

**Aesthetics (Philosophy 3366) Syllabus**  
**Instructor: S. West Gurley, Ph.D.**  
**CHSS 220, MW 3-4:20pm**

Credit hours: 3  
Office hours: MW, 10:30-Noon  
or by appointment

Office: CHSS 358  
email: [wgurley@hsu.edu](mailto:wgurley@hsu.edu)

**Course description:** An inquiry into the nature and meaning of art which will include analyses of aesthetic experience, the relation of art to value, and an examination of aesthetic theories concerning representation, form, expression, and truth. Through close readings of several philosophical, philosophically relevant literary texts, and artistic reflections, we will contemplate and discuss a number of perennial questions that continue to occupy philosophers and artists today. This course satisfies 3 semester hours of the Fine Arts requirement for the B.A. degree at SHSU.

**Official objective:** Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of the intellectual and cultural activity of philosophy.

**Additional objectives:** Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view; Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories.

**Required (!!!) Texts:** Note: I have indicated ISBN numbers so that you may purchase these texts via other reasonably priced avenues:

Stephen David Ross, Editor, *Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (SUNY Press, 1994) **ISBN: 9780791418529**

Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, Editors, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist's Writings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Univ. of California Press, 2012) **ISBN: 9780520257184**

Other texts will be made available through "Course Documents" on the Blackboard course page from time to time.

**This is a "W" course, which means that at least fifty percent (50%) of the final grade will derive from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives.**

**Course Requirements and Grading:** The most thoroughgoing way to introduce Philosophy of Art and Beauty is to actually do rather than merely to theorize about the particular issues that confront philosophers of art and artists themselves. But, in order to get to the introduction, we will first have to engage in some situating ourselves deep into the particular ways of seeing the world that served as the origin of art. This will involve some consideration of why art became identified as a problem in Ancient times. In keeping with the centuries old practice of doing philosophy, our class periods will consist of some brief introductory comments that should serve as a "problem to consider" and as a frame for the discussion that will follow. These comments will relate to the readings assigned for that day in class. You will be expected to engage actively in the discussion—which means that you

will come to class prepared to work through the deeper issues presented by the assignments for the week, you will bring the relevant texts with you to class, you will disengage and put away any electronic devices that may serve to distract you, and you will engage thoughtfully and respectfully in discussion. To these ends, your fullest possible attention will be required. You are encouraged (even expected) to get lost in the assigned texts: read them multiple times, make notes, question what the works wants us to think about, try to understand why someone (me?) would want us to think about these things—ALL these directives will prepare you to engage legitimately in the class discussion. Relevant contributions will count toward your attentiveness and participation grade.

Two prompted essays will be assigned as indicated in the schedule below. Prompts will be delivered at least one week prior to the due date. The **official** policy is that no late work will be accepted. If you approach me with a defensible reason for not being able to comply with the deadline and I approve, then late penalties of one grade increment per day late will be deducted from the base grade earned.

In addition to the essays, you will be required to submit reflections covering each weekly topic heading. These informal papers will be submitted to the Blackboard Journal thread for each session heading. You should think of these exercises as an opportunity to work through some challenging or provocative idea or constellation of ideas under discussion. These exercises may be as long as you'd like, though 500 words is a good goal. They are informal and will not be graded individually. I will read your journal entries every couple of weeks and provide feedback that should serve to assist you in writing your prompted essays. As another part of your attentiveness and participation grade, you will perform a Maintenance Project, a performance art project. I will provide a description of this project to you and you will report it on your journal page.

Finally, there will be a comprehensive final essay exam. Study questions from which the exam will be derived will be distributed two weeks in advance of the exam. No make-up exam will be offered. Familiarize yourself with the date and time of the exam and be there.

The following distribution of credit will be used in calculating your final grade:

Attentiveness* and participation	25%
Combined average of essay exams	50%
Final essay exam	25%

*\*Nota bene:* I use the word *attentiveness* in contrast to the word *attendance* so as to distinguish prepared and visible engagement in class discussion from mere bodily presence in class. It will not be sufficient to physically make an appearance in order to earn attentiveness credit. In keeping with this idea: **ALL electronic devices (cell phones, computers, etc.) must be turned off and put out of sight while in class.**

### **Departmental Grade Policy:**

As of the fall semester 2009, only grades of C or better will be counted toward the student's major in Psychology and Philosophy.

**Institutional policies** and requirements regarding Q-drops, dates of religious observance, academic dishonesty, disabilities accommodations, etc., may be found at the following link: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/> Please familiarize yourself with the policies.

**One note about the way I approach instances of academic dishonesty:** I will not assign a grade to work that is not yours. If you consult a source, then you must document it; but you also should not use someone else's understanding of things as a substitute for your own. In this class, you will be expected to confront issues related to art and the philosophy of art directly.

**Schedule of Readings and Assignments (\*subject to modification at Instructor's whim and caprice):**

Week One (Wednesday, 23 August): Course introduction. Post initial journal entries.

Week Two (28-30 August): Historical background: Plato and the danger of art. Read Ross, pp. 1-63.

Week Three (6 September): More historical background: Aristotle and the attempt to redeem the artist. Read Ross, pp. 65-76.

Week Four (11-13 September): More historical background: Hume and the question of a standard of taste. Kant and the idea that Beauty is not relative, the distinction between the Beautiful and the Sublime. Read Ross, pp. 77-142. Read Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, and Walter De Maria in Stiles, pp. 222-7, 243-4, and 629-633.

Week Five (18-20 September): More historical background: Hegel and the attempt to claim a history for art. Nietzsche and the pesky chaotic side of our nature that will not be ignored. Read Ross, pp. 143-175. Read Alice Neel and Eric Fischl, in Stiles, pp. 248-250 and 290-291.

Week Six (25-27 September): What role has truth to play? And what is "truth" anyway? Tolstoy and Heidegger. Read Ross, pp. 177-181 and 253-280. Read Piero Manzoni and Jenny Savile in Stiles, pp. 109-110 and 316-320. **First essay falls due.**

Week Seven (2-4 Oct.): More about truth and perception: Heidegger continued and Merleau-Ponty. Read Ross, pp. 253-298. Read Chillida and Christo in Stiles, pp. 611-623.

Week Eight (9-11 October): Meaning and Truth and Conditions for the (Im)Possibility of it all: Pepper, Hirsh, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Derrida. Read Ross, pp. 325-437. Screening of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*.

Week Nine (16-18 October): Continue with Ricoeur and Derrida. Ross, pp. 385-437. Read Julian Schnabel and Georges Mathieu in Stiles, pp. 281-283 and 824-827.

Week Ten (23-25 October): Moving towards the Political and Social underpinnings of Art: Foucault and Benjamin. Read Ross, pp. 439-454 and 525-538. [Artist's statements to be determined]

Week Eleven (30 October-1 November): But first, an adventure in Psychoanalysis: Freud, Jung, and Vygotsky. Read Ross, pp. 499-523. [Artists to be determined]

Week Twelve (6-8 November): Cultural and Marxist Critique: Adorno and Marcuse. Read Ross, pp. 539-557. [Artists to be determined]. **Second essay falls due.**

Week Thirteen (13-15 November): Postmodernism and Feminist Critique: Lyotard, Göttnner-Abendroth, Irigaray, and Owens. Read Ross, pp. 559-598. [Artists to be determined]. Screening of *Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present*.

Week Fourteen (20 November): Feminist Critique continued. [Artists to be determined].

Week Fifteen (27-29 November): Multicultural Theory: Mudimbe, Trinh Minh-Ha, Clifford, and Fry and Willis. Read Ross, pp. 599-654. [Artists to be determined].

Week Sixteen: **Final Exam administered in class, 6 December, 5-7pm. Bring two Blue Books and something to write with. This is a closed note, closed book essay exam.**