

Philosophy 156 – What Is Art?

Instructor: Dr. Chris Venner

Course Number: 18291-003

Location: Innovation Hall 209

Time: T/Th 12:00pm-1:15pm

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Phone: N/A

Office: TBD

Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description:

This course explores the changing relationship between art and society in western culture over the last 2500 years. We will investigate questions such as: is artistic activity truly creative, or does it simply imitate other aspects of human life? What, if anything, is beauty, and how does its definition relate to concurrent social norms and practices? What impact does art have on its audience, and how does this affect their capacity for participation in a broader community? And most importantly, as a citizen of the contemporary world, how do I myself interact with art, and what does this imply about my own thinking, beliefs, and actions?

We will divide our investigation into multiple artistic genres, such as painting, photography, music, dance, fashion, and cinema. Students will produce a variety of written and spoken deliverables, both individually and in small groups, with multiple opportunities for feedback and revision. By the end of the course, students will have assembled an intellectual toolbox for interrogating contemporary cultural production in a way that both aligns with and challenges their own beliefs and viewpoints.

Grading:

Individual short paper = 20%

Group presentation = 20%

Individual semester paper = 40%

In-class exercises and participation = 20%

NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus during the course of the semester.

Classmate #1:

Classmate #2:

Course Policies

Statement on Academic Integrity:

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

Statement on Accommodations:

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; <http://ds.gmu.edu>) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

Statement on Diversity:

I am committed to building an inclusive classroom. Lack of respect for your fellow students will not be tolerated, will adversely affect your participation grade, and may result in your immediate expulsion from the class.

Statement on Sexual Harassment:

Sexual harassment will not be tolerated in the classroom, will adversely affect your participation grade, and may result in your immediate expulsion from the class.

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking: As a faculty member, I am designated as a

“Responsible Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to [Mason’s Title IX Coordinator](#) per University [Policy 1412](#). You may seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator, Jennifer Hammat, by calling 703-993-8730 or email cde@gmu.edu. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as [Student Support and Advocacy Center](#) (SSAC) at 703-993-3686 or [Counseling and Psychology Services](#) (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. The 24-hour Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Crisis Line for Mason is 703-380-1434.

Statement on Communication:

Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.

Statement on Undergraduate Course Repetition:

Beginning fall 2018, there is a limit of three graded attempts for this course. A W does not count as a graded attempt. Please see AP. 1.3.4 in the University Catalog and consult with your academic advisor if you have any questions.

Schedule of Classes

1/16:

- **Attend** introduction to course

Painting

1/18:

- **Read** Plato, Book X of *Republic*

1/23:

- **Read** Kant, *Critique of Judgment* Book II Sections 46-50 (pp. 174-188)

1/25:

- **Skim** Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*

1/30:

- **Read** Spicer, "The Renaissance Elbow"

2/1:

- **In-class** film and discussion: *Who the F&!/? Is Jackson Pollock?*

Photography and Typography

2/6:

- **Read** Talbot, "Photogenic Drawing" .pdf

2/8:

- **Read** Willis and Porter, "The Pencil of Nature" .pdf
- **Read** Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography" .pdf

2/13:

- **Read** Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," in *On Photography*

2/15:

- **In-class** Writing Day -- Outline Paper #1

2/20:

- **In-class** Writing Day -- Draft Paper #1

2/22:

- **Submit** final draft of Paper #1 through Blackboard by beginning of class
- **In-class** film and discussion: *Helvetica*

Fashion, Dance, and Music

2/27:

- **Read** Veblen, Chapter 7 in *Theory of the Leisure Class*

2/29:

- **Read** Plato, Book II of *Laws*
 - stop reading when it starts talking about drinking wine

3/5:

- **Spring Break** -- No class meeting

3/7:

- **Spring Break** -- No class meeting

3/12:

- **Read** Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music"

Acting

3/14:

- **Read** Plato, *Ion*
- **Read** Diderot, *The Paradox of the Actor* pp. TBD

3/19:

- **Read** Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* pp. TBD
- **Read** Stanislavski, *Building a Character* pp. TBD

3/21:

- **In-class** Writing Day -- Outline Group Presentation

3/26:

- **In-class** Writing Day -- Draft Group Presentation

3/28:

- **In-class** -- Group Presentations Begin

4/2:

- **In-class** -- Group Presentations Continue

4/4:

- **In-class** -- Group Presentations Continue

4/9:

- **In-class** -- Group Presentations Continue

Cinema

4/11:

- **Read** Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

4/16:

- **Read** Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

4/18:

- **Read** Dyer, "Lighting for Whiteness" .pdf

4/23:

- **In-class** Writing Day -- Outline Semester Paper

4/25:

- **In-class** Writing Day -- Draft Semester Paper
- Last day of regular class meetings

5/??:

- **Final Paper due in Blackboard by end of official class final exam time**