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SAS – SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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**SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS / SCHOOL OF DIGITAL IMAGING AND VISUAL ARTS / SCHOOL OF LIFE STUDIES AND HUMAN SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY / DEPARTMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY / DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**  
**COURSE TITLE: Art Theory and Criticism**  
**COURSE CODE: LAAHTC370, DIPHTC370, LSSOTC370**  
**3 semester credits**

## **1. DESCRIPTION**

This course examines major philosophies and concepts that have contributed to the discussion of art theory, aesthetic discourse, and criticism in the wider context of contemporary society. Reading and analyzing various texts from antiquity to the present, students will explore the underlying questions and meanings of art and how they interact or conflict throughout the development of Western thought, behavior, and society. The aim of this course is to utilize art theory foundations in order to develop an informed critical analysis. Texts covered in class will include writings by philosophers, critics, and artists such as Plato, Alberti, Kant, Benjamin, Greenberg, Barthes, Baudrillard, Lippard, and Trin T. Minha.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

Upon successful completion of this course students will:

- Be familiar with the chronology and the progress of the theories within the history of art criticism.
- Gain knowledge of the most important art critics (such as Alberti, Ghiberti, Leonardo, Vasari, Winckelmann, etc.), their main ideas and some of their fundamental texts.
- Be familiar with art criticism concepts and approaches to modern and contemporary art with a critical point of view.
- Be familiar with the language of art criticism and its role in contemporary societies and human thought.
- Gain a critical approach when describing and discussing artworks and be able to position them in the context of societal changes and development.
- Be able to critically analyze art exhibitions, museum displays and contemporary artworks as well as art reviews.

## **3. REQUIREMENTS**

Introduction to Art History or equivalent.

## **4. METHOD**

This course consists of lectures, class discussions, projects, and site visits within the local community. Mediums for instruction used will include, but are not limited to, interactive and hands-on activities

which challenge thought processes, academic texts and studies, videos, slides, guided problem solving, and experiential and/or field learning activities where applicable.

## 5. TEXT BOOK – FURTHER READINGS – RESOURCES

### TEXT BOOK:

Freeland, Cynthia. *Art Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Houston, Kerr. *An Introduction to Art Criticism: Histories, Strategies, Voices*. Pearson, 2013.

The text book is mandatory for successful completion of the course.

Where applicable, additional materials, handouts and/or notes will be provided by the instructor.

### FURTHER READINGS

(Books listed below are available in the FUA-AUF library)

- E. H. Gombrich, *Gombrich on the Renaissance, Volume 1, Norm and Form (1966); Vol. 2, Symbolic Images (1972);* London, Phaidon, 1985.
- Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, Stockholm, Almqvist and Wiksell; New York, Harper & Row, 1960.
- Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art. A Contemporary Introduction*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999.
- Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy (1450-1600)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962.
- C. Harrison, P. Wood, *Art in Theory, 1900-2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, New York, 1992.
- H. Foster, R. Krauss, Y.A. Bois, B.H.D. Buchloh, *Art since the 1900*, Thames and Hudson, London 2004.
- Donald Preziosi, *The Art of Art History. A critical anthology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Terry Barrett, *Interpreting Art. Reflecting, Wondering and Responding*, New York, Mc Grawhill, 2003.
- Clement Greenberg, John O'Brian (Editor), *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4 volumes:
  - Volume 1: *Perceptions and Judgments (1939-1944)* University of Chicago Press; Reprint edition 1988; Volume 2: *Arrogant Purpose (1945-1949)* University Of Chicago Press; Reprint edition 1988; Volume 3: *Affirmations and Refusals (1950-1956)* Publisher: University Of Chicago Press 1995; Volume 4: *Modernism with a Vengeance (1957-1969)* Publisher: University Of Chicago Press 1995.

### LIBRARIES IN FLORENCE

The FUA library is located in Corso Tintori 21. Please consult the posted schedules for official opening times. Also note that the library is for consultation only and it is not possible to borrow materials. The library is equipped with a scanner and internet access so that you may save or email a digital copy of the pages needed.

Students may also utilize additional libraries and research centers within the local community:

#### **BIBLIOTECA PALAGIO DI PARTE GUELFA**

Located in Piazzetta di Parte Guelfa between Piazza della Repubblica and Ponte Vecchio. Please consult the library website for hours of operation:

[http://www.biblioteche.comune.fi.it/biblioteca\\_palagio\\_di\\_parte\\_guelfa/](http://www.biblioteche.comune.fi.it/biblioteca_palagio_di_parte_guelfa/)

#### **BIBLIOTECA DELLE OBLATE**

Located in via dell'Oriuolo 26. Please consult the library website for hours of operation:

[www.bibliotecadelleoblate.it](http://www.bibliotecadelleoblate.it)

#### **THE HAROLD ACTON LIBRARY AT THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF FLORENCE**

Located in Lungarno Guicciardini 9. Please consult the library website for hours of operation. This library requires a fee-based student membership. For information: [www.britishinstitute.it/en](http://www.britishinstitute.it/en)

### **6. FIELD LEARNING**

Please consult your Official Registration for any mandatory field learning dates. Field Learning Activities cited in Official Registrations are an integral part of the course and also include an assignment that counts towards your final grade, details will be provided on the first day of class.

### **7. COURSE MATERIALS**

No additional course materials are necessary.

### **8. COURSE FEES**

Course fees cover course-related field learning activities, visits, and support the instructor's teaching methodologies. Book costs are not included in the course fee. The exact amount will be communicated by the instructor on the first day of class.

### **9. EVALUATION – GRADING SYSTEM**

10% Attendance

15% Class Participation, Home Assignments and Reading

20% Midterm Exam (or FL / Special / Research Project)

25% Final Paper and/or Presentation

30% Final Exam

A = 93-100 %, A- = 90-92%, B+ = 87-89%, B = 83-86%, B- = 80-82%, C+ = 77-79%, C = 73-76%, C- = 70-72%, D = 60-69%, F = 0-59%, W = Official Withdrawal, W/F = Failure to withdraw by the designated date.

### **10. ATTENDANCE – PARTICIPATION**

Academic integrity and mutual respect between instructor and student are central to the FUA academic policy and reflected in the attendance regulations. Student presence is mandatory and counts toward the final grade.

On the second absence the attendance and participation grade will be impacted. Please note that

missing certain field learning activities may count for more than one absence.

On the third absence the instructor may lower the final grade by one letter grade. (Example: Final grade average of 93% or A will become a B).

**The fourth absence constitutes automatic failure of the course. Students with excessive absences will be asked to withdraw with a W (if before the deadline) or leave the course with a WF.**

#### LATE ARRIVAL AND EARLY DEPARTURE

Arriving late or departing early from class is not acceptable. Two late arrivals or early departures or a combination will result in an unexcused absence. Travel is not an exceptional circumstance.

#### TRAVEL (OR DELAYS DUE TO TRAVEL) IS NEVER AN EXCUSE FOR ABSENCE FROM CLASS.

It is always the student's responsibility to know how many absences he or she has in a course. If in doubt, speak with your instructor!

**Participation:** Satisfactory participation will be the result of contributing to class discussions by putting forth insightful and constructive questions, comments and observations. Overall effort, cooperation during group work, proper care of work space and tools, responsible behavior, and completion of assignments will be assessed. All of the above criteria also apply to Field Learning and site visits.

## 11. EXAMS – PAPERS – PROJECTS

### Homework Assignments

Home assignments aim at documenting your knowledge and understanding on specific aspects relating to the course topic. After each lecture, a question may be posted on the course's blog page (MyFUA) relating to the lecture. Students are expected to contribute a short, thoughtful response. Responses must be posted before the start of the next lecture (all posts are time stamped, late postings (after 9 am) will not be accepted). Be creative, in addition to your short text you can post pictures and videos if you'd like.

### Reading and quizzes

Reading of the text book is mandatory for successful completion of the course, further reading is highly recommended. Regular reading quizzes have been designed to ensure that you are completing the reading and engaging in active learning and critical thinking about course concepts outside of class. They are also designed to help you prepare for the final exam in manageable increments. Quizzes may be open-note, which means you may use your notes to assist you in taking the quiz. Notes must be originals (not photocopied) and in your own handwriting. Quizzes will NOT be open book.

### Paper/Presentation

The instructor will provide you with specific information concerning the paper/presentation topic and

length. Make sure your paper/presentation conforms to academic standards in terms of style and register. Your paper/presentation must include quotations and/or citations from scholarly books, journals, or articles. Your paper/presentation must be properly referenced and must include a bibliography. Evaluation will be based on the following criteria: Pertinence & Coverage; Analysis & Understanding; Organization & Structure; Language & Accuracy; References & Bibliography.

### **Exams**

The Midterm exam will take place on Lesson 7 and the Final Exam will take place on Lesson 15. Note, the date and time of the exams cannot be changed for any reason, so please organize your personal activities accordingly.

Format (for both exams): the exam is divided into three sections:

Part I: 10 Multiple choice questions. Each correct answer is worth 2 points, for a total of 20 points.

Part II: 10 short-answer questions. Each correct and complete answer (concise explanations, main ideas, key words, names, etc.) is worth 5 points, for a total 50 points.

Part III: two essay questions; each correct and complete answer is worth 15 points (based on content, vocabulary, detail, etc.) for a total of 30 points.

## 12. LESSONS

<b>Lesson 1</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Course overview, content, structure, assessment and expectations. What is Art Criticism? Who are art critics? What can art criticism offer and what does it represent in society? The search for standard features, distinctions and overlaps between art criticism and related activities, art criticism's place in the larger context of human behavior and society.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Houstonn, Kerr. Pp. 1-21.

<b>Lesson 2</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	A history of art criticism. The birth of a genre, from early voices in art criticism to the rise of formalist criticism.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Houstonn, Kerr. Pp. 23-46.

<b>Lesson 3</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Criticism in Modern and Contemporary Societies: A history of art criticism continued. From European criticism between the wars to art criticism since 2000.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Houstonn, Kerr. Pp.46-77.

<b>Lesson 4</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Description and contextualization. General issues involving description, the act of description and its aims, strategies of description. Internal and external evidence.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Houstonn, Kerr. Pp. 82-110.

<b>Lesson 5</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Interpretation and analysis. General issues involving interpretation. Interpretations involving internal and external evidence. Critical theory and systematic interpretations. French theorists Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, death of the author and the author-function.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Houstonn, Kerr. Pp. 113-148.

<b>Lesson 6</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Judgement and evaluation. The place of judgment in criticism. Forms of judgement and related issues.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Houstonn, Kerr. Pp. 152-182. Review all reading assigned so far in view of the mid-term exam.

<b>Lesson 7</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	<b>Midterm exam</b>

<b>Lesson 8</b>	
<b>Lecture</b>	<b>Academic break</b>

<b>Lesson 9</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Art controversies: morality, art and taste, art and societal tension. Damien Hirst, Andres Serrano, and Robert Mapplethorpe. Hume and Kant's aesthetic theories. Lippard's defense of Serrano.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Freeland, Lucy. Pp.1-19.

<b>Lesson 10</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Plato's and the oldest theory of art: Art as imitation. The commonplace in art through everyday life and society. Arthur Danto on Andy Warhol – artworld theories as social activity.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Freeland, Lucy. Pp. 20-39. Additional (optional) reading: Arthur Danto's Andy Warhol: The Embodiment of Theory in Art and the Pragmatic Turn. Full text available: <a href="https://www.ledonline.it/leitmotiv/Allegati/Leitmotiv-2010-0-Snyder.pdf">https://www.ledonline.it/leitmotiv/Allegati/Leitmotiv-2010-0-Snyder.pdf</a>

<b>Lesson 11</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	The universal language of art. John Dewey's Art as Experience. Cultural (mis)appropriation, cultural connections, the remnants of European colonialism.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Freeland, Lucy. Pp.39-59.

<b>Lesson 12</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Art and money, museum functions and roles. Relations among artistic, educational, civic, commercial and spiritual values. Bourdieu's 'low' taste and Greenberg's 'kitsch.'
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Freeland, Lucy. Pp. 59-82.

<b>Lesson 13</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Questioning the canon. Minorities in standard histories of art. Feminism and art theory.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Freeland, Lucy. Pp. 82- 99.



<b>Lesson 14</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Art and new media, 'high' vs. 'popular' culture, 'democratizing' art. New media theorists: Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan, Jean Baudrillard.
<b>Homework/ Assignments</b>	See MyFUA for assignments.
<b>Reading</b>	Freeland, Lucy. Pp.100-140.

<b>Lesson 15</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Final exam