Course description

The proposed Course is set on a disciplinary border that highlights sociological discourses about specific Western phenomena of artistic creativity and their uses and reception. The time-span under scrutiny broadly extends from the mid-19th century to the post-WW2 years, with occasional forays into the present by using sources also gathered from the field of anthropology, art history and art criticism.

Different topics are interwoven within the Course. Firstly, we will discuss the complex cultural processes linking the visual arts and society in Western modernity. In such an endeavor we will adopt the assumption that artistic expressions are the result of those ongoing processes of ‘social construction’ that take place between artists, their audiences (art critics, curators, the media etc.), their economic and cultural environments as well as their historical and social contexts. We will of course review issues of artistic ‘production’, while in agreement with Marcel Duchamp when he stated that it’s the gaze of the viewer/audience that is accountable for the artwork itself, we will also discuss the ‘reception’ side of the matter. Therefore the role of the artist and the one of the critic/dealer/media reporter and of the curator are examined in an effort at understanding the place occupied by art in contemporary societies, while - on the other hand - attention will be granted to different kinds of audiences and the use they make of art objects. Sometimes it may be also a matter of re-classifying art works, according to sociological criteria that tend to work on a highbrow/lowlbrow (fine arts/popular arts) scale, rather than one pitched against purely aesthetic values.

The dauntingly broad timeline (from the mid-19th century to the present) will not allow to develop in-depth analyses: the Course rather offers exemplary phenomena that should provide a ‘sensitizing’ experience about the role that art (very broadly defined) plays in different cultural contexts and the extent to which they themselves ‘shape’ artistic phenomena.

Requirements

The program will be developed through a series of in-class lectures, one Field Trip, Site visits (whose attendance is mandatory), multimedia supported presentations. Lectures will accompany the discussion of the topics touched upon by the readings and DVD’s viewing (please read the Syllabus closely). Each week, different students will be made responsible for
leading/facilitating the in-class discussion. During the Course there may take place un-announced quizzes. Students are also expected to write a Site visit report (2 pages long) for each of the “outings”; DVD reports (2 pages): all of the above will be rated as 'class participation’. Therefore active involvement is required by all who have enrolled in this Course!

There will be two assessments: 1) a take-home Mid-term essay on assigned topics (about 8 pages long); 2) a take-home Final paper on a topic chosen by each student in agreement with the instructor (about 10 pages).

**Grading**

Class participation (including quizzes, discussion leadership; film and DVD’s reports etc.): 30% of final grade
Mid-term: 30% of final grade
Final paper: 40% of final grade

**Please pay attention to the following!**

No late papers (Mid-Term and Final) will be allowed unless a prior given notice is given and accepted. Half a point per day will be subtracted to the otherwise deserved grade. Other assignments are equally expected on time. Assignments should be submitted in paper version and stapled.

Reasons for absence from class should be reported through the School’s Administration and following the rules set out by the School.

Thank you!

**Assignments**

Students should make sure to check the week-by-week assignments (as indicated in the Syllabus) and read the corresponding paper(s). You may notice that the Course’s weeks carry a rather uneven load of homework (i.e. readings and preparation; viewing of DVD’s, etc.). Therefore you are strongly encouraged to start working in advance for the ‘heavier’ sessions!

**Recommended books and other resources**

(Villa Ulivi Library)


*An informative contribution to the field: some excerpts are included in the AHP.*


*Small book with 'thick' arguments. It might be considered an equivalent to Berger's Ways of seeing and opening new ground for your understanding of the Renaissance.*


The well-known art collector reveals her thirst for life-as-an-artwork. If in Venice you may possibly visit the Guggenheim Museum: reading the book may enrich your appreciation for the niece of Solomon Guggenheim!

A. Hauser, *The social history of art*, (esp. vols. 3&4).  
*A hard-to-die classic, written over fifty years ago by Hungarian-born member of the Frankfurt School.*


*A very discursive introductory book by well-known writer.*

The two Penguin volumes by Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists* (1568) are strongly recommended reading. Though a bit dated (1568!) - the comments provided by Vasari are still today a "must" for anyone interested in the social history of art.


The two books reveal standard sociological approaches to the field.

**Online resources** such as Grove Art Online, Artcyclopedia etc.
SCHEDULE AND OUTLINE

All reading assignments from Journals are accessible online. Check Blackboard pages for accessing readings from books. DVD’s are obtainable through the Reception Desk in Villa Ulivi. The required book by John BERGER, *Ways of seeing* is available at Feltrinelli International Bookstore (Via Cavour)

1. Tues., Sept 6th, 2011  
**Course overview. Approaching the sociology of the arts.**  
Chosen reference is to the visual arts, and to the growing role of images in contemporary culture.

2. Tues., Sept 13th  
**The social construction of artworks**  

3. Tues., Sept 20th  
**Site visit** (during class hours)  
Venue: Palazzo Strozzi, “Money and beauty: Bankers, Botticelli and the bonfire of vanities”.  
As a foretaste, students are ‘strongly’ encouraged to browse the book by M. Baxandall, *Painting and experience in 15th C Italy* (Ulivi Library).

4. Tues., Sept 27th  
**Viewing and representing: the modern gaze.**  
The discussion will focus on the making of new urban audiences and their tastes in mid-19th C Europe (especially France).  
P. Mainardi, “The political origins of modernism”, *Art Journal*, vol 45, n.1, Spring 1985, pp.11-17. (available online)
5. Tues., Oct 4th

Doing away with the Academy

**DVD and Readings:**

**DVD:** *The Impressionists: Edouard Manet* (available at the Reception Desk at Villa Ulivi).


5. Tues., Oct 11th

**Site visit** During class hours

“I Macchiaioli a Villa Bardini”, (details to follow). Meanwhile students are ‘strongly’ invited to browse the A.Boime book in Villa Ulivi Library (*The art of the 'macchia' and the Risorgimento)*.

6. Tues., Oct 18th

At the dawn of the 20th Century


<<MID TERM DUE>>

SPRING RECESS

7. FRIDAY Oct 21st

**FIELD TRIP TO MILAN:**

*MUSEO DEL 900 and TRIENNALE DESIGN MUSEUM* (details to follow)

8. Tues., Oct 25th

At the dawn of the 20th Century (part 2)

9. Tues., Nov. 8th
Art and its political ‘double’
Readings: G. Lista, “The activist model or the avant-garde as Italian invention”; A. Bowler, “Politics as art: Italian Futurism and fascism”; T. Todorov, “Avant-gardes and totalitarianism”; (Bibliogr. info tba).

10. Tues., Nov. 15th
Site visit
Venue: Palazzo Strozzi, Piazza Strozzi, STROZZINA, “Declining democracy” during class hours.

11. Tues., Nov. 22nd
Where has (good) taste gone?
Readings: M. Perloff, “Dada without Duchamp/Duchamp without Dada: Avant-garde tradition and the individual talent”;
DVD: “Artists of the 20th century: Marcel Duchamp” (available at the Reception Desk at Villa Ulivi)

12. Tues., Nov. 29th
The artists and their audiences: issues in taste-making.
Readings: Alexander, “Art and social boundaries”;
Peterson & Kern, “Changing highbrow taste: from snob to omnivore”;
V. Zolberg “Barrier or leveler? The case of the art museum” (Bibliogr. info to follow).

13. Tues., Dec. 6th
In class-presentation of students’ projects.
14. Dec. 13th>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>FINAL PAPER DUE>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>