

Philosophy of Art

Philosophy 349

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Great artists probe the central issues of the human condition, yet in a different way than do philosophers, psychologists, and political scientists. How does art do what it does—whether it be a piece of music you play over and over again, a novel you hate to see end, or a movie that makes you laugh and cry? And what is art? Can it be defined? What is the difference between good, mediocre, and incompetent art? Or are no such distinctions valid? Is it possible to say of a given piece of art, “This is great art, but I don't like it”?

In this course we will raise these and other philosophical questions about art, trying to understand the nature of an enterprise that ranges from music to sculpture to dance to painting to poetry to motion pictures:

- Metaphysics: What *is* art?
- Human nature: Why do humans *make* and *experience* art?
- Epistemology: How do I *know* what an art work *means*?
- Ethics: What makes art *good* or *bad*?
- Culture and politics: What *enables* or *disables* artistic development?

In investigating those questions, we will read reflections on art by philosophers, artists, and other commentators.

Course Resources

- John Gillis's Artgrok online art analysis site: <http://artgrok.org/>.
- Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, editors. *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger* (<http://www.amazon.com/Philosophies-Art-Beauty-Aesthetics-Heidegger/dp/0226348121>).
- Michael Newberry's online art tutorials site: <http://michaelnewberry.com/mentor/tut.html>.
- Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto* (<http://www.amazon.com/Romantic-Manifesto-Ayn-Rand/dp/0451149165/>).
- Plus some handout [supplements](#) and art images at <http://www.stephenhicks.org/art-images/>.

Assignments and Grading

First test	10
Second test	10
General participation	10
Socratic participation	20
Essay on TBA	20
Final exam	30
	100%

On the Essay

We will decide the topic by Spring Break.

Email your essay as a Word document to SHicks@Rockford.edu. Put your last name in the Word document name—e.g., “Michelangelo-Phil-of-Art-essay.doc.”

On the Socratic Participation

For our Tuesday meetings, I will lead the sessions, but my contribution to our Thursday meetings will be only to facilitate the discussions. Your contribution will be to bring the questions and ideas and to sort them out to your satisfaction.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

[HK] = *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*

[AR] = *Romantic Manifesto*

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1 Jan 17	Introduction to the course	Reading: Plato [HK]
2 Jan 24	Experiencing art philosophically. Reading and viewing: Newberry tutorials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Art Tutorial: Anatomy of Light” [http://michaelnewberry.com/mentor/Tutorial/light/light.html] ▪ “Transparency - A Key to Spatial Depth in Painting, Part 1, Black/White” [http://michaelnewberry.com/mentor/Tutorial/trans/trans.html] ▪ “Composition in One Easy Lesson” [http://michaelnewberry.com/mentor/Tutorial/comp/comp.html] Gillis, “About Artgrok” [http://artgrok.org/about-artgrok]	Reading: Plato [HK]

3 Jan 31	<p>Experiencing art philosophically.</p> <p>Reading and viewing:</p> <p>Newberry tutorials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Seek the Big Form: Study Sculpture” [http://michaelnewberry.com/mentor/Tutorial/bigform/bigform.html] ▪ “Innovation Series: Polyclitus' Canon of Proportions” [http://michaelnewberry.com/mentor/Tutorial/prop/prop.html] ▪ “Abstraction in Representational Art” [http://michaelnewberry.com/mentor/Tutorial/abstract/abstract.html] <p>Gillis, Artgrok: Your choice of items in the “Thematic Arts” quadrant [http://artgrok.org/].</p>	Reading: Plato [HK]
4 Feb 7	<p>Classical Greek culture and art</p> <p>Reading and viewing: Metropolitan Museum of Art, “The Art of Classical Greece (ca. 480–323 B.C.)” [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tacg/hd_tacg.htm]</p> <p>“Ancient Greek Art” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_art]</p> <p>Images at http://www.stephenhicks.org/art-images/.</p>	Reading: Aristotle [HK]
5 Feb 14	<p>Classical Greek culture and art</p> <p>Reading and viewing: “Classical Greece” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Greece]</p> <p>Images at http://www.stephenhicks.org/art-images/.</p>	Reading: Aristotle [HK]
6 Feb 21	<p>First test</p>	Reading: Aristotle [HK]
7 Feb 28	<p>Renaissance Italian culture and art</p> <p>Reading and viewing: Renaissance Painting [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_painting]</p> <p>Images at http://www.stephenhicks.org/art-images/.</p>	Reading: Kant [HK]
8 Mar 6	<p>Spring Break</p>	Spring Break
9 Mar 13	<p>Renaissance Italian culture and art</p> <p>Reading and viewing: “Italian Renaissance” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Renaissance]</p> <p>Images at http://www.stephenhicks.org/art-images/.</p>	Reading: Kant [HK] and Sections 23, 26, and 28 of <i>Critique of Judgment</i> [Handout]

10 Mar 20	The Dutch Golden Age culture and art Reading and viewing: Dutch Golden Age Painting [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_Golden_Age_painti ng] Images at http://www.stephenhicks.org/art-images/ .	Independent reading [SH travel]
11 Mar 27	The Dutch Golden Age culture and art Reading and viewing: Dutch Golden Age [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_Golden_Age] Images at http://www.stephenhicks.org/art-images/ .	Reading: Nietzsche [HK] and Schopenhauer quotations [Handout]
12 Apr 3	Second test [SH travel]	Reading: Nietzsche [HK] and Section 18 of Birth of Tragedy [Handout]
13 Apr 10	Romantic modernism in France Reading and viewing: 19 th -century French Art [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/19th-century_French_art] Images at http://www.stephenhicks.org/art-images/ .	Independent reading [SH travel]
14 Apr 17	Romantic modernism in France Reading and viewing: “Age of Enlightenment” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment] Images at http://www.stephenhicks.org/art-images/ .	Reading: Rand, “The Psycho-epistemology of Art” and “Philosophy and Sense of Life” [AR]
15 Apr 24	Modernism and postmodernism in philosophy and art Reading and viewing: “Why Art became Ugly: From Modern to Postmodern Art” [http://www.atlassociety.org/why_art_became_ugly] Images at http://www.stephenhicks.org/art-images/ .	Reading: Rand “Art and Sense of Life” and “Art and Cognition” [AR]
16 May 1	Essay due.	Conclusions and wrap-up
17 May 8	Final exam: Tuesday, May 8, 8 a.m.	

A copy of this syllabus and schedule can also be found online at www.StephenHicks.org.
For Honor Code and Disability issues, consult the College’s website.