Art 106—Ways of Seeing: an introduction to art history

MWF 1:30–2:20 pm
Autumn 2001
Kane

“seeing comes before words” J. Berger, Ways of Seeing

“The more I think of it, I find this conclusion more impressed upon me—that the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion—all in one.” J. Ruskin, Modern Painters

Picasso once remarked that there is only one way of looking at things until some one comes along and shows you another.

This course is designed to introduce students to aims, methods, and issues in the discipline of art history. Readings, projects, and in-class discussions will focus on the many ways to look at art objects, as well as how to think and read critically about the history of art and architecture. Integral use is made of the Allen Memorial Art Museum.

Required Books
Martin Kemp, ed, The Oxford History of Western Art
John Berger, Ways of Seeing
Marcia Pointon, History of Art: A Student's Handbook

Course Website:
http://www.oberlin.edu/~skane/courses/art_106/intro.html

Course Requirements
All work must be completed in order to pass this course.

I. How Images Work (due 10 Sept; 15% of grade)
II. Portrait (part a due 17 Sept; part b due 19 Sept; CR/NE)
III. Ways of Telling Stories (due 1 October; 15% of grade)
Final Project: Interrogating the work of art (70% of final grade)
    Part I due 8 Oct
    Part II due 15 Oct
    Part III due 5 Nov
    Part IV due 12 Nov
    Part V due 26 Nov
    Part VI due 10 Dec
    Part VII due by 17 Dec

Office hours
Wednesday 9:00–11:00 am or by appointment
Schedule of classes:

September

5  What is art? Loss and recovery
   Read: M. Pointon, *Art History: a students’ handbook*

7  AMAM visit. Who owns the past?
   Recommended reading

Part I: The Foundations: Egypt, Greece, and Rome 2500 BC-AD 410
   Read: Kemp, Part 1

10 Egypt (Project I due)

12 Greece—Sculpture

14 Greece and Rome—Architecture

17 Rome—Sculpture (Project IIa due)

19 Portrait (Project IIb due)

20 Fred Wilson, artist, Fisher Hall 4:35 pm; Tom Learner, conservator, Fisher Hall 8:00 pm

21 AMAM visit. Who changes the past? Viewing the fragment and the fake.

Part II: Church and State: The Establishment of European Visual Culture AD 410-1527
   Read Kemp, Part 2

24 Barbara Prior, Art Librarian, on Project III

25 Audra Skoudas, artist; Fisher Hall 4:35 pm

26 Medieval Architecture

28 AMAM visit. Who can use the past?

October

1  Medieval Sculpture (Project III due)

3  Making Masterpieces: Pictures as Things; The Materials of Faith

3  Ed Gomez, artist; Environmental Studies 4:35 pm

5  AMAM visit. Panel Painting.

Part III: The Art of Nations: European Visual Regimes 1527-1770
   Read Kemp, Part 3

8  Making Masterpieces: The Conquest of Light; From Illusion to Emotion. (Final Project I due)

8  Caroline Elam, art historian, Fisher Hall, 8:00 pm
10 The concept of the artist: Michelangelo

12 AMAM visit. Portrait of an artist.
   Recommended reading:
   N. Solomon, “The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission” 344-355 in
   D. Preziosi, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*

15 Making Masterpieces: Old Tricks and New Pigments; Bill Viola’s “The Greeting” (Final Project II due)

17 The Picture: Italy

19 AMAM visit. Oil Painting.

Autumn break

29 The Picture: Spain

31 The Picture: Dutch and Flemish

November

2 AMAM visit. Landscape.

5 Forms in Space I (Final Project III due)

7 Forms in Space II

9 AMAM visit. Art and Technology.

**Part IV: The Era of Revolutions 1770-1914**

   Read Kemp, Part 4

12 The Rise of Art History (Final Project IV due)

12 Nyland Blake, artist; Fisher Hall 4:35 pm

14 Pictures and Publics

16 AMAM visit. The Death of Cleopatra.

19 Pictures and Publics

19 Whitfield Lovell, artist; Fisher Hall 4:35 pm

21 Pictures and Publics

23 no class (Thanksgiving)

26 Pictures and Publics (Final Project V due)

26 Eve Andree Laramee, artist; Environmental Studies 8:00 pm

28 AMAM visit. The Nude.

30 Field trip to the Frank Lloyd Wright house (by car)
Part V: Modernism and After 1914-2000
Read Kemp, Part 5

December
3  Picasso and Pollock: artist as superhero?
5  Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Hung Liu: artist as other?
7  AMAM visit. Eva Hesse: artist as victim?
7  Patrick Killoran, artist; Classroom I, Art Bldg 4:35 pm
10 Final Project VI—presentations in class
12 Final Project VI—presentations in class
14 AMAM visit. Recent Acquisitions.

Project I: How Images Work (Due 10 SEPT; 15% of grade)

Length: 3 pages
Useful Reading:
Berger, Ways of Seeing

Write a concise, three-page analysis of the layout and message of an advertisement taken from a magazine or newspaper.
How does the ad communicate its visual message? Note every important element that contributes to its design: factors such as choice and placement of images, the use of scale and color, the style of typeface, and the quality of the paper.
Analyse the symbolic relationship between the ad’s words and images. You probably already know what this advertisement means, therefore, it may be difficult for you to separate your “subjective” responses from your “objective” analysis. Imagine that you are explaining this advertisement to someone who has no understanding of American culture.
Turn in the advertisement with your analysis.

Project II: Portrait (Part a due 17 Sept; part b due 19 Sept; CR/NE)

Useful Websites and Readings:
Human Face
http://tlc.discovery.com/convergence/humanface/humanface.html
Marquand’s Beauty Mask and the Golden Section
http://www.beautyanalysis.com/index2_mba.htm
Spatial Summation of Face Information, Christopher W. Tayler
http://www.ski.org/CWTyler_lab/CWTyler/Pubtopics/Face%20Summation/SummationOfFaceInformation.html
An Eye-Placement Principle in 500 Years of Portraits, Tayler
Robert L. Solso, “Brain Activities in a Skilled versus a Novice Artist: An fMRI Study” Leonardo vol. 34 (1) 2001 (available on-line via OBIS)
This assignment has two parts:
   a) Due 17 Sept: create a portrait of yourself or someone else you know personally and bring it to class. You may use any format as long as it is portable. You will exchange portraits with a classmate.
   b) Due 19 Sept: write a concise analysis (1-2 pages) of why the work you have been given is a portrait. What do you think the intentions of the artist were? How successful is the artist in communicating the person represented? Your analysis will be given to the creator of the portrait for their commentary.

**Project III: Ways of Telling Stories (due 1 OCT; 15% of grade)**

Length: 2 pages

Useful Resource: 24 Sept lecture by Barbara Prior, Art Librarian

This assignment has two parts:
1) Go into the Allen Memorial Art Museum and find one object dated before 1900 A.D. that depicts a myth or story.
   a) Write a short synopsis of that myth or story. Note: the reference sections in Mudd and the Art Library both have mythological handbooks and dictionaries.
   b) Make a comparison between the visual and written versions of the story. What can a visual portrayal accomplish that a written one cannot or vice versa? Do you think that the story is best told via one means rather than the other?
2) Choose either part a. or b.:
   a) Find a twentieth century equivalent to the myth or story that you have chosen in part 1.
   b) Find a twentieth century object in the AMAM that depicts a myth of story and write a short synopsis of it.

**Final Project: Interrogating the work of art (70% of final grade; 15 page research paper due by 17 December)**

Your final project will include:

Parts I–V as outlined below

Part VI: an in-class presentation of your mini-exhibition

Part VII: a fifteen page research paper on your object

Assignment:
Choose an object in the Allen Memorial Art Museum’s collection and make a detailed study of it as outlined below.

**Part I. Visual Analysis (due 8 Oct)**

Length: 3 pages

Useful Reading:
H. Wölfflin, “Principles of Art History” 115–126
M. Schapiro, “Style” 143–149
E. Gombrich, “Style” 150–163

What is it? What is it made of? What condition is it in? What is going on in it?
See Sylvan Barnet, *A Short Guide to Writing About Art* for information on how to write a visual analysis.
Part II. Artist and Patron (due 15 Oct)

Length: 3 pages

Useful Reading:

Who made it? For whom was it made? Is the artist’s biography pertinent to the object? If the artist is unknown, does their culture provide any clues about the object?

Part III. Iconography and Iconology (due 5 Nov)

Length: 3 pages

Useful Reading:

What did it mean? What does it mean?

Part IV. Acquisition and Connoisseurship (due 12 Nov)

Length: 1–2 pages

How did it come here? When did it come? Who acquired it? Why? How much did it cost?

Part V. Meaning and Reception (due 26 Nov)

Length: 3 pages

Useful Reading:

Viewers and their reactions: Who looked at it? Who looks at it now and in what ways?

Part VI. Meaning and Display (due 10 Dec)

Length: 3 pages plus exhibit

Useful Reading:
C. Duncan, “The Art Museum as Ritual” 473-485
D. Preziosi, “The Art of Art History” 507-525

How was it originally presented? How is it presented now? How would you present it?

Create a comparative exhibition of your object with another object in the AMAM collection. On the day of your presentation, bring a mock-up of your exhibit to class and be prepared to discuss it with your classmates.

Part VII. Final Research Paper (15 pages; due by end of Reading Period: Dec 17)