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-19\textsuperscript{th} 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 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-19\textsuperscript{th} 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.

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 prepare in advance for the ‘heavier’ sessions!

Recommended books and other resources
(Villa Ulivi Library)

A recent contribution to the field: some excerpts are included in the AHP.

M. Baxandall, Painting and experience in 15th century Italy, Oxford University Press, 1996.  
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.

H. Becker, Art worlds, California UP, 1982.

J. Berger, Ways of seeing, Penguin

Peggy Guggenheim, Out of this century, (autobiography originally published in 1962).  
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.

G. Vasari, Lives of the artists, (orig. 1568), Penguin.
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 through the Stable URL’s.
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)

Chosen reference is to the visual arts, and to the growing role of images in contemporary culture.

2. Tues., Feb. 8th

The social construction of artworks

Readings: V. Alexander, “The Art Itself” and “The constitution of art in society” from V. Alexander, Sociology of the Art

Posted on Blackboard

3. Tues., Feb. 15th

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).


This small book is an easy and very refreshing reading that should provide you with inspiration throughout the Course. Therefore I expect (clever) comments about its whole contents to enliven our general discussions without having to specifically schedule its assessment.


4. Tues., Feb. 22nd

Doing away with the Academy

DVD and Readings:

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


5. February 26th Saturday

FIELD TRIP

Full-day excursion by private bus to Rimini (on the Adriatic coast) in order to visit the IMPRESSIONISTS’ Exhibit. Details will follow.

5. Tues., March 1st

Site visit

During class hours

Venue tba.
6. Tues., March 8th

At the dawn of the 20th Century
**YouTube:** view sessions from J.Berger’s BBC castings of his book, *Ways of seeing*.

7. Tues. March 22nd

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

8. Tues., March 29th

**Site Visit** During class hours
Visit the Atelier of Maestro Gianni CACCIARINI, meet the artist and discuss his work (etching, oil painting).
Borgo degli Albizi 18 (downtown Florence).

9. Tues., April 5th

The making of artistic careers
**Readings:** tba
**Films:** *Le mystère Picasso* (dir. Clouzot); *Surveying Picasso* (dir. J. Ivory); *Caravaggio* (dir. Jarman)

10. Tues., April 12th

**Site visit** Venue: Palazzo Strozzi, Piazza Strozzi, during class hours. Exhibit: *PICASSO, DALI, MIRO’: Angry young men and the birth of modernity*.

11. Tues., April 19th

Photography and the moving image
**Readings:** tba
**DVD:** “Artists of the 20th century: Marcel Duchamp” (available at the Reception Desk at Villa Ulivi)

12. Tues., April 26th  
**Site visit**  
Venue: Centro Cultura Contemporanea La Strozzina, Palazzo Strozzi. Exhibit: TALENTI EMERGENTI

13. Tues., May 3rd  
In class-presentation of students’ projects.

14. May 10th  
>>>>>>>>>>>>FINAL PAPER DUE>>>>>>>>>>>>