

## Art: Its History and Meaning

Fall 2021

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11-12:15

Instructor: Prof. Khushmi Mehta

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Office hours by appointment. Please email me to set up a meeting.

Class website: <https://mehta1010.commons.gc.cuny.edu>

### Course Objectives

In this class, students will:

- Acquire familiarity with artworks from a range of geographical regions, cultures, and mediums and gain an understanding of the multiplicity of chronologies within art history.
- Critically engage in discussions surrounding the roles of art institutions, the role of art in social movements, and an interpretation of artworks as artifacts of social, political and economic discourse.
- Develop skills of visual analysis and learn methodologies including citation practices and research techniques used to build art historical arguments.

### Communication and Office Hours

- Email and the CUNY Commons group are the primary means of communication for this course. I do my best to reply to emails within 24 hours. Students are expected to check email frequently and ensure that the email you use most frequently is linked to the CUNY Commons group.
- I am available for office hours by appointment. I welcome conversations at any point of the semester regarding learning styles, final paper topics, progress check-ins etc. Please email me to set up office hour meetings.

### Class policies

#### Online code of conduct

- It is extremely important that the online classroom be a safe and respectful environment for all students. To that end, there are a few expectations for behaviour in all virtual learning spaces, including Zoom meetings, discussion forums, and the class “chat room.”
- When responding to a classmate, please do so respectfully, even when disagreeing. When disagreeing offer evidence or ask questions in a collegial way that encourages further discussion, rather than invalidating a classmate’s ideas. Should there ever be an issue, please feel free to contact me.
- I will monitor all class online spaces; should a post violate the code of conduct it will be removed. When we meet over Zoom, you are expected to maintain this online code of conduct.
- I have strong preference for cameras being on during Zoom lectures and seminars, but understand that there may be privacy, network or other issues. If you are unable to turn your camera on for any reason, please let me know at the beginning of class.

- To participate in the seminar discussions, you can use the chat function or the ‘raise hand button’ on Zoom to speak. Please mute yourself when not speaking.
- The Zoom sessions will not be recorded as there may be privacy concerns, so you are expected to take notes during the lecture. I will post all PowerPoints to the CUNY Commons website after the lecture.

### Attendance

Attending the Zoom classes every Tuesday and Thursday, and actively participating in the discussions is mandatory. If you are unable to attend class due to illness, religious holiday or another legitimate conflict, please email me in order to be excused. More than four unexcused absences may result in a failing grade.

### Deadlines

Late submissions will be graded down by one letter grade. You are responsible for all assignment due dates. Extensions must be requested at least 24 hours in advance, other than those for unforeseen circumstances such as illness or family emergencies. Extensions will be granted at the discretion of the instructor.

### Course Materials

There are no books to purchase for this course. PDFs of the readings are posted on the class website. There will be approx. 10 pages of required reading for each class. You are expected to come to the Zoom sessions having completed the readings and prepared to have a discussion on them.

### Student accommodations

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services. Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to set up an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Disability Services, Ms. Valerie Stewart-Lovell at 718-951-5538. If you have already registered with the Center for Student Disability Services please provide me with the course accommodation form and we will discuss your specific accommodations.

### Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

*Plagiarizing on any of your written or presented work **guarantees you a failure** in the course.* To avoid plagiarism, you must provide full citations for all types of sources. See the “How to Cite” page on the CUNY Commons website for a guide on citations.

You must abide by the University’s rules of Academic Integrity as outlined in the [CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity](#). The CUNY Policy defines plagiarism as:

Plagiarism is the act of presenting another person’s ideas, research or writings as your own. The following are some examples of plagiarism, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:

- Copying another person’s actual words or images without the use of quotation marks and footnotes attributing the words to their source.
- Presenting another person’s ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source.

- Failing to acknowledge collaborators on homework and laboratory assignments.
- Internet plagiarism, including submitting downloaded term papers or parts of term papers, paraphrasing or copying information from the internet without citing the source, or “cutting & pasting” from various sources without proper attribution.

## Assignments and grading

### Seminar participation: 20%

- You will be assessed based on your contributions during the class Zoom meetings.
- The second half of each class meeting will take the form of a seminar, in which you are expected to critically engage with the lecture and the readings. I encourage students to actively ask questions, develop their ideas beyond what is presented through the course material and push the limits of the topics each week.
- In the first week of the semester, you will each sign up for one class to lead the discussion for. All students signed up for that topic will bring at least two discussion questions each based on the readings and be responsible for initiating the seminar discussion on that topic.
- I encourage students signed up for the same topics to collaborate, and to reach out to me before your assigned class if any questions arise.

### Visual analysis at home post: 10%

- 1-2 pages (not including images), double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font
- Conduct a formal analysis of an object you find in your home, and have spent considerable time with. The objective of this exercise is to conduct close looking at an object and identify its visual elements.
- Identify stylistic components using key visual art terms introduced through the course– make specific observations about its form, color, scale, material, texture etc.

### Close reading assignment: 30%

- 3-4 pages (not including images), double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font
- This assignment takes the first “visual analysis at home” exercise a step further. For this assignment you will create an illustrated essay that closely examines one work of art from an NYC museum collection, linking the visual analysis to the artwork’s socio-historical context.

### Final research paper: 40%

- 5-6 pages (not including images and citations), double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font

### Extra Credit Assignments

There will be a few opportunities for extra credit throughout the semester in the form of online events relevant to the course material. The details of the events will be posted on the CUNY Commons website. If you are able to attend, please submit a 150-200 word response on the event to be graded for extra credit.

## Class schedule

Note: I may make slight changes to the material or dates over the course of the semester. These changes will be made in accordance with class needs and you will be given as much notice as possible. In case of changes, I will make an announcement and upload the updated syllabus to Blackboard.

Many of the readings assigned are short excerpts from longer articles and books. If you are interested in researching any of the topics further, please let me know and I would be happy to share the complete text.

### Unit 1: Introduction

Th 26 Aug: Introductions, Syllabus review

### Unit 2: Culture formations

T 30 Aug: Prehistoric art

- John Robb, "Art (Pre)History: Ritual, Narrative and Visual Culture in Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe." *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, 27 (2020): 454-470.

→ Seminar: [How to conduct a visual analysis](#)

Th 2 Sep: Egyptian art

- Dorothea Arnold, "Ancient Egyptian Art: Image and Response." *Amilla: The Quest for Excellence*, 2013, 3-15.

T 7 Sep: No class

### Unit 3: Art, Myth and Power

Th 9 Sep: Ancient Near Eastern Art

- Miriam Said, "Radiance and the Power of Erasure in an Obsidian Lamastu Amulet," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* (2020), 102-104, 106-108

Sun 12 Sep:

→ "Visual analysis at home" post

T 14 Sep: Greek and Roman art

- Charles Heiko Stocking, "Greek Ideal as Hyperreal: Greco-Roman Sculpture and the Athletic Male Body," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 2014), 45-49, 64-68.

Th 16 Sep: No class

### Unit 4: Sacred Spaces

T 21 Sep: Byzantine Art and Architecture

- Ron Hassner, "What Is Sacred Space?" In *War on Sacred Grounds*. Cornell University Press, 2009, excerpts.

Th 23 Sep: Art of the Americas

- Cecelia Klein, "Not like Us and All the Same: Pre-Columbian Art History and the Construction of the Nonwest." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 42 (2002), 131-35.

### **Unit 5: The Soul of Objects**

T 28 Sep: African art + the restitution debate

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Whose Culture is it?" *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. W.W. Norton, 2006, excerpts.

Th 30 Sep: Hindu art and architecture

- Eck, Diana. "The Image of God." In *The Life of Hinduism*. University of California Press, 2006, pp. 42-52.

### **Unit 6: Art, Faith and Philosophy**

T 5 Oct: Islamic art

- Jale Nejdert Erzen, "Reading Mosques: Meaning and Architecture in Islam." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 69, no. 1 (2011) 125–131.

Th 7 Oct: Art of Imperial China

- Eric C. Mullis. "The Ethics of Confucian Artistry." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 1 (2007): 99-107.

### **Unit 7: European Art through the Ages**

T 12 Oct: The Middle Ages to the Renaissance

- Palmer, Ada. "Black Death, COVID, and Why We Keep Telling the Myth of a Renaissance Golden Age and Bad Middle Ages" *Ex Urbe*, 2020.

Th 14 Oct: Romanticism to Impressionism

- EH Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, Phaidon Press, 1950, excerpts.

→ Seminar: [How to read an artwork](#)

### **Unit 8: Picturing the Other**

T 19 Oct: Colonialism, Orientalism

- Nochlin, Linda. "The Imaginary Orient." In *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth Century Art and Society*, New York: Harper Row, 1989, 33-39.

Th 21 Oct: Images of race in North America

- Baigell, Matthew. "Territory, Race, Religion: Images of Manifest Destiny." *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, Vol. 4, No. ¾, 1990, 2-21.

Sun 24 Oct:

→ Close reading assignment due

## **Unit 9: Modernism and Tales of Progress**

T 26 Oct: Cubism and Futurism

- Errington, Shelly. "Three Ways to tell the history of (primitive) art." *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress*. University of California Press, 1981, 1-6, 12-17.

Th 28 Oct: Dadaism and Surrealism

- David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2004, excerpts.

## **Unit 10: Art and Revolution**

T 2 Nov: Harlem Renaissance

- Mitchell, Ernest Julius. "'Black Renaissance': A Brief History of the Concept." *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2010, 641-45, 660-61.

Th 4 Nov: Chinese Cultural Revolution

- *Art in Turmoil*, edited by Richard King. Hong Kong University Press, 2010, excerpts.

## **Unit 11: National Modernisms**

T 9 Nov: Mexican Muralism

- Joes Segal, "Between Nationalism and Communism: Diego Rivera and Mexican Muralism." In *Art and Politics: Between Purity and Propaganda*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016, 31-44.

Th 11 Nov: Post-Independence African art

Chika Okeke Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in 20<sup>th</sup> century Nigeria*, Duke University Press, 2015, excerpts.

## **Unit 12: Embodied Art**

T 16 Nov: Abstract Expressionism and Japanese Gutai

- Jackson Pollock, Interview with William Wright (1950), in *Art in Theory*, 574-77.
- Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* 51/8, (Dec.1952), 22-23, 48-50.

Th 18 Nov: Performance Art and Relational Aesthetics

## **Unit 13: How to write an art history paper**

T 23 Nov: Research workshop

→ [Seminar: developing a topic, forming a thesis, citing your sources](#)

25-28 Nov: Thanksgiving break

## **Unit 14: Image politics**

T 30 Nov: Pop art

- Andy Warhol: Interview with Gene Swenson

Th 2 Dec: Feminist art of the 1980s

- Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” In *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, Westview Press, 1988, excerpts.

→ Abstracts due

### **Unit 15: Institutional Anatomies**

T 7 Dec: Minimalism and the White Cube

- Birkett, Whitney B. “To Infinity and Beyond: A Critique of the Aesthetic White Cube,” 2012, excerpts.

Th 9 Dec: Institutional Critique

- Lisa Corrin, “Mining the Museum: An Installation Confronting History.” *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Volume 36 (4) – Dec 1, 1993, 302-313.

### **Unit 16: Reading/Finals week**

T 13 Dec: Open office hours

Th 16: Open office hours

→ Sunday 19 Dec: Final papers due

### **Course related notices**

#### **Note on online learning**

I expect there will be technology issues throughout the semester; if you can't access something, get cut off during Zooms etc., please email me to let me know. I'm also expecting that it will take some time for many of us to become familiar with the CUNY Commons– don't hesitate to reach out with questions!

#### **Note on research during the pandemic**

If there's one thing the past year has shown us, it's that circumstances will likely change over the course of the semester and we need to be flexible. Considering that physical access to libraries and other research facilities may still be difficult, this course is designed to emphasize participation and critical thinking on a week-by-week basis. Over the course of the semester, you will be introduced to online resources to engage with art history from home and conduct research for the final project. If you have concerns or any issues that arise during the semester due to the pandemic that are affecting your ability to participate, complete assignments, etc. please reach out to me.

Brooklyn College has made a number of resources available for students during the ongoing pandemic. These can be found here:

<https://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/about/offices/studentaffairs/health-wellness/coronavirus/student-resources.php>

## Note on writing and language

If you need help with your writing or learning, I would encourage you to work with a writing tutor. Especially if English is not your first, (or second, or third!) language, please know that I will not penalize grammatical or spelling errors in exams or papers. It is important that your ideas are clearly conveyed and your writing reflects a good understanding of the content. If you are worried about this, please let me know and we can discuss strategies for you to get the best out of assignments and convey your thoughts most effectively.

However, writing academic research papers is one of the learning objectives of this course and is a skill we will be working on throughout the semester. The assignments and workshops are therefore designed to provide you with tools to develop this skill. If you are dealing with any kind of hindrance to your writing, please try to communicate with me about it so that I can do my best to support you.

## Campus resources

Brooklyn College offers a number of services to support all students. free counseling, a center for disability services where students can get evaluated if they are not already diagnosed, a food pantry, immigration services as well as services for undocumented and DACA recipients, veteran and active military services, groups for Women, Black and Latino Males, and LGBTQ students, in addition to emergency financial assistance and a health clinic. All can be found on this page: <https://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/about/offices/studentaffairs/student-support-services.php>. You also have access to a Personal Counselling program, details of which can be found here: <https://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/about/offices/studentaffairs/student-support-services/isso/counseling.php>

## Gender and identity

It is CUNY policy, along with my own, to use proper names rather than gender binary Ms/Miss/Mrs/Mr. If you have a preferred name or form of address, please let me know and I will change the register. My own pronouns are She/Her.

## Sensitive content notice

Art History often presents us with images and histories that can be triggering, painful, or covered by religious taboo. If for whatever reason you have objections to looking at particular material (images of the nude body, for example) please understand that such images may come up for discussion and that if they are important to the syllabus, they cannot be censored from it. However, to the best of my ability, I will try to anticipate this, provide trigger warnings and create the space for us to discuss difficult material sensitively and openly as a group.

I also welcome feedback from students who identify with the material we discuss in this course and wish to help all of us understand it more richly, personally, and responsibly, (during and even after class). I will do my best to maintain an atmosphere of care and careful listening in this course and will appreciate all students doing the same.

**PLEASE NOTE: I reserve the right to change this syllabus throughout the semester. Please check the CUNY Commons website for updates.**