ART 428: 20th Century Art History

Instructor: Prof. Roann Barris
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Spring 2008, T Th 2-3:15, 208 Powell
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Description:
In the simplest terms, this course is an overview of the artistic developments of the 20th century. In less simple terms, this course is an examination of the often radical, seemingly unprecedented, and always exciting changes which have taken place in the nature of art, artistic materials and media, and artistic goals, and the attempt, as much as possible, to correlate these changes with social and historical developments in the 20th century. Because the notion of teaching courses in 20th century art came into being before the 20th century had ended, now that we live in the 21st century, it is next to impossible to cover the entire preceding century in one semester. And because there are precedents for many of the changes we will examine, and these precedents occurred in the 19th century, our course will begin with the late 19th century and cover as much of the 20th as possible, most likely ending somewhere in the 1970s with a brief, panoptic overview of the remaining portion of the century.

Textbooks
- other readings will be available in xerox form (two complete folders in 223 Powell and you can make your own copies) or on reserve in the library

A note on the readings: always read the work I put on the website – this is your textbook. Other readings listed for the unit will generally include more than you have to read. You should read enough to have a sense of the issues, debates and varying points of view.

Goals and Objectives:
- to develop and demonstrate visual and analytic familiarity with significant movements, artists, and ideas of the 20th century and the contributing influences of the 19th century
- to recognize the roles of gender, economic systems, and politics in both the creation and reception of art
- to engage in independent exploration of a provocative issue, artist or work of art in terms of style and ideas and present your findings in a coherent and convincing paper

Web Sources:
class web site: www.radford.edu/rbarris (Link to the page for ART428)
ARTSTOR: www.artstor.org [class folder: ART428 (Spring 2008); password: 20th.century.art.history]
TOPIC OUTLINE

I. Radical Revisions: an introduction to modernism
Key issues in art at the end of the 19th Century; overview/review of critical developments and key artists: impressionism/post-impressionism; the role of primitivism; the emphasis on specularity and autonomy

Unit one readings:
Barris, chapter one on the web site

II. Early 20th century developments: Poles of Abstraction
expressionistic, disintegrative and hallucinatory movements to consider: expressionism, cubism, futurism
themes: war, revolution and apocalypse in art, the failure of illusion, the role of popular culture

Unit two readings:
Barris, chapters 2 - 4: The decorative and the expressive; Cubism: Questioning language and representation; War, Movement and Revolution as the Subjects of Art: Futurism and German Expressionism
Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism,” in Art in Theory, 146-149.

CASE STUDY: Parade: the unity of symbolism, popular culture and cubism

III. Extreme or absolute abstraction
Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian
alternative spiritualities and the 4th dimension

Readings:
Barris, chapter 5, “Spiritual Utopianism” and the Purification of Art
X or R: Wassily Kandinsky, Excerpts from Concerning the Spiritual in Art, in Art in Theory, 82-89.

CASE STUDY 2: the continued response to a painting of “nothing”: the black square and its influence on contemporary art

IV. Order, Anti-Order, and the Art of Revolution
Russian constructivism: Art without objects?
From Dada to Surrealism and socialist Realism
other realisms of the period between the wars

Readings:
Barris, chapter 6, From Constructivism to Socialist Realism: Art and the Reification of Utopia
Risatti: introduction to part 2; chapter 6.
CASE STUDY 3: Magnanimous Cuckold and I Want a Child
CASE STUDY 4: the NY World’s Fair of 1939 and the German Exhibition of Degenerate Art

V. Existentialism, crisis and the avant-garde
negating the image, a dialogue with materials, and a search for origins
American abstract expressionism; the European existential artists

Readings:
Barris, chapter 7, Abstract Expressionism: Sources, Narratives, Style

VI: Responses to Abstract Expressionism
the return of the figure, the return of realism, and the much talked-about “end” of painting postmodernism and the “death” of the artist

Readings:
Barris, chapter 8, Postmodernism and Critical Theory.
Risatti: at least two chapters from the second half of the book (chapters 9 - 12).
Themes of Contemporary Art. [read all of it]

CASE STUDY 5: Marina Abramovich and the House with an Ocean View
CASE STUDY 6: Documenta 12 and the other contemporary art exhibitions

Requirements:

Attendance and Participation:
Attendance is expected and necessary since lectures will supplement but not duplicate reading material. Participation is also expected, and is more than simply showing up for class. Some of your assignments will be “negatively” graded, meaning that not doing them will result in the loss of “a/p” points.

Ideally, you take responsibility for attending class because you are adults and you are taking this class because you want to; you (and the state of VA) are paying for your education; and you are here to learn. Nonetheless, penalties for absences can sometimes be effective. Note that the attendance policy applies to everyone and does not assume that some reasons for being absent are better than others. You therefore do not need to bring me any documentation of reasons for missing class, and you do not need to contact me prior to an absence. With respect to attendance, everyone and all reasons are equal.

Your a/p pool consists of 100 points.
Attendance:
The first two absences will have no impact.
Absences numbering 3-4: deduction of 5 points
Absences numbering 5-6: deduction of 10 points
Absences numbering 7-8: deduction of 15 points
Absences numbering 9-10: deduction of 20 points
Absences numbering 11-12: deduction of 25 points
More than 12 absences: automatic F
Noticeable lateness, leaving early, or engaging in non-class related activities (ie, cell phone, text messaging, reading unrelated material: will count as 1 absence in your absence pool.

Class participation activities: each activity not completed will count as a deduction of 10 points.

**Graded Activities:**

**I. 3 identification quizzes:**
These will be short, probably lasting no longer than 20 minutes, and will consist of accurate identification of art works seen and discussed in class. They will also include short answer questions about the art works, requiring you to write one or two sentences in response to a question or identification of concepts and styles in works we haven’t discussed in class. (50 points each)

**II. 2 take-home essays:**
Being able to organize your thoughts and to develop a convincing argument related to a conceptual question is an important goal of college. Rather than asking you to do this in the form of essay questions on your exams, I will give you specific questions to answer at home. They will require you to make use of material from class as well as from the readings. Your answers should be written in either Microsoft Word or Word Perfect, should have a minimum word count of 1300 words (excluding your name; repetition of the question, if you do that; footnotes, if used; and headers, if used) and submitted to me as an attachment to an email. Although late work will be accepted, your grade will be lowered. (100 points each)

**III. Term Paper or Visual Essay (Book):**
I. **Term Paper:** The best approach to a term paper for this type of course is usually to choose an artist or specific work of art which interests you. Although I do not encourage biographical term papers, if you focus on a specific artist you can address a particular question or issue raised by that artist’s work. If you choose a particular work, the best approach is usually one which explores the various interpretations given that work and argues why one is more convincing or better than another. One thing you do not want to do is to choose a style or movement as a topic. You might, however, ask a question about a movement and use that as your means of examining a specific style. Since almost everyone in this class is an art major, I would not be surprised if you have already identified artists of particular personal interest. I am open to papers which involve the reconstruction of another artist’s work in order to understand the technique used by that artist, its implications for the course of 20th century art, and its implications for your own work. Note that doing this still requires a written research paper, but part of your research is experiential.

**Types of Papers:**
1. **The Descriptive or Expository paper:** this paper chooses a position which you will prove or substantiate. The typical topic for a paper like this is either an investigation of some theme in the work of the artist (ex.: Although the CoBrA artists did not personally experience the Holocaust, the theme of the Holocaust unites their works through style and content). The general outline for this type of paper is a statement of the thesis with some description of the subject, enumeration of the key points that are necessary to prove your thesis, followed by the development of these points. The body of the paper therefore develops and demonstrates the validity of each point. For a paper about a group of artists (such as the example I gave above), this would include examples of works of art for each point. If your topic had to do with the demonstration of a particular idea in the work of one artist, your points to be developed would show how this idea is found in a body of work. If your topic is the detailed analysis of a single work, your thesis statement becomes a statement about the interpretation of the painting and your points of proof become the
supporting "data" for your interpretation. This might be reference to earlier works as support for understanding a later work or it might be reference to interpretations of works which are similar to the one you have chosen.

2. Argumentative Paper: As the title suggests, this paper is based on your establishment of a point of view which is contrary to that of someone else. [Example: Prof. Smith (this could be a writer or a critic) suggested that Alex Katz's contributions to modernism are insignificant whereas I think they respond to a comparable development in fiction writing and are important because they demonstrate the widespread influence of a prevailing cultural trend in the 1960s.] In some respects, this paper uses a comparison format although you probably want to lay out the essence of each position at the beginning. The development of this paper then breaks down the two arguments into key points and shows how your position refutes the other position. To make this a convincing paper, you need to be able to support your own position with ideas from other sources (in other words, it's not enough to say: I think this is wrong).

3. Synthesis of the Expository paper and the Argumentative paper:
The argument is essentially taking place between two (or more) interpretations or analyses. Both positions need to be developed. The conclusion to the paper is your synthesis of the two arguments, either by rejecting one and accepting the other or by finding that each offers something valuable.

Papers should be 7-8 pages in length, not including pictures, bibliography, title page, or other attachments. Longer is acceptable; shorter is not. Because font sizes vary, the required word count is 2800 ± 100, not including notes, bibliography, title page, etc. Specific directions for general term paper formats and documentation using the Chicago style, which is required, are included on the web site.

You must use journal and book sources in your bibliography. Books that CANNOT be used as sources include: survey textbooks; art appreciation textbooks; encyclopedias; the Time Life series; books written for adolescents or high school students or younger. Web sites that CANNOT be used include: Wikipedia, Encarta, and About: art history. I will try to have a class activity related to judging sources before you’ve used them and correct note styles. It may take the form of a take-home a/p activity.

II. Visual Essay/Book Project
Instead of a traditional term paper, this project will result in the creation of your own book about the period of the class. It still requires research but instead of organizing your research to prove or disprove a thesis, you will use your research to supplement class material.

There are three ways to approach this. The first and most straightforward will be a strictly chronological approach, proceeding with styles in sequential fashion and making your focus an explication of the basic ideas of the style. If you choose this approach, you should include 6 - 8 styles or movements, and you should go out of your way to include works which are not covered in class. The risk of this approach is that you will end up with a shorter version of class material; the benefit of this approach is that it is logical and straightforward. This approach is most similar to the Image Notebooks some of you have made in a previous class.

The second approach, although still chronological, will use an overriding theme as the umbrella for organization. In other words, if your theme is women, for example, you would still proceed with styles in pretty much the same order but you would choose your representative art works and quotations on the basis of how they illuminate the question of
gender. You might focus on the presence or absence of women artists in each style, comparing their work to those of men. You still need to include 6 - 8 styles and but you would filter your selections through the umbrella of the female gender (or whatever theme you choose).

A third approach would be to look at the history of the 20th century through the eyes of an artist who interests you. This approach would require a brief analysis of the artist you choose in order to identify some general parameters for how this artist would look at the styles we're covering. This may be the most challenging approach but it might be very rewarding.

**Overview of what the Visual Essay must contain:**
1. Introductory essay for each “chapter” which encapsulates the key concerns and questions raised by the style or theme. You should have a rationale for which styles you include and which you exclude.
2. Three art works for each style or theme included in the book, with analysis of key points raised by the art work (why this art work and not another one for this theme). Each artwork should be identified completely, analyzed with respect to the style and the thematic question, if appropriate, should include a discussion of the artist’s reason (or someone else’s reason) for making it, the public and/or critical response to the work, and its meaning.
3. Each chapter should also include at least two quotations from primary sources which are relevant to the issues raised by the style or theme.

To ensure that you do well on the visual essay, you should: submit preliminary materials for each chapter, and meet with me frequently and show me your progress. I will keep a record of how often you do these things and if you do not keep up, your participation grades will be lowered. You may also find that your final result is not as good as you had hoped.

*Expectations for either project include completion of certain steps by a scheduled time, consultation with me, and commitment to this as a term project. Not meeting the required deadlines and steps will result in the loss of 10 points from the a/p pool for each step not completed on time.*

1. you must make an appointment to discuss your project with me before you complete it. Submit your plan to me on paper or by email with a suggested date and time for a meeting. [required: no later than Feb. 14]
2. for the term paper, prepare a preliminary bibliography with rationale for the selection of your sources and submit it for approval; for the book, in addition to your list of chapters, prepare a plan for one chapter, indicating images, sources for quotations, and other research which may be needed [required: Feb. 28]
3. term paper: read your sources and take notes. Prepare an outline or rough draft. Ask me to review it and give you feedback; for the book, draft the introduction to the book and complete plans for more than half of the remaining chapters. [required: Mar. 20]
4. write a better draft and ask someone in class to read it and critique it. Ask someone else to proof it for grammatical and spelling errors. [this is optional but strongly recommended]
5. turn in complete project on April 15. The best projects will be selected for presentation at the 1st Annual Art History symposium.

**Grading Criteria for both the term paper and the book:**
1) thoughtful and creative synthesis of material covered in class with research and original thinking
2) for book: if you choose a theme, you choose one which allows you to deal with the major concerns of the semester; if you do not choose a theme, your style analyses encapsulate key period concerns AND allow you to demonstrate your understanding of this material; for term paper: you choose a thesis which can be argued, and which does not have an obvious or easy answer, and you organize your paper to demonstrate the thesis

3) correct formatting used for given assignment; sources used are acceptable; indicated steps are followed in the course of completing the project

(200 points for the term project)

III. Final Exam: Part one (in class) will consist of identifications and questions of significance (as in the previous hourly exams). This part will last longer than the semester quizzes and will be comprehensive. You will be allowed to bring one 3X5 index card with you for the exam. Part two will be a take-home essay (to hand in at the time of the final). (150 points)

IV. Artstor Image Groups (a/p grade)
Artstor is our digital library. Although I will prepare some artstor image groups for you (in particular, the groups which will serve as illustrations to my textbook), you will be responsible for preparing your own study units. This will have three benefits: first, you will become familiar with searching techniques in artstor; second, you will be able to see for yourself the multiple views that are often included for a single work and decide which one is the most informative for your purposes. The third benefit is that you will be more actively involved in creating your own study groups.
I will give you image lists for each unit. Your job will be to find the images in Artstor, prepare an image group for that unit, and in the student commentary section of the image, you will be expected to write a paragraph statement of significance for 3 images in the unit. Since you will keep your units in your personal work folder included in the Art 428 folder, I will have access to it and I will be able to look at your units and commentary. For every unit which is not complete, you will lose 10 points from the a/p pool.

Using Artstor:
Access Artstor through the library database system or by typing in: http://www.artstor.org
The first time you use Artstor, you must either be on campus or go to the artstor site by using the Radford library link. Once you have a log-in and password, you can work from home for 4 months without working on a campus computer. If you have used artstor in another class, you are already registered and you do not need to do this again. However, you do need to register for this particular artstor folder.

2. Make sure you allow pop-ups for this site. Otherwise, it will not work.

3. Whenever you use Artstor, after the home page comes up:
   Click on the launch button on the right side of the Artstor home page: Search and Browse for Images. You can’t register until you do this. If your browser is IE7, you will get a message telling you that the page is trying to close. Let it close because a new window will open up.

4a. First time users: The first time you use it, you must register. Hit the register button (on the right side of the page you’re now on) and complete the form. Your Artstor user name and password must be the same as your Radford email address.
4b. Now that you’re registered, the next time you use it, instead of hitting the register button, you log in (the button is below the register button). You must always log in when you use it.
5. Register for the course. You only need to do this once. Go to the Tools menu on the top of the page, and choose: access shared folder. It will come up with your name entered for you and ask you for the password: 20th.century.art.history

This will give you access to the Group folder called Art 428 (Spring 2008). Any folders I create for this class will be included in this folder. There will also be a folder with your name on it. This is where you should save your image groups.

Class Web Site
This is not the same as Artstor. My home page is: http://www.radford.edu/rbarris
On that page, you will find a link to the ART428 “home” page. This is where I will put the chapters of our textbook. For those of you who have taken other classes with me, it will be a little different this semester. Rather than using these as summaries of key ideas after I’ve covered them in lecture, the web units will take the place of a textbook. You should therefore read it before I discuss it in class, and read it again later. In some cases the illustrations will be in the web unit but most of the time, the text will be an adobe formatted text and the figures will be in an artstor unit (identified as “chapter one figures,” and so on). Think of the web site as your primary textbook for the class.

Due Dates and Grading Chart:

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<th>Expectation</th>
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<th>Points (Ideal)</th>
<th>Points (Actual)</th>
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<td>attendance and participation activities</td>
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<td>quiz 1</td>
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<td>essay 1</td>
<td>FEB 7</td>
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<td>Project step 1</td>
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<td>CAA conference: no class; use time to prepare bibliographies</td>
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<td>Quiz 2</td>
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<td>Project Step 2</td>
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<td>Essay 2</td>
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<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
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<td>Project Step 3</td>
<td>MAR 20</td>
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<td>quiz 3</td>
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<td>project (final version)</td>
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If you’ve taken art history before (and you’ve taken it with me), the following suggestions will not be new. If you’re still fairly new to art history, you might want to try some of them.
HOW TO GET AN A (OR CLOSE TO IT)

1. Increase your participation: why?
   It keeps you awake so you take better notes.
   It makes the time go faster and it reinforces your learning.

2. Increase your participation: how?
   This may sound like strange advice, but try sitting in different seats. Although it helps me get to know you when you stay in the same seat, you may feel bolder in some parts of the room. Sitting up front may make the room seem smaller, and therefore less threatening. For other people, being in the back is less threatening. Try different seats until you find your best place. Reward yourself: make a deal with yourself. For every 5 times you ask or answer a question, you’ll buy yourself a creamy latte (or whatever you like).
   If answering questions scares you, ask them. Chances are, if you don’t know something, you’re not the only one.

3. Take good notes
   Why? No matter how much I put on the web site, it can’t take the place of your own notes. For one, your notes reflect your understanding. For another, writing something down helps you remember it. Unless you have perfect recall, you will never remember everything without taking notes.
   What should you write down?
   Enough of the artist’s name (abbreviate!) and the art work’s name to know what it is you’re writing about. You don’t need the entire name, since that will be on your handout or on the web site, and you can write faster if you use shortcuts.
   Key features of the art work: what do I indicate is unusual or novel? What does this art work mean to other people? How did people react to it when it was made? How do people react to it today? What comparisons do I make to it? If you don’t get all of this from the lecture, go back to your notes later and supplement them. Later, you might try to transfer this information to the images in your artstor image group.

4. Image Identification: Study techniques
   Step one: prioritize. Are all the images equally important? Probably not. So you need to decide which ones are the most likely candidates for an exam:
   Which ones did I spend a long time talking about? Which ones have I come back to more than once and used in comparisons? Which are covered in both the textbook and in class?
   Step two: group them. Were several paintings used to illustrate a common principle or theme? Put them together. Did we study the work of a single artist in detail? Learn his or her work as a unit. Did we cover three different periods? Group the works by period. It doesn’t matter what categories you make; what matters is that the category should help you make sense of the images.
   Step three: get to know the images. This involves several things. Just looking at it is a passive activity and probably won’t do the job. Look at it and describe it to yourself. What exactly is it a picture of? What colors did the artist use? What shapes dominate the picture? How would you describe it to someone who has never seen it? But in addition to visual familiarity, get to know the image as a character in history. What is the meaning of the picture? Why was it made? When was it made? What happened because it was made?
   Step four: test yourself.

5. Terminology and key ideas
   This should be pretty straightforward. Make a list of any terms and concepts which are new (not just to you but to the period as well), difficult, unfamiliar, used more than once. Find their definitions and find examples of art works which illustrate the meaning of the term.
Classroom Contract

1. Arrive on time.
The rules for class conduct are based on the principle of being considerate of others and creating an environment which facilitates learning. Arrive promptly and be prepared to begin class when it is time for class to start. Turn off your cell, put it away and do not send text messages during class. I occasionally allow laptops for upper level classes but I will ask you to sit up front and if there is any indication that you are using it for other purposes than class-related, you will not be allowed to use it again.

2. Disagreements and Personal Responsibility
We should expect to disagree on issues about art, especially if these issues concern aesthetic judgements and personal feelings. But art history is not based on individual responses and many of the questions we will pursue involve analytic and factual material. In such cases, there's only one correct answer. One of the goals in a class like this is learning to distinguish between those cases where answers can be more subjective and variable and when they cannot. If I disagree with you in class, it is either because the question called for a factual answer or because I want you to explore a question from other angles or points of view. Disagreement is not a value judgement; it is something we can all learn from.

3. Academic Honesty
Students are expected to abide by the Radford University Honor Code in this and all your classes. This includes the avoidance of plagiarism on all writing assignments.

4. Assistance for Students with Disabilities:
If you have a learning disability recognized by the Disabled Student Services Office of Radford University, you should advise me of the nature of your disability during the first week of the semester. Other problems: a lot of things happen to us and we can’t always cope with them as well as we’d like. You may not want to confide your personal life problems in me, but if something is impacting your performance, you should find a way to let me know - before the last week of the semester! At the same time, recognize that you have choices to make and a university education does make demands. Sometimes the right choice is knowing when you can’t do something.

5. Academic Freedom: from the Radford University Handbook:
Faculty and students “have the right to express their views without fear of censorship or penalty. Such freedom must apply both to teaching and research and includes not only the rights of a teacher in teaching but the rights of a student in learning.” This means at least two things: not only is it highly possible that we won’t believe the same things, but we can feel free to say it without penalty.

6. Read the syllabus. I will assume that you have read it. You should therefore not need to ask me questions about material in the syllabus. On the other hand, if you don’t understand some of the policies for this class, do not hesitate to ask me to explain.

I have read the classroom contract and syllabus and will do my best to uphold the expectations and procedures described in it. I understand that not doing so will negatively affect my grade.

Signature and date:__________________________________________________________

Keep this signed contract in your class folder or notebook.