

Vision and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century American and European Art

History of Art 190F

Lecture: M/W 4:00-5:30 pm; 102 Moffitt

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course investigates how artists working on both sides of the Atlantic incorporated new findings in the field of human vision that developed over the course of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the period's scientific discoveries, technological innovations, urban expansion, as well as social, political, and intellectual revolutions all served to overturn long-standing assumptions about the way we see. These developments problematized picture-making in new and unexpected ways. Throughout the term we will study those artists who grappled with vision-related issues as they sought to create images that addressed the conditions of modernity. We will focus primarily on painting, but consideration will be given to photography and other forms of visual culture, including prints, optical toys, and motion pictures. Throughout the term, emphasis will be placed on critical looking.

Required Texts:

Margaret Livingstone, Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing, (2002: 2008 pbk)

Jonathan Crary, Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century, (1993)

Various articles and essays available either through electronic database or course website.

CLASS FORMAT

Although this class is primarily a lecture course, we will also have extensive and intensive class discussions. I like the discussion format because it helps (and sometimes even forces) most students to keep up with the reading. I also feel that discussions encourage and enable students to develop their looking skills as well as their intellectual independence. In a good discussion class, you can't just sit back: you have to jump in and get involved--you have to help in setting an agenda for discussion. For discussions to work, as we all know, everyone must be prepared: everyone has to do the reading, everyone has to have an idea or question in reserve, in case things start to drag or stall. I'm assuming that if you stay in this class, you are declaring your willingness to do those things. Rest assured, though, that I wouldn't ask you to do anything if I weren't sure that you could do it well.

READING PORTFOLIO

In order to encourage you to read the assigned readings carefully, and to come to lecture with them fresh on your mind, I have implemented "Reading Portfolios."

It will work like this:

1. At the beginning of lecture: You may turn in a single page (double spaced) summary of the reading for that day. Summaries will be collected only at the beginning of lecture.

2. During lecture: As you listen to the following lecture and discussion, consider how you might change your summary. Take notes on issues that you did and did not address in your summary.
3. After lecture: You may revise your summary in any ways you wish (although it can only be maximum of one single page, double spaced.)
4. In section: Your revised summary will be collected. NOTE: You may only turn in a revised summary if you turned-in an early version at lecture.
5. At the exams: Your portfolio will be returned to you so that you may consult it when formulating your response to the exam questions. You will be allowed to consult only your portfolio; the exams will not be open note.

You are not required to develop your Reading Portfolio for this class. If you do not, however, you may find yourself at a disadvantage during the exams.

NOTE: As the course description suggestions, this course is not a survey of nineteenth-century European and American Art. I will do my best to give you a sense the broader context and artistic developments. If in the course of your reading, however, you feel the need for some additional information about any of the artists or art movements we are studying, I encourage you to search out this information on the web.

For nineteenth-century art, I recommend:

The Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History (produced by the Metropolitan Museum of Art):
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/te_index.asp?i=18

As other sites come to my attention, I will pass them along.

CLASS ETIQUETTE

No sleeping, napping, texting, or surfing. Please turn off your cell phone and do not take calls while in class (if you absolutely cannot miss a call, please sit in the back of the room and quiet step outside when your call comes in). No reading for another class or doing homework for another class.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:

Consistent and regular attendance and participation is required in both lecture and section. You should be on time, prepared, and attentive. If you miss many days of class, expect those absences to affect how well you understand course material. If you miss a day, get assignments, notes, and any handouts before you return to class so that you are as ready as students who were there.

EXAMS:

One midterm and one final. Both essay format.

MUSEUM VISITS:

Early in the term, you will be required to visit the UAM. During the middle of the term, you will need to visit the Legion of Honor. The final paper/project will involve a visit (or two, depending) to the De Young Museum.

GRADING:

Midterm: 200 points

Final Paper/Project: 400 points

Final Exam: 300 points

Section Grade: 100 points

Total possible points: 1000

All assignments must be completed to pass the class.

PLAGIARISM POLICY

I expect your papers, exams, and other assignments to be your work and your work alone. I have a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism and cheating. All cases of plagiarism will result in an automatic zero for the assignment and the case will be sent to the administration for further disciplinary action.

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, passing off another author's ideas and/or words as your own without proper acknowledgements. I will accept no excuses for your failure to understand what is the proper way of acknowledging other authors. If you do not understand what plagiarism is and/or how to properly acknowledge your sources, consult a style manual and ask me for clarification.

DUE DATES, LATE POLICY, AND EMERGENCIES:

All papers and assignments are due in class on the due date, unless you can document a legitimate emergency. Without documentation, you will be marked down for each day an assignment is late. If an emergency occurs that prevents you from attending class, completing an assignment on time, or taking an exam, notify me and/or Beth ASAP and be prepared to provide documentation of your emergency. We will need written documentation in order to grant you an extension. No documentation means no extension or make-up. (Going out of town for personal, family, or professional business does not count as an emergency.)

ADA NOTICE:

Students with physical, sensory, emotional or medical impairments may be eligible for reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Please meet with the instructor and GSI in the first week of classes to make arrangements.

DISCLAIMERS:

The course schedule is subject to change. It is the student's responsibility to attend class and pay attention to announcements. If a class meeting is missed, it is the student's responsibility to find out what was announced.

Schedule of Classes, Readings, and Assignments

8/29 Introduction

Part One: Biology and Context

- 8/30 On Light and Color
Reading for today: Livingstone, 12-23.
- 9/5 No class
- 9/7 On Vision I: Color and Luminance
Reading: Livingstone, 24-45
- 9/12 On Vision: Processing (pt. 1)
Reading: Livingstone, 46-99
- 9/14 On Vision: Processing (pt. 2)
Reading: Livingstone, 100-189
UAM Visit Assignment passed out
- 9/19 On Attention
Reading: Guy T. Buswell, excerpts from How People Look at Pictures: A Study of the Psychology of Perception in Art, (1935), 45-82; 142-44

Part Two: Case Studies

- 9/21 Picturing Vision in Early Modern Art
No Reading for today, (start Crary).
- 9/26 Nineteenth-Century Techniques and Observers (pt. 1)
Reading: Crary, 1-66
- 9/28 Nineteenth-Century Techniques and Observers (pt. 2)
Reading: Crary, 69-150
- 10/3 The Invention of Photography: Guest Lecture
No Reading for today.
- 10/5 Photographic Truths and Fictions
Reading: Michael Leja, "Mumler's Fraudulent Photographs," in Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp, (2004), 21-58.
Legion of Honor Visit Assignment Passed Out
- 10/10 Photography and Impressionism
Reading: Kirk Varnedoe, "Artifices of Candor: Impressionism and Photography Reconsidered," in Perspectives on Photography; Essays in Honor of Beaumont Newhall, Peter Walch and Thomas Barrow eds. (1986), 99-123.

- 10/12 Impressionism
Reading: Philip Ball, "The Reign of Light: Impressionism's Bright Impact," in Bright Earth: Art and the Invention of Color, (2001), 168-196.
- 10/17: Impressionism First-Hand
Discussion of Legion of Honor Assignment
- 10/19 Neo-Impressionism
Reading: Excerpts from William Innes Homer, Seurat and the Science of Painting, (1964)
Pages: TBA
- 10/24 Midterm Review
- 10/26 Midterm
- 10/31 Deceptive Paintings
James W. Cook, "Queer Art Illusions," in The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum, (2001), 214-55
- 11/2 Optical Toys and Moving the Image
Reading: John Ott, "Iron Horses: Leland Stanford, Eadweard Muybridge, and the Industrialised Eye," Oxford Art Journal, (October 2005): 407-428 (Project Muse)
- 11/7 Guest Lecture
No reading for today.
- 11/9 Early Cinema
Tom Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, the Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," originally published in Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative, (1990): 229-34.
- 11/14 Thomas Eakins and the Problems of Painting
Reading: Michael Leja, "Eakins and Icons," The Art Bulletin, (Sep., 2001):479-497 (JSTOR)
Final Project/Paper Assignment Handed Out
- 11/16 Pointed Vision
Reading: Alan Braddock, "Charles Schreyvogel and the Spectacle of Gun Vision," American Art, (Spring 2006): 36-59 (JSTOR)
- 11/21 Cézanne's Project
Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" (1945), from Sense and Non-sense, (1964), 9-25.
- 11/23 Cubist Points of View
Excerpt from Edward Fry, "History of Cubism," Cubism, (1966); reprinted in Major European Art Movements 1900-1945, Patricia E. Kaplan and Susan Manso eds., (1977), 104-120.

11/28 Neuroaesthetics[?]

Reading: Semir Zeki, "Art and the Brain," Daedalus, 127:2, 71-103.

11/30 Final Thoughts