- *Introduction*
- Ch 5 Satire, Irony, and Abstract Art
- Ch 6 Abstract Art Now

**Week 12 *Art and Politics***

- *Introduction*
- Ch. 1 State-Sponsored Art During the Cold War
- Ch. 2 Post-Colonial Identity and the Civil Rights Movement

**THIRD EXAM**

**Week 13 *Art and Politics***

- Ch. 3 The Anti-War and Peace Movements
- Ch. 4 Feminisms

**Week 14 *Art and Politics***

- Ch. 5 Gay Identity/Queer Art
- Ch. 6 Environmental Art

**Week 15**

- Ch. 7 Anti-Globalization

**FOURTH EXAM OR PAPER**