

The Meaning of the Arts
Fall 2013
Online

Instructor Information

Instructor: Travis Perry

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Office: Anderson 726

Office Hours: Wednesday 3:30-4:30, Thursday 12:30-1:30, by appointment

Course Description

Many of us have overheard people asking of some painting, sculpture, poem, or other artwork, “Is that even art?” This is an important question, and it is worth thinking about, but I want us to look beyond this question. So this semester instead of trying to find an evaluative model for art we will ask, “How did we come to this question in the first place?” We must recognize that when we ask whether something is art we are already putting it in the context of a discussion about art. After all, we don’t see an abstract expressionist painting and ask whether it’s a truck.

Our preconceptions about art are rooted in a long history of practice, theory, and tradition, and this semester our task is to critically evaluate those practices, theories, and traditions. The practices, theories, and traditions used by artists, philosophers, curators, collectors, and spectators produce a *canon* of art: a set of the greatest artworks in history. But there are good reasons to reevaluate the canon and the foundational assumptions that shape it. Are the evaluative and conceptual tools used to justify the canon still relevant? Were they ever relevant? What can we learn about historical and contemporary social values by looking at the canon? Finally, do we need a canon of great art? And if so, how should we decide which works and whose works are included?

To help us in our task I have assembled a set of readings that will give us at least two things: 1) a good idea of the foundation of the practices, theories, and traditions in Western art and philosophy of art; and 2) some good critical tools for evaluating that foundation. We’ll hear from a variety of artists, philosophers, and cultural critics, which I’ve chosen because I value their contributions to the discussion we will have this semester. But I want each of you to bring into our discussions your own ideas and the ideas of those I have excluded. Ultimately, you will construct a canon of your own: a canon that is representative of those practices, theories, and traditions *you* value in art, artworks that help *you* understand *your* life and *your* place in the world. Although we can’t rewrite the entire history of art and the philosophy of art, we can definitely challenge it.

Course Objectives

- Develop critical reading skills through close reading of philosophical texts
- Develop analytical writing skills
- Think critically about social and philosophical issues in the arts
- Gain a working knowledge of various philosophical approaches to issues in the philosophy of art

Required Texts

- Freeland, Cynthia, *But Is It Art?* Oxford University Press, USA (2002)
 - ISBN-10: 0192853678 ; ISBN-13: 978-0192853677
- Korsmeyer, Carolyn, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*, Routledge, (2004)
 - ISBN-10: 0415266599; ISBN-13: 978-041526659
- Additional readings, images, and video will be available on Blackboard

Course Requirements

- Participation in Discussion Boards: 30%
 - Every week students will post two questions related to the week's readings: one question for each reading. Both questions must be posted before 10:00 pm on Wednesday night.
 - Every week Each student will also respond to another student's question using the readings from that week: students only have to respond to one question. Responses must be posted before 10:00 pm on Friday. Responses should be between 250 and 500 words.
 - **NB:** We will follow the Wednesday-Friday schedule for discussion boards unless otherwise indicated. Some changes are indicated on the syllabus. I will also announce scheduled or additional changes at least one week in advance.
- Two Analytical Essays: 20% (10% each)
 - For this assignment I will distribute a list of prompts or questions addressing central themes or major philosophical issues from the course, and students will respond to one.
 - Students only have to answer one question.
 - Essays should be between 500 and 750 words.
 - Successful essays will demonstrate both mastery of the concepts and original thought. We will discuss the essays in greater detail later in the semester.
- Semester Project: 50%
 - The semester project will be an online art collection which students will design: in other words, you will be the curator of your own art gallery.
 - The project is comprised of two parts: 1) the art collection itself and 2) an essay explaining the philosophical premises which informed your choice of artworks, a philosophical explanation of theme of the collection, and an argument in support of your collection as a valuable contribution to philosophical and artistic dialogue.
 - Students will present "drafts" of both their collection and their essay, one at midterm for peer review, and one just before Thanksgiving break which I will review and grade. The final version of the project, the collection and essay, will be due during finals week (date TBD). Each stage of the project will be graded, so it is important to treat this as an *ongoing* project rather than a *final* project.
 - This is a very brief description of a very complex assignment; I will give more direction as we move through the semester.

Late Work

- Analytical essays and items related to the semester project that are submitted late will be penalized one fraction of a letter grade for each day (excluding weekends) the assignment is late; i.e. turning in an assignment one day late drops what would have been an A to an A-. I do not grant extensions except in emergency situations. Notify me as soon as possible by email if you will not be able to submit your work on time so that I can consider the circumstances and decide whether an extension is appropriate.
- Late posts to the discussion board are unacceptable because a true discussion requires each of us to be actively participating while the discussion is ongoing. Your fellow classmates are depending on you to post good questions on time so that they have plenty of time to respond.
 - **However**, if you miss the deadline for posting a question don't give up on the week altogether; respond to a question so that you can get some credit for participation that week.
 - As indicated above, although the response may require more writing, both the question and response are given roughly equal weight. In order to earn a good participation grade, it is important to always post good questions before the due date.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism or “cheating” in any form is absolutely unacceptable. Plagiarized assignments will receive no credit and students who plagiarize may fail the course and be subject to Temple University sanctions as defined by the “Temple University Student Code of Conduct.” See <http://policies.temple.edu> (policy number 03.70.12) for further reference.

Course Catalog Information

Course Number: PHIL 0847

Section: 701

CRN: 16049

This course fulfills the Arts (GA) requirement for students under GenEd and Arts (AR) for students under Core. Students cannot receive credit for this course if they have successfully completed Philosophy 0947.

Disability Statement

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215-204-1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities Statement

Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has a policy on Student and Faculty and Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy #03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link:

http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02.

Course Calendar

Week One 8/26-8/30

- Read:
- *But Is It Art?* Introduction and Chapter One
 - *But Is It Art?* Chapter Two
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- Notes:
- Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday
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Week Two 9/3-9/6

- Read:
- *But Is It Art?* Chapter Three
 - John Dewey “The Aesthetic in Experience”
 - **Recommended:** *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “[Dewey’s Aesthetics](#)”
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- Notes:
- Only write **one question this week**. Post by 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday. The recommended text is intended to supplement the other readings and enhance your understanding. It is not necessary to include material from the recommended reading in your questions or answers.
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Week Three 9/9-9/13

- Read:
- *But Is It Art?* Chapter Four
 - *But Is It Art?* Chapter Five
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- Notes:
- Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday
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Week Four 9/16-9/20

- Read:
- *But Is It Art?* Chapter Six
 - *But Is It Art?* Chapter Seven and Conclusion
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- Notes:
- Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday. I know you’ll be busy with the first essay, but next week we’ll cover an important text so be sure to plan ahead.
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Week Five 9/23-9/27

- Due:
- First Analytical Essay
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- Read:
- Plato, *Republic* Book X
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- Notes:
- Only write **one question this week**. Post by 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday.
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Week Six 9/30-10/4

- Read:
- Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy”
 - Barthes, “The Death of the Author”
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- Notes:
- Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday
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Week Seven 10/7-10/11

Due: • First Installation of Semester Project for Peer Review

Notes: • **No questions or responses this week**; peer review will count for participation.
See Blackboard for full details on peer review assignment.

Week Eight 10/14-10/18

Read: • *Gender and Aesthetics*, Introduction and Chapter One
• Plato, *Symposium*

Notes: • Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday.

Week Nine 10/21-10/25

Read: • *Gender and Aesthetics* Chapter Two
• Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §§ 43-50
• **Recommended:** *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "[Kant's Aesthetics](#)"

Notes: • Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday.

Week Ten 10/28-11/1

Read: • *Gender and Aesthetics* Chapter Three
• Nochlin, Linda, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"

Notes: • Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday.

Week Eleven 11/4-11/8

Due: • Second Analytical Essay

Read: • *Gender and Aesthetics* Chapter Four
• David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste"

Notes: • Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday.

Week Twelve 11/11-11/15

Read: • *Gender and Aesthetics* Chapter Five
• Susan Feagin, "Feminist Art History and De Facto Significance"

Notes: • Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday.

Week Thirteen 11/18-11/22

Read: • *Gender and Aesthetics* Chapter Six
• Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury"
• Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"

Notes: • Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday.

Week Fourteen 11/25-11/29

Due: • Revised Semester Project

View: • Film: *Style Wars* or *Bomb It*

Notes: • **No questions or responses this week.** Instead post a 250-500 word response to the film. Happy Thanksgiving!

Week Fifteen 12/4-12/6

Read: • Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Poet”
• Adrienne Rich, “Blood, Bread, and Poetry”

Notes: • Questions due 10pm Wednesday; Response due 10pm Friday.
