Philosophy of Art
Instructor: Elaine Miller

Course Description
In this course we will the philosophy of art. We will ask questions such as: What is a work of art? Why do humans create works of art? How is art different from crafts or from ritual objects? What does it mean to call something beautiful? What standards can be used to correctly interpret, judge, and evaluate works of art? Can there be universal criteria for judging art?

We will also be asking contextual (historical, social, and political) questions such as What philosophical status has art had or should it have? How can we understand the distinction between modern, postmodern, and contemporary art? What social and political factors influence what gets identified as good art?

Finally, we will also consider some individual artists and artworks and the ways in which they are defined and theorized in the context of philosophical arguments about art.

This course will include visits to art galleries and museums, watching films, and listening to music.

Learning Objectives
1. To become familiar with various philosophies of art.
2. To understand aesthetic theory in a historical, philosophical, and political context.
3. To learn to become critically reflective about art and aesthetics, in order to be able to state, defend, or revise one’s beliefs about art with the support of philosophical arguments, and clear reasoning.

4. To learn the difference between expressing an opinion and making an argument, as well as to be able to identify, evaluate, and articulate arguments.

5. To learn how to write well, in particular to express one’s ideas in an academic paper.

Required Texts (course packet to be provided by the instructor)

Text from: Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology (Blackwell)
Freeland, Cynthia, But is it Art? An Introduction to Art Theory
Lyotard, Jean-Francois: The Inhuman

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Course requirements include three longer writing assignments, one of which will be an midterm exam, regular question writing assignments, one class presentation, and regular, prepared, attendance. The breakdown of your final grade will be as follows:

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<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Class Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Questions on reading</td>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>First Essay</td>
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<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Final Essay</td>
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Grades

I will grade your work according to the following scale: An ‘A’ is reserved for truly excellent work that shows you have understood the concepts and the texts well, reflected upon them, and, in the case of papers, composed your work thoughtfully and carefully with some attempt to incorporate your own voice. A ‘B’ grade indicates a very good understanding of concepts and texts that does not capture all their complexity or that does not critically reflect upon them. A ‘C’ grade will be given to work that is satisfactory and shows a basic comprehension of the material but which simplifies or misunderstands significant points and makes little effort to organize thoughts around a central argument. A ‘D’ grade indicates less than satisfactory work that shows very little comprehension of the texts and ideas and serious misunderstanding of major points. An ‘F’ will be given to work that is unacceptable because it shows no comprehension of the material at all, and to plagiarized papers.

WARNING:
Plagiarism is defined in the broadest sense as the presentation of another person’s words or ideas, whether in written or spoken form, as one’s own, without indicating the source (this includes anything you get from the Internet!). This includes paraphrasing information without proper reference. You may use quotations from
other people’s writing or words *only when appropriately indicated*, namely, by using a footnote, endnote, or by indicating the author and page number within parentheses at the end of the quotation and including a works cited page at the end of a paper. All exact quotations should be enclosed in quotation marks.

**Course Requirement Specifics**
1. All students will deliver a short presentation in groups of two once during the course.
2. You are responsible for taking notes on the reading and for bringing to class any questions that arise for you during the reading. We will use these questions as a basis for discussion, and I will take them in at the end of each class.
3. The midterm exam will be in essay format, and will be open notebook. It will be designed to test your understanding of and your ability to synthesize and critically respond to the ideas we have read and discussed, not your memorization of information. You may be asked to respond reflectively and philosophically to reproductions of contemporary artworks as part of the midterm.
4. There will be two essays: one preliminary essay before the midterm, and one final essay assignment due at the end of the course. I will hand out criteria and guidelines.
Course Structure

The class will be conducted in a seminar style, which means that most sessions will begin with student presentations, followed by critical discussion of the day’s readings, rather than lectures or simple summary of the texts. All students are therefore expected to attend all sessions, seriously study and reflect upon the readings, and be prepared to a) discuss the reading, b) ask questions about its meaning, c) make connections between different ideas and prior readings, and finally, d) offer your own insights and interpretations.

Students should bring the reading assignment, with important passages and places that were not understood hi-lighted, along with questions that came up as you were reading the text, along with them to class. Write these down as you are reading. Even those of us with the best memories and the best intentions cannot remember everything that occurred to us as we were reading or reflecting on the text. Students who participate less frequently in class should be sure to include as many independent reflections and questions as possible in their critical response papers to indicate to me that they are following and reflecting upon the material.

It is extremely important to attend class, because slides and videos will frequently be shown in order to give the discussions a concrete context and frame of reference. Students will be encouraged to learn to “read” contemporary art through the framework of the philosophy they read, not so much to capture the truth of the work in the sense that we traditionally conceive it (that is, to match the intention of the artist, or fix the single “true” interpretation of the work), but in order to do justice to the complexity and theoretical layering of contemporary art. For this reason, attendance and class participation will influence your grade significantly and regular attendance is mandatory. The success of this course depends heavily on your contribution. If you should have to miss a class, you are still responsible for knowing the material and for any assignments made during that class.
Schedule of Readings

*Note: This course is designed to be flexible to the needs and interests of its members. Assignments may be amended at the end of each class in light of the progress we have made and the directions in which we have turned. The texts will thus be read in this order, although the length of time spent on each text is subject to change according to the evolution of the class.

Week One:
Introduction to the Course
Plato, *Symposium*
Plato, *Symposium*, pp. 25-60 (through Diotima’s speech)
Plato, selections from *Republic and Ion*

Week Two:
Kant, *Critique of Judgment*
Schiller, *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*

Week Three:
Hegel, *Introduction to Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*
Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*
Marx, *Private Property and Communism*

Week Four:
Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”
Barthes, *Camera Lucida*
Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”

Week Five:
Lyotard, “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde”
Greenberg, “Modern and Postmodern,” “Modernist Painting”
Freeland, *But is it Art?*

Week Six:
Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy”
Danto, "The Artworld”
Goodman, "When is Art?"
Carroll, "Identifying Art"