Art and Culture in Contemporary Israel

Class code
CORE-UA 9764

Instructor Details
Aviv Livnat

Prerequisites
None

Class Description
The location of Israel at the geographic junction between the West and the East, between the Arab world and the Western world, against the background of the long historical complexity of this piece of land provides the context for the course Expressive Culture: Art and Culture in Contemporary Israel" which will offer a panoramic view of expressive cultures in modern Israel. This course will provide an introduction to Israeli culture and art by examining thematic crossroads and ideas, via problems and social conflicts which lie at the heart of those art works and are reflected by them. Themes to be addressed will include: religion and secularism, universalism/globalism versus localism, Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazic and Sephardic cultures, multiculturalism in Israel, Zionism and Post-Zionism, right and left political world views, questions of gender, historical perspectives on war and peace and the Holocaust. The students will explore the way different forms of art – visual, literary, and performance – reflect and shape the understanding of the "Israeli mosaic" while learning about the way the artists and writers internalize, consciously and unconsciously the complex Israeli reality. Towards this end, the course will incorporate an exclusive audiography, image bank and collection of video materials and will include excursions to cultural institutions and events in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. Expressive culture is a way to embody, analyze and express culture through sensory experiences such as movements, sounds texts and images. The students will be invited to engage in processes, exposed to ideas and emotions, bound within the social production of aesthetic forms and performances in Israeli life and culture.

Desired Outcomes
This course has the following learning goals:

1. To develop an understanding of the formal methods of interpretation, including approaches and structures of interpretation and reception specific to various art forms, explored during the course.

2. To curate a critical appreciation of Israel’s cultural and artistic arena in its wider perspective, through the complexities and diversities of modern Israeli identities

3. To foster a purposeful approach to analysis and interpretation of Israel’s social phenomena and challenges through expressive cultural manifestations.

4. To pursue ongoing interests and future engagements with Israeli culture, using the rich resources of Tel Aviv as a base.

Assessment Components
Students are expected to attend class regularly and arrive on time. Students must complete all assigned readings before the class meeting and be prepared to participate actively in discussions of the readings and current events. Students are required to turn in all written assignments on the dates scheduled. Late work will be penalized.

Students will be evaluated on the following basis:
1. Active Participation and Discussion (10%)
2. Four Writing Assignments (30%)
3. Midterm Examination (20%)
4. Final Examination (40%)

Failure to submit or fulfill any one of the required course component results in failure of the class.

The College Core Curriculum is designed to provide students with an intellectually rigorous general education in the liberal arts. Because Core courses seek to stretch you beyond your previous schooling and major course of study, they will likely be among the most academically challenging experiences you undertake as an undergraduate. The following outlines the Core Curriculum's common expectations concerning the evaluation of students’ work across the curriculum. More information on grading guidelines can be found at http://core.cas.nyu.edu/page/ProgramDocumentsandGuidelines.

**Grade A:** Outstanding academic performance – reserved for clearly superior work.

**Grade B:** Good work – outstanding effort and class participation.

**Grade C:** Satisfactory work – regular attendance, ordinary effort, a minimum of demonstrated improvement across the semester.

**Grade D:** Poor work and effort.

**Grade F:** Failure to complete the requirements for a course in a creditable manner.

**Grade conversion**

A=94-100
A-=90-93
B+=87-89
B=84-86
B-=80-83
C+=77-79
C=74-76
C-=70-73
D+=67-69
D=65-66
F=below 65
Grading Policy

No-shows for in-class presentations and assignments submitted after the deadline without requesting an extension will receive zero grades.

If a student believes an inadvertent error was made in the grading of an individual assignment or in assessing an overall course grade, a request to have the grade re-evaluated may be submitted. To appeal an assigned final grade, the student should first email the course instructor requesting clarification about how the grade was determined. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the discussion and wishes to appeal the grade further, a formal written appeal should be submitted to the site director. This appeal must be submitted within 30 days after the grade has been posted; appeals that are submitted after this deadline will not be considered.

Attendance Policy

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

All medical-based absence requests MUST be presented to the Manager of Student Life and Housing (MSLH). In the case of illness, contact the MSLH within seven (7) days of the absence or as soon as practicable and provide medical documentation. Non-medical requests should be made to the Assistant Director for Academics (AD/Academics) and in advance of the intended absence. Your instructors will be informed of any excused absence; they are not authorized to approve your absence, and they are required to report any absences to the AD/Academics.

NYU Policy on Religious Holidays

1. Students who anticipate being absent because of any religious observance should, whenever possible, notify faculty and the AD/Academics in advance of such anticipated absence.

2. Whenever feasible, examinations and assignment deadlines should not be scheduled on religious holidays. Any student absent from class because of his/her religious beliefs shall not be penalized for any class, examination, or assignment deadline missed on that day or days. In the event that examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on a religious holiday, any student who is unable to attend class shall be permitted the opportunity to make up any examination or to extend any assignment deadline missed on that day or days.

3. That no adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student who avails him/herself of the provisions of the resolution.

4. A violation of these policies and principles shall permit any aggrieved student to bring forward a grievance, provided under the University Grievance Procedure.

Late Submission of Work

All works must be submitted on time, unless you have received an explicit extension. Any late submission may result in grade deduction at the sole discretion of the instructor.

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.
**Plagiarism Policy**

Plagiarism is the presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Plagiarism constitutes an academic offence for which you can be disciplined. Punishment may include a failing grade, suspension or expulsion. In all confirmed cases, a report will be sent to the student’s Dean at NYU or, in the case of a non-NYU student, to the home institution.

**Required Text(s)**


All other readings are available on NYU Classes

**Supplemental Text(s)**

A special Glossary of Hebrew terms, places and Holidays prepared for the course, to be provided to students during the first class.

**Internet Research Guidelines**

It is hard to overestimate the importance of the internet to the build up of contemporary knowledge of the world around us. But it needs to be used wisely. This means that one must be selective and careful when relating to internet-based sources, identifying and distinguishing opinions from facts, and journalism from academics. One should make clear reference to internet sources, allowing the reader the opportunity to consult these resources as and if required. As with all sources of information, use the internet critically.

Please also note that the ‘world-wide web’ exists in many languages. Many sources about Israel in English, for instance, will be aimed at tourists or readers living primarily in English-speaking regions of the world. Sources might differ when reading them in other languages.

**NYUTA's Writing Center**

Established in coordination with NYU’s Expository Writing Center, NYUTA's Writing Center is available to help you with all genres of writing, from senior theses to smaller response papers; from personal statements to cover letters; from PowerPoint presentations to creative assignments. The Center can help you at any stage of the writing process, from figuring out the demands of an assignment, to working with or researching sources, to brainstorming a thesis and outline, to finalizing a project or reviewing a draft. However, please note that writing sessions are held as a joint session, an active exercise between the student and writing advisor – this is not a proofreading service!

Please view the Writing Center as an opportunity, not a punishment. It is meant equally for student-writers who are not confident in their skills as well as students who are quite talented and strong, but recognize the value of a second look. Moreover, rest assured that your instructors will value and appreciate your initiative to visit the writing center.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please contact NYUTA's AD/Academics, Edan Raviv (room 201; edanr@nyu.edu).

**Session 1**

**Poles and Themes of Expressive Culture**

Students will be introduced to the theme of ‘expressive culture’, with an examination of the fundamental approaches to the topic intertwined with an overview of Israel’s cultural history inclusive of key poles within its social and cultural scene.


**Session 2**

**Textures of Identity**

A survey of Israeli literature examining the manifestations of identities, either dominant or marginalized in Israeli society.
Session 3

Tradition and Avant-Garde

Traditional and Avant-garde trends and influences in the Israeli cultural and artistic sphere will be examined. The mythological journey of Habima theatre from Early Russian Avant-garde circles to mainstream Israeli Modern Theater will serve as a study case and exploration on the polar and complementary concepts of tradition and avant-garde.


Film: *Der Dibuk (The Dybbuk)*

Session 4

“I am in the West and my heart is in the East” Part I

The Israeli art world will serve as a laboratory for exploring the complex encounters between eastern and western influences that lie at its core.


Visual Art: Asim abu shakra, Mordechay Ardon, Nahum Gutman, Itzhak Danziger, Marcel Yanko, Dani Karavan, Zeev Raban

First Assignment Due: Three Page Maximum

Session 5

“I am in the West and my heart is in the East” Part II

The lesson will continue to examine east and west encounters and tensions in the fields of popular music and cinema. The case of "Musiqua Mizrahit." developing from a marginal silenced genre into a popular genre exemplifies the changing attitudes toward cultural eastern identity in popular music - a change apparent in other modern Israeli expressive cultures.


Bursztyn, Igal. "Israeli cinema’s I’m in the East and my heart is in the West". In Israeli Identity. David Tal, ed. Routledge, 2013. 199-211.


Culture, Politics and Performance
The case of Hanoch Levin and his theatre will allow an examination of political-cultural encounters over several decades of the playwriter/director's theatrical activities.

Theatre: Hanoch Levin: "You me and the next war", "The Labor of Life", "Job's Passion"

Modernism and Utopia
The Kibbutz and Tel Aviv white city architectures are world heritage sites. They facilitate an examination of modern and utopian layers in the Israeli architectural spheres. How old and new are combined in a dialectical process in a built environment reflecting the cultural zeitgeist.

Szmuk, Nitsa. Tel-Aviv's modern movement: the white city of Tel Aviv: a world heritage site. Tel-Yafo Municipality, 2004. 72-136

Architecture: Arieh Sharon, Karl Rubin, Erich Mendelson, Ze'ev Rechter, Shmuel Mestechkin

Second Assignment Due: Five Page Maximum

Pillar of Fire: From The Holocaust to Revival
The lesson will trace the confrontation of Art Images and cinema's moving pictures and sound with the Holocaust and its ongoing resituating position in Israel's cultural identity and politics of memory and commemoration.

Avisar, I. (2011). "The Holocaust in Israeli cinema as a conflict between survival and
Session 9

Secular and Religion Genres

How religious essence is expressed in modern Israel's cultural scene will be the focus of the lesson. The Israeli art discourse and the dance arena are exemplary fields for tracing the encounters of Israeli secular and religious modes of expressive culture.


Visual Art: Michael Sagan-Cohen, Uri Nir, Belo-Siminition Fainaru

Session 10

Identity and Gender

An exploration of identity issues in the sphere of art will be the focus of the following lesson. Feminist discourses followed in specific communities as the traditional and religious Jewish community and the struggle of Ethiopian-Israeli Women Artists will open wide doors into Israel identity and gender complexities expressed through visual art.


Visual Art: Hila Lulu-Lin, Nir Hod, Andi Arnovitz, Hila Karabelnikov, Adassa Goldvicht

Session 11

Conflict in Context

War, terror, hostilities, and occupation have a significant impact on artistic expressive utterances. The lesson will explore those influences in art, poetry, cinema and theater; trying to locate specific strategies and mode of expressions from diverse perspectives and identities that share the Israeli political existential turmoil.


Jacobs, Adriana X. “From IDF to .pdf: War Poetry in the Israeli Digital Age.” In *Narratives of Dissent: War in Contemporary Israeli Arts and Culture*. Rachel S. Harris and Ranen...


Visual Art: Adi Nes, Gilad Ophir, David Rubinger

Poetry: Merhav Yeshurun, Mati Shmuelov, Roni Hirsh, Eran Zelgov, Rami Saari, Tal Nitzan, Salman Masalha, Twafik Ziad

Theatre: "Queen of Bathtub" (1970)


Session 12

Tel Aviv Museum
A Visit to Tel Aviv Museum. Meeting and discussion with the curator of Jewish art after viewing the Israeli collection.

Session 13

Jazz in Tel Aviv
Special performance of Israeli and Jewish Jazz music featuring some of the hottest musicians on the scene.

Fourth Assignment Due: Ten Page Maximum

Session 14

Cinema and Identity in motion
The concluding lesson will be devoted to the screening of a film followed by a final discussion on themes raised throughout the course.


Film: "Dancing Arabs" (2014) Eran Riklis, Sayed Kashua

Please turn off, or place on silent, all mobile devices. Laptop computers may only be used for directly class related activities. Students are expected to be courteous and engage in the topics and classes.

Required Co-curricular Activities
Trip to Tel Aviv Museum including a discussion with the Curator of Jewish Art
Visit to an Israeli and Jewish Jazz Performance

Your Instructor
Aviv Livnat graduated in Philosophy and the multidisciplinary program in the Humanities at Tel Aviv University and completed MA studies magna cum laude. He completed his PhD in the interdisciplinary program at the School of Jewish Studies at Tel Aviv University. Livnat deals with issues of bereavement and commemoration in philosophy and the Arts with emphasis on East European Jewish history, the Yiddish Avant-garde and the philosophy of space. He assisted in establishing The Goldreich Family Institute for Yiddish Language, Literature, and Culture within which he initiated special projects. He established the Raz-Ram Foundation, a special art foundation which operates in diverse artistic fields among Arab, Druze Bedouin and Jewish orphan children. The Foundation initiates projects for the transformation of bereavement on the personal, communal and inter-communal levels, advancing and promoting loss and bereavement research in academic settings alongside striving for a discourse of creativity and bringing together or 'Joining hearts' through the Arts.