AAD 251: Arts & Visual Literacy

COURSE SYLLABUS

We will attempt to explore hidden assumptions and preconceptions about the visual arts, and lead class participants to more fully experience and interpret visual experience and visual culture. The arts (whatever that means—we will investigate possibilities) rooted in concepts of visual design, will provide a conceptual framework for wider explorations. The goal is to introduce students to a set of conceptual skills for actively shaping and creating meanings in their visual experience, and discovering how other humans express their experience and identity through visual means. The ultimate grounding is not in what we see/look at, but in who we are, what it is to be a Viewer or Maker of visual experience.

We will explore visual culture, look at examples of visual Places, Objects, and Events (POEs—every POE tells a story...many stories, actually), and we will practice interpreting visual experiences (POEs themselves, individual and cultural influences on experience). Students will practice noticing, analyzing and interpreting both 2-D and 3-D worlds of experience, from photos on a screen to physical objects in their (your) everyday world. Along the way we will explore the nature of being a Viewer or Maker of visual experience. We will begin with the commonalities we share as humans (senses, needs, motives, personality, intelligences—the plural of intelligences” is intentional—and more), moving ever outward from self to a plurality of cultural structures and points-of-view. Through an investigation of images and objects—from cave paintings, to consumer products, to the fine arts—this class will examine design and interpretation: structure and meaning, symbols and metaphor, contexts, histories, narrative, models for interpreting, child development & image-making, varieties & definitions of “art” and their many uses, and other aspects of the creation and interpretation of visual culture. Aspects of definition and expectation will also be considered. In short, we will examine: Viewers and Makers, POEs (including Places, Objects, and visual Events), the Context of viewing, History, and the notion of art/Art itself (from historical, cultural, and individual perspectives).

We will also consider/wonder whose voices shape helps determine our interpretations of our visual experiences. We are, as individuals, and members of cultures, with potentially widely disparate points-of-view, here, at this image, this POE. What is it to me? What does it mean to others (gender, race, ethnicity, religion...all the many things that divide us as human beings). What did it mean to the person who created it? How might experience of a POE unite us as human beings in this world of physical existence, verbal/mental constructs, virtual realities, existential/spiritual beliefs...? How is our humanity, in all its rich and glorious diversity, from the individual to the collective voice, identity, issues of society and culture, expressed and encountered through our visual experience of the world?

Objectives:

1) articulate individual and shared beliefs about visual arts and other visual phenomena;
2) identify and articulate a variety of ideas that shape individual and shared definitions of art and other objects of visual experience;

3) identify multiple social, cultural, psychological, and aesthetic contexts that shape the meanings of visual phenomena;

4) demonstrate ability to understand visual phenomena using interpretation models presented in the course;

5) explore the richness of human diversity and the opportunities and challenges of life in a multicultural society (Multicultural Requirement);

6) gain scholarly insight into the construction of collective identities, the emergence of representative voices from varying social and cultural standpoints, and the effects of prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination (Category B: Identity, Pluralism, and Tolerance); this may include ethnicities, classes, genders, religions, sexual orientations, or other groups whose experiences contribute to cultural pluralism.

Instructional approaches to achieve course Objectives are intended to promote learning as an enjoyable experience while simultaneously challenging students to engage with the material in a critical and rigorous way.

**READINGS:**

No physical textbook is required. Information will be provided on-line including Blackboard and Web sites for further required reading (think of it as an on-line “textbook”).

**By the time of the Midterm you should have finished** the Introduction to Arts and Visual Literacy, Viewer & Maker, and POEs: Places, Objects, and Events course documents:

- **Introduction to Arts and Visual Literacy**
- **Viewer & Maker**
  - Child Development with Images
  - Human Senses
  - Human Intelligence Domains
  - Human Emotions
  - Needs and Social Motives
  - Personality
  - Biases
- **POEs: Places, Objects, and Events**
  - Design as Text
  - The Elements and Principles of Design
  - Practice with the Elements and Principles of Design
  - Dervish Video [Optional]
Image Styles
Categories of Visual Arts
Visual Tactics and Strategies
Moving Pictures
Mondrian Series
Chair Series
Lamp Series
Architecture, Landscape, and Space
Principles of Landscape Design

> READINGS after the Midterm (students will be able to make some selections from below):

✦ The Question of art / Art
  ✦ Where is the art-ness in art?
  ✦ Paintings are art? What are paintings?
  ✦ An Animal Did That: Paintings by Animals
  ✦ History and art
  ✦ Purposes for Designed Images and Objects
  ✦ Philosophical Systems
    ✦ Preface to the Philosophical Systems
    ✦ Form – Clive Bell
    ✦ Art as Expressive Emotion
    ✦ Life – John Dewey
    ✦ Social System – The Institutional Theory of Art
    ✦ A Conservative View of Aesthetics – Michelle Marder Kahmi
    ✦ The Art Instinct – Denis Dutton
  ✦ Creativity [if believe this is essential for “art” – be sure to see / reference]
  ✦ Skill [if believe this is essential for “art” – be sure to see / reference]
  ✦ Optional Readings
    ✦ Marder Kahmi on Fine Art
    ✦ The Institutional Theory of Art – Supplemental
    ✦ 8 Common Art Myths
    ✦ An Artworld Myth: Rudolf Schwarzkogler
    ✦ Visual Arts, a Non-“Fine” Example: Food Styling
    ✦ Considering Socks...Visual Arts and Education: Problems in Definition
    ✦ A Question of art / Art (Supplemental Resource)
    ✦ Core Concepts in Understanding the Human Experience

✦ Contexts and Histories
✦ Aesthetic Systems:
  • Aboriginal Aesthetics
  • African Aesthetics (Sub-Saharan)
  • Balinese Aesthetics
  • Black and Post-Black Aesthetics
  • Chinese Aesthetics (traditional)
  • Christian Aesthetics
  • Feminist Aesthetics
  • Indian Aesthetics
Islamic Aesthetics
Japanese Aesthetics

Symbolism - Introduction
Symbolic Systems
- 17th C. Dutch Still-life Codes
- Alternative Religion Symbols
- Christian Symbolism
- Color Symbolism
- Death Symbolism
- First Nations Symbolism
- Flower and Plant Symbolism
- Gender-related Symbolism
- Hate Symbolism
- Heraldric Symbolism
- Kwanzaa Symbolism
- Love Symbolism
- Mystical and Religious Symbols
  - Optional: Axioms for Reading the Landscape
  - Optional: Front Yard Devotions
  - Optional: A Semiotic Analysis of 3 Beer Ads
  - Optional: Modern Memorial

Interpretational Perspectives (critical approaches)
- History of Images & Design
- Environmental
- Functionalist
- Formalist
- Behaviorist
- Psychological and Philosophical
- Gender and Sexual-orientation
- Community
- Social History
- Socio-cultural
- The Psychological and Philosophical Perspective (a resource)
- Non-Representationalism: Context and Symbol
- Histories & POEs: a door lock, the Mona Lisa, and more
- Context: Frames and Framing

Readings: No physical textbook is required. Information will be provided on-line including Blackboard and Web sites for further required reading (think of it as an on-line “textbook”).

Requirements:
- Web-based readings and research.
- Three short written Exercises.
- One longer Exercise exploring ideas about “art.” Individual & Group blog options.
- Midterm paper.
- Final paper.