

Art 345: Contemporary Art
Rhodes College, Spring 2006
417 Clough, TTh: 3:30-4:45
CRN: 20129

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Office Hours: MWF:
1:00-3:00, and by
appointment.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND DESCRIPTION

The objectives of the course are as follows: (1) to enhance student knowledge of the major works, artists, and movements of western art since 1968; (2) to integrate these works of art within the broader social and intellectual history of the period; and (3) to help students develop their skills in visual analysis, image identification, and historical interpretation.

Among the issues we will examine are the following: the revival of political art in the late 1960s; the differences between modernism and postmodernism; the emergence of feminist strategies in representation; the rejection of the art object, and of the culture industry; the ongoing dialogue between modern art and mass culture; the return of history painting in the early 1980s; and the emergence of different voices in the art world in the past generation.

Art 345 is the final course in a four-part sequence designed to trace the development of the visual arts in the west since the eighteenth century. Though the emphasis of the course is on the visual arts, the ideas examined are applicable to courses covering the same chronological period in film studies, history, languages, and philosophy. This is an intermediate level course with no prerequisites. It satisfies the fine arts requirement and may be counted toward the American Studies minor. Art 345 is a lecture course with discussion based on a variety of readings.

TEXTBOOKS

Barnet, Sylvan. *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, 8th edition. New York: Longman, 2005.

Lippard, Lucy. *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art*. New York: The New Press, 1995.

Wallis, Brian, ed. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984.

Wallis, Brian, Marianne Weems and Philip Yenawine, eds. *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.

Additional readings on reserve in the library.

REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and participation in lectures, discussions, and field trips. Students are allowed no more than two unexcused absences. With each additional class missed, your grade will drop by 3.3% (for example, from a B to a B-).

Readings on the day they are assigned.

With each reading, you should be prepared to answer the following three questions:

1. What is the author's argument?
2. What is the author's evidence?
3. How is the essay organized?

I will randomly call on a student to lead discussion on a particular reading. Be prepared.

Two examinations involving:

Slide comparisons (identification, iconography, formal vocabulary, historical context, art historical significance).

Unknowns.

Students are responsible for all material presented in class and in the readings. Slides for identification and discussion will, however, be selected from those artists and images analyzed at length in class. The second examination is cumulative, although the emphasis will be on material covered since the first examination.

Makeup examinations are rarely given.

Four papers.

A short visual analysis of one work of art. No more than two pages in length.

A one-page proposal presenting the question you wish to pursue in your research paper, as well as your preliminary answer to that question (your thesis). Attach a copy of your working bibliography to the proposal. This proposal should grow from your visual analysis.

A ten-page research paper incorporating a revised draft of your visual analysis, in which you will examine the meaning of the work in relation to broader historical, intellectual, and social issues. In addition to the ten pages of text, your paper must include endnotes, a full bibliography, a list of illustrations, and photocopies of any work of art you discuss.

A revision of your third writing assignment. When you submit this paper, you must also include the proposal and ten-page draft that contain my comments.

Papers must be typed, double-spaced, numbered, and written according to the guidelines of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

Sylvan Barnet's book, *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, is your source for proper citation, organization, research (archival, library, on line), appropriate voice, and any other questions about writing the history of art.

Late papers are not accepted.

Papers receiving a grade of D or F will be returned for revision.

Failure to complete any graded assignment will result in a failing grade for the course.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

Your first writing assignment in this class is to produce a two-page visual analysis of one work of art.

As the art historian Sylvan Barnet notes, visual analysis is not the same thing as description. Whereas a description answers the question, "What does x look like?," a visual analysis answers the somewhat awkward question, "How does x look?," or better yet, "How does x mean?" To answer this question, you will have to resort to some description, but keep in mind that you must subordinate this to your analysis, which helps explain how and to what end your subject looks the way it does. Think of your essay as an argument that you wish to win. To do this you must advance a thesis and defend it.

Because this assignment deals with questions of composition, you will need to pay attention to visual form. This includes line, color, value, shape, texture, virtual space, and handling of paint (facture). Depending on your subject, you may need to address only some of these terms. You will find that careful attention to the art object will take time, and that you will see more the longer you look. If it helps, turn a reproduction of your subject upside down, or trace over it on tracing paper or clear plastic. Even sketching a copy of the work will help you move beyond description into analysis.

Keep in mind that this is not a research paper. You do not need to track visual or literary sources, nor do you need to worry about notes. All of your attention should be on the composition of the work because this is your primary evidence, the foundation that you will build upon for your research paper.

When you turn in your paper, please append a good color photocopy of the work. If you cannot secure a color photocopy, hand in the book in which you found your reproduction.

One final thought: looking is the process of visual discovery. What did you find?

PROPOSAL

The second part of your writing assignment is a one-page proposal in which you will present a brief overview of your proposed research on the same work of art used for the visual analysis. Here you should pose the question or questions you will pursue at greater length in your research paper. You must provide a thesis, a statement of the methodology you will use, and some indication of why your topic is important for our

understanding of contemporary art. With this assignment you must turn in a bibliography of books and articles you plan to use in your research.

RESEARCH PAPER

The third and fourth part of your writing assignment for this course is a ten-page, typed, double-spaced research paper incorporating a revised draft of your visual analysis. You must integrate this image with the broader social, political, cultural, and intellectual environment within which it was produced. Whereas the assignment for your first paper was to analyze an image visually, you should now place that image in a broader context. This means addressing the issues of subject matter, of expressive content (form and subject matter combined), and, most importantly, of meaning.

HONOR CODE

Remember that whenever you use another person's ideas or words, you must acknowledge that they belong to that person. If you choose to quote someone (I would advise only quoting primary sources, such as an artist's or critic's writings), place his or her words in "quotation marks" and note the exact source, including author's name, title of book or article, place of publication, date, and page number. Whenever you use another person's ideas, you must also acknowledge this in the same way. If you paraphrase another person's writing without proper acknowledgment, for instance by copying the structure and organization of an essay or an entry in an encyclopedia, this too is an act of plagiarism. No matter how much you rewrite the original source, downloading a paper from the internet (or any other form of cutting and pasting), is also plagiarism. Most of the recent cases before the Honor Council have involved plagiarism. According to the Rhodes College Student Handbook "ignorance is not an excuse for these violations."¹ If you are unclear about plagiarism, please see me before you turn in the paper.

GRADING OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Your grade for each assignment will depend on several factors. First, you must demonstrate sufficient mastery of the terms and ideas we have discussed in class and in our readings. To do this, you must apply these terms correctly to the work you choose to analyze. Second, the skill with which you organize and write your essay will affect your grade. I expect clearly and concisely written papers in which you convey your passion for your chosen subject. Do not turn in your first or second draft. Allow yourself enough time to edit what you have written. Remember that the writing assignments are your only chance to turn in polished work for this course. Take advantage of this opportunity.

¹ Rhodes College Student Handbook 2005-2006.

GRADING

Grading is designed to measure the success of each student's understanding and assimilation of the materials presented in the course. I grade for improvement.

Each exam is worth 20% of your final grade. The combined paper assignments are worth 50% (visual analysis 10%, proposal 5%, combined average of research papers 35%), and class participation 10%.

WRITING

S.Y.A.D. Writing takes time.

Take NOTES as you conduct your research. Remember to record accurately your sources: author, title, date, place of publication, and page numbers.

DOUBLE CHECK quotations for accuracy. You probably made a mistake in writing down the quote.

Make an OUTLINE before you start writing.

INTRODUCTION. Set up your argument in your first paragraph. What is your thesis? What is the tone you wish to project?

DOCUMENTATION. In the writing of art history, you must work with primary materials. Your most important evidence is the work of art (or works of art). Primary materials also include statements by the artist, preliminary studies, letters and diary entries. Many of these are already in published form. You can also find them in archives, such as the Archives of American Art. Reviews from the artist's life may count as primary evidence too. Historical studies are not primary evidence.

VOICE. Do not let other scholars speak for you. This means limiting how much you quote from secondary sources. If I want to know what Meyer Schapiro has to say about modernism, I will read his work.

TRANSITIONS. How do you get from one paragraph to the next?

TITLES of works of art are either underlined or *italicized*. Do not use "quotation marks" for titles.

NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY should follow the format outlined in the CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE. All of this material is available for ready reference in Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, which you are required to purchase for this course.

Avoid OVERSTATEMENT, GENERALIZATION, and VAGUE language.

REPETITION: cut it out. In a paper of less than twenty pages, you do not need to repeat things. When I get to the point that I cannot remember what a student said a page or two previously, I will retire. This will be long after you graduate.

CONCLUSIONS ARE NOT SUMMARIES. In this section of your paper you should point out what contribution your paper has made to the field of art history. Even at this stage of your training you should think about how your work will shape the field.

REVISION. Your paper will get better the more you revise.

STYLE. Pay attention to the craft of writing. Your goal, in relation to your readers, is to put a glide in their stride and a dip in their hip so they'll climb on board your rocket ship.

WEEK 1

January 12 Introduction: 1968.

WEEK 2

January 17 Modern or Not.
Reading: Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood* (on reserve).

January 19 Art and politics in the late 1960s.

WEEK 3

January 24 Conceptual.

VISUAL ANALYSIS TOPIC DUE.

January 26 Process and Earth.
Reading: Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," in *The Writings of Robert Smithson* (on reserve).

WEEK 4

January 31 Performance in the 1970s.
Reading: Lucy Lippard, "Making Up: Role-Playing and Transformation in Women's Art" and "Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth . . ." in *The Pink Glass Swan*.

February 2 Feminist art in the 1970s.
Reading: Lucy Lippard, "Sexual Politics: Art Style," and "The L.A. Woman's Building," in *The Pink Glass Swan*.

VISUAL ANALYSIS DUE.

WEEK 5

February 7 Feminist art in the 1970s: Looking and Representation.
Reading: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Art After Modernism*.

February 9 Photorealism and painting in the seventies.

ESSAY QUIZ.

WEEK 6

February 14 Sculpture in the expanded field.
Reading: Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (on reserve).

February 16 Sculpture in public places.

PROPOSAL DUE.

WEEK 7

February 21 Pattern and decoration, craft, and "low art."
Reading: Lucy Lippard, "Making Something from Nothing (Toward a Definition of Women's 'Hobby Art')" and "Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s" in *The Pink Glass Swan*.

February 23 Review.

WEEK 8

February 28 EXAMINATION.

March 2 Photography and Postmodernism.
Reading: Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodern Repetition," and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Photography After Art Photography," in *Art After Modernism*.

WEEK 9

March 7 Death of the Author.
Reading: Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Art After Modernism*.

March 9 Critics and criticism.
Reading: Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," in *Art After Modernism*.

WEEK 10

March 21 The Return of Painting, ca. 1980.

ROLLING DEADLINE FOR RESEARCH PAPERS BEGINS.

March 23 The Return of Pop art.

WEEK 11

March 28 Difference.
Reading: Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality," in *Art After Modernism*.

March 30 Mapplethorpe and the politics of difference.
Reading: Carole Vance, "The War on Culture," and Lewis Hyde, "The Children of John Adams: A Historical View of the Fight Over Arts Funding," in *Art Matters*.

WEEK 12

April 4 Cultural Anxiety in the early 1990s.
Reading: Philip Yenawine, "Introduction," Lucy Lippard, "Too Public? Forget it," and David Dietcher, "What Does Silence Equal Now?" in *Art Matters*.

April 6 Picturing difference.
Reading: Coco Fusco, "Passionate Irreverence: the Cultural Politics of Identity" and David Wojnarowicz, "Post Cards from America: X-rays from Hell," in *Art Matters*.

WEEK 13

April 11 Color and/in art, Part I: Reading Mapplethorpe.
Reading: Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," in *Art Matters*.

April 13 Easter Recess.

WEEK 14

April 18 Color and/in art, Part II: Oppositional Voices.

April 20 Art After Theory.

WEEK 15

April 25 In the Present Moment.

RESEARCH PAPERS DUE.

April 27 Review.

May 6 EXAMINATION, Saturday, 5:30 p.m., 417 Clough.