

ARTH 101-001: INTRODUCTION TO THE VISUAL ARTS

Spring 2013

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Class times: MW 9:00-10:15

Classroom: Robinson B113

Office hours: Th 12-1:15 or by appointment

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THE PROMISES OF THIS COURSE: It is my opinion that this is one of the most important classes you will take in college. Yes, **it fulfills the University General Education requirement**, but, assuming we both do our jobs correctly, it is also the class that you will take with you every time you walk into an art museum, or travel around the world, or take your children down on the Mall. It is not a studio class although we will study different media and techniques; nor is it a survey class although works of art will be presented in their historical context. Rather this class will focus on how art communicates, how to analyze and interpret it, and how we can see it as a cultural product that reveals something about the society that produced it.

By the end of the semester, you will have been exposed to many works of art, various media, and a great deal of new vocabulary. You will also have learned some of the fundamentals of looking at works of art. You will know that interpretation of a work depends on the interpreter, and that you, too, are necessarily an interpreter. That is not to say that all interpretations are equally valid; interpretations can be well- or ill-formed, responsible or irresponsible, useful or useless, etc.; opinion is not interpretation. Naturally, I hope that you conclude this course intrigued by the possibility of art historical study and with the confidence and impetus to continue your engagement with art—and indeed with all aspects of our emphatically visual culture.

I spend a great deal of time thinking about the larger questions of this course, questions like “what should you be able to do intellectually in this discipline at this time? How can I encourage you to develop those abilities?” At any time, however, you too can ask me a big question. Any time in this course, with any image, you can ask me “why?” Why does this issue matter? I will stop and try to explain why this material is important and how it relates to larger issues. It may take a few weeks, but I will be able to get you to a payoff. This course is my responsibility; don’t hesitate to come to me if you have a problem or complaint. I can’t promise I’ll fix things, but I will do my best.

TECH SKILLS REQUIRED: I can only communicate with you via Mason e-mail accounts, so please activate and check your GMU e-mail account regularly for any communication regarding the class. I will also be placing readings in Dropbox and you will need email to access those.

WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO DO TO REALIZE THOSE PROMISES:

1. First, commit to the class. The decision to take this class is yours. Once you make that decision though, you have responsibilities to everyone else in this community of learners. It is really a decision to attend. Every time. It is hard to get to know you and each other and continue a line of thought if you are not here. During the course of the semester, I will randomly take roll and at the end of the semester I will use those lists to calculate your attendance grade which is worth 20% of your final grade. My expectation is that you are in class and thus attendance is not a problem. If you miss class, get the notes from another class member. (The first class would be an opportune time to exchange some e-mail addresses with each other.) I will not answer e-mails that ask what we covered in class today. If you miss class on a day when I take attendance, please do not email me asking to be excused for your absence that day. You roll the dice when you miss class.

2. Second, commit to memory. This class is a lecture format during which I will address ideas, present key works, and define terms. Some of our learning objectives involve mastery of vocabulary, comprehending techniques and materials, and analyzing ideas. I will be using power point presentations, so all terms, ideas and key works for which you are responsible will be clearly labeled, spelled, defined, and emphasized in class. I will not, however, be putting those powerpoints on Blackboard. That’s why you have a textbook, and that’s why regular attendance is necessary. This course is divided into three separate parts: *Fundamentals; Materials and Process; History and Context*. Each section ends with an exam and these three examinations are scheduled as follows:

- **Exam #1:** – **Monday, February 25.** 20% of your final grade
- **Exam #2:** – **Monday, April 1.** 25% of your final grade
- **Exam #3:** – **Monday, May 13.** 25% of your final grade. **Please note that this exam is**

scheduled during final exam week. It is the time slot designated for this class by the registrar's office. Thus, there can be no conflicts with any other classes. If you do have a conflict, it is the OTHER professor who has changed his/her exam date. Consult with them to fix it. Also, please be mindful of this date when making your plans for end of term.

You should mark those dates on your personal calendar immediately. Unless you have an incredible reason, I won't give an exam earlier or later than the scheduled slot. Yes, this includes spring break, end of the semester, and weekend plans. Please do not request special favors that cannot be granted to all of your peers. Test make-ups are only given if you have a legitimate written medical excuse or police report, on printed letterhead stationery, with a phone number I can call for confirmation. I mean this seriously. Do not e-mail me with any excuses about car accidents or bad love affairs—even if it's true. **If you miss an exam without a legitimate written excuse, you will receive a 0 for that exam.** Better to take the exam and get an F than to receive a 0.

All exams will test for terms. Exams #2 and #3 will also have slide identification of those key images that are designated in class – not just the name of the object, the artist, its location (if architecture), and the style or period to which it belongs -- but also why they are important for the evolution of art. This involves knowing something about those larger issues and concepts that we will develop in class. All exams begin on time, so please plan ahead and allow sufficient time for parking. I will not repeat slides for latecomers. (Why? Some people are going to need to concentrate in these exams and flipping back and forth between images is badly distracting.)

Finally, I believe that you control your education and that knowledge develops over time. Thus, rather than treating each test as an isolated event with material that then disappears from our course, there will be an essay question on each exam after the first that is more comprehensive, giving you multiple chances to demonstrate your understanding of the material.

3. Third, do some authentic tasks that embody the kind of thinking and acting expected for life, tasks that challenge you to grapple with ideas, address your existing assumptions, and perhaps rethink them.

- TWO ORAL PRESENTATIONS
 - On **February 27**, I will randomly select students to present the ideas of their papers.
 - On **April 10**, we will have small groups present the ideas from the Dropbox readings on the Baptistery in Florence.

You need to be prepared BOTH times to participate immediately. Remember the selection will be random. If you are selected to participate in any oral presentation, 25% of your attendance grade will come from this presentation. If you are selected twice, 2 x 25% (or 50%) of your attendance grade comes from your presentations.

- ONE SHORT PAPER
 - There is one short (1-2 page) written assignment that encourages you to look closely at the visual culture that surrounds you. It will be the subject of the first class presentation on February 27. It is due one week later on **Wednesday, March 6**. It is worth 10% of your grade.

Regarding the written assignment, I have set up some specific requirements. I will take written work late but it will be penalized 5 points for every day it is late. Yes, the weekend counts. After one week, I will not take any late papers. Remember that we are in the computer age where Murphy's Law applies with a vengeance. Assume that your computer will break down, that every other student in the school will be trying to print a paper on the same night, and so forth. Plan accordingly! There are no excuses for turning in a late paper. You simply take the point deduction. Also, **I will NOT accept papers via e-mail.** Why? Too many problems with viruses, with formatting, with accidental deletions, with deadlines. In the end, it shifts the responsibility from you to me and in this course these assignments are your responsibility. And, **I will NOT accept papers turned into my office mail box.** Again, too many problems to recount—you've turned it in but it's not in my mailbox. Did you put it in the wrong mailbox? Did someone take it out of my mailbox? This kind of situation breeds suspicion and resentment. Let's break the cycle of abuse and dependency! Turn in your stuff in class on its due date. Make the time. It's your job. My job will be to return your work in a timely fashion – exams and written assignments within two weeks.

HOW WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE NATURE, QUALITY, AND PROGRESS OF YOUR LEARNING:

I believe a professor has two jobs: to help students learn and to tell society how much learning has been done. I expect ambitious and creative learning and I will work hard to use some strategies that I believe are effective in helping students learn. For the record though, here is my grading policy.

In order to receive a grade in this course, students must complete all assigned work. Grades will not be calculated on the basis of a percentage of work completed. **There are no extra credit projects.** There are often questions about grading and evaluation policies, especially for those who have never taken an art history class before and are concerned about how their work will be evaluated. Grade ranges and a description of the sort of work expected are as follows—please read them carefully.

A (90-92 an A-; 93-96 is an A; 97-100 is an A+) startlingly good, exceeding my expectations, and well-written. Must be imaginative; NOT given for simply following directions

B (80-82 is a B-; 83-86 is a B; 87-89 is a B+) Good effort with a good result.

C (70-72 is a C-; 73-76 is a C; 77-79 is a C+) Perfunctory; or tried but missed the point; or did something well but it wasn't the assignment; or a good idea but careless or sloppy.

D (60-69) Warning: accepted under protest

F (Below 60) Unacceptable as college-level work; see me immediately if you find yourself in this situation.

Please remember something though. The function of this course is not to enable you to get a good grade easily. Its function is to open you up to intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic skills that you will use for the rest of your lives. All of us, myself included, have taken courses that were FAR from our areas of expertise (for me, Multi-variable Calculus, Baroque Poetry, and Physics), in which we did dreadfully grade-wise (don't ask!). But these were vital courses later and in unexpected ways (in my case, returning to school years later to study Landscape Architecture). No employer ever punished us for bad grades in adventurous courses. That's why you take courses like this. God forbid you should become an art historian—highly unlikely, and I will try to talk you out of it, even though it is the most fun I have (where the music isn't blasting at 1000 decibels, or involving my children, or husband). You take courses like this to be richer in the important ways.

It is not just the professor though who should be vested in the nature of learning. A student also has a tremendous responsibility here; **you should be able to judge the quality of your own work.** If you cannot assess the quality of what you have produced, then you haven't really learned anything. Here are the **Student Learning Objectives.**

- Analyze the formal elements of a particular art form using vocabulary appropriate to that form
- Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between artistic technique and the expression of a work's underlying concept
- Analyze cultural productions using standards appropriate to the form and cultural context
- Analyze and interpret material culture in its social, historical, and/or personal contexts
- Engage in critical analysis in writing using reasoned, well-organized arguments with introduction, thesis statement, supporting evidence, and conclusion

At various points in this course, you might want to sit down and ask yourself about your progress and the strategies you are using to understand those learning objectives. Talk to me if you are struggling here.

TEXT AND READINGS: The schedule of lectures lists the reading in the text and/or in Dropbox for each class. You are expected to come into class prepared with that day's reading assignment completed. Every teacher I know says this in their syllabus; few students I know actually do it. Is this a problem? Depends on how you absorb material. Coming to class and looking at work which is completely new and foreign to you is an intimidating proposition. You get so caught up in all the details of individual facts that you lose sight of (or never really get) the broader historical context or the development of an artistic style. Reading before class introduces you to the story of art history.

The textbook for this class is new: Debra J. DeWitte, et al, *Gateways to Art. Understanding the Visual Arts* (Thames &Hudson, 2012). It's a good book, well-written and interesting—rare for a college text. But its newness also makes it expensive (retails for \$116; rents for \$45). If you are a vigilant note taker, it is possible to do quite well in this class without it. But if you are not doing well, the very first question I'm going to ask you when you come to me to tell me you're not doing well is “have you been reading along in the text book?”

The other readings for this class will be made available in Dropbox which is free. Thus, there is no reason not to do them. (In fact, the links to them should be sitting in an email from me in your GMU email account.)

1. **What is Art?:** Robin Cembalest, "The Obscenity Trial. How They Voted to Acquit," *Writings about Art*, ed. Carole Gold Calo (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), pp. 343-350; **AND** Hilton Kramer, "Is Art above the Laws of Decency?" pp. 351-356.
2. **Ancient Greece:** Gisela Richter, "Characteristics of Greek Sculpture," *Readings in Art History*, ed. Harold Spencer, second edition (NY: Scribner's, 1976), volume 1, pp. 35-49.
3. **Middle Ages:** Herbert Kessler, "Matter," *Seeing Medieval Art* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), pp. 19-43.
4. **Italian Renaissance:** Baptistery competition readings.
5. **Baroque:** John Rupert Martin, "The Baroque," *Readings in Art History*, ed. Harold Spencer, second edition (NY: Scribner's, 1976), volume 2, pp. 161-171.
6. **19th century:** Kirk Varnedoe, "The Artifice of Candor: Impressionism and Photography Reconsidered," *Art in America* (January 1980): 66-78.

CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE: Courtesy and common sense please. We're all adults; sometimes emergencies come up. However, talking to friends during lectures, wandering in and out, and texting are all badly distracting to everyone else. Chronic chatters and latecomers are disruptive. If you know you will have to leave a few minutes early, please sit on the aisle and let me know. Also, I am banning all electronics from my classroom. Obviously, this means cell phones, but it also includes laptops. If you absolutely must have a laptop for note-taking, you must talk to me about it and then you will need to sit in the front row in class.

PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING: These are not fooling-around offences with me. Your written work is to be the product of your own thinking. Ditto with tests. Be warned: **if you cheat, I will send you and your work on to the Dean of Students.** No excuses, no tears, no "I didn't understand about citing other people's work/talking during an exam" stories.

If you are not sure how the University defines plagiarism, please see the Plagiarism Statement in the George Mason University Honor System and Code at <http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm>.

DISABILITIES: If you have a learning disability, it must be properly documented by the Office for Disability Services and I am happy to make the necessary accommodations for those students. I need to see and sign the documentation from the Office for Disability Services well before tests and assignments are given in order to accommodate you. Please contact them for more information. <http://ods.gmu.edu/> (703.993.2474)

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: If English is not your first language, please discuss any concerns you might have about the writing assignment with me. And don't forget about the Writing Center (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>)

IMPORTANT DATES:

January 29. Last day to add this class

February 22. Last day to drop this class

COURSE SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS:

January 23. Introduction to the course.

January 28. What is art? Style, Form and Content; Context

Reading: Text, Introduction, pp. 26-43; Chapter 1.10, pp. 152-163.

Dropbox: **What is Art?** Cembelast, "Obscenity Trial," and Kramer, "Laws of Decency"

January 30, February 4, and 6. *Fundamentals: Line, Shape vs. Form, Depth, Value and Space, Color, Time and Motion.*

Reading: Text, pages 46-115

February 11, 13, and 18. *Fundamentals: Unity and Variety, Balance, Scale and Proportion; Emphasis and Focal Point; Pattern and Rhythm*

Reading: Text, pages 116-151

February 20. Catch-up and Review session.

February 25. Exam #1

February 27. Class presentations.

March 4. *Media and Process: Painting*

Reading: Text, pages 180-191

March 6. *Media and Process: Printmaking*

Reading: Text, pages 192-203

PAPER DUE TODAY

March 11 and 13. SPRING BREAK

March 18. *Media and Process: Photography*

Reading: Text, pages 212-227

March 20. *Media and Process: Sculpture*

Reading: Text, pages 260-273

March 25. *Media and Process: Architecture*

Reading: Text, pages 274-291

March 27. Catch-up and review session

April 1. Exam #2

April 3. *History and Context: Greece and Rome*

Reading: Text, pages 304-313

Dropbox: Richter on Greek Sculpture

April 8. *History and Context: The Middle Ages*

Reading: Text, pages 314-329

Dropbox: Kessler on Matter

April 10. *History and Context: The Italian Renaissance* and **class presentations**

Dropbox: Baptistery project

April 15. *History and Context: The Italian Renaissance and the Renaissance in the North*

Reading: Text, pages 376-393

April 17. *History and Context: The Baroque*

Reading: Text, pages 393-396

Dropbox: Martin on Baroque

April 22. *History and Context: The 19th century*

Reading: Text, pages 398-421

Dropbox: Varnedoe on Impressionism

April 24. *History and Context: The 20th century*

Reading: Text, pages 422-451

April 29. *Themes in Art: Spirituality; Politics; The Body*

Reading: Text, pages 454-483; 520-553; 554-577

May 1. *The Last Lecture*

May 6. Catch-up and Review

Monday, May 13, 7:30-10:15. Exam #3