

Aesthetics: Philosophy of the Arts

Description: This course examines aesthetics, storytelling, and the value of the arts in the context of specific artistic mediums, including visual arts, music, dance, theatre, film, and video games. Guiding questions include: what counts as art, and why is it valuable? Why do certain kinds of art provoke strong emotional reactions in us, and in what ways is such a reaction meaningful? What can art tell us about reality, morality, and ourselves? What does it take to be a “true” artist? What is the relationship between art and science?

Assignments:

- **Art Evaluation** (3-4 pgs.) – Choose a piece of art (broadly construed). Evaluate from the perspective of one of the authors we have discussed in class. Choose a different author, and repeat.
- **Short evaluative essay** (3-4 pgs.) – Choose from 3 prompts.
- **Art Experience** (2-4 pg. reflection) – Sometime over the course of the semester, attend a drop-in art, dance, theater, or music class (I will provide links with some options). Write a short reflection on your experience, relating it to at least one of the themes of our class.
- **Presentation and peer feedback** (5 mins.) – Present on your final topic. You will be graded on both your presentation and your feedback to your peers.
- **Final paper** (5-7) – Choose a piece of art (broadly construed) and evaluate in the context of one of the provided prompts.

Week 1: Introduction – The Value of Art

- Leo Tolstoy – “The Value of Art” from *What is Art?*
- National Endowment for the Arts – “Why the Arts Matter”
- Jim Pryor – “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy”

Week 2: Aesthetics

- Immanuel Kant – “The Concept of the Beautiful” from *Critique of Judgement*
- Marsha Muelder Eaton – “Kantian and Contextual Beauty”
- David Hume – “Aesthetic Appreciation” from *Of the Standard of Taste*
- Stephanie Ross – “Humean Critics: Real or Ideal?”

Week 3: Art and Reality

- Plato – “Art and Imitation” from *Republic*

- Jean-Paul Sartre – “Imagination and Art” from *The Psychology of Imagination*
- Ilham Dilman – “Art and Reality: Some Reflections on the Arts”

Week 4: Storytelling

- Garry Hagberg – “Literary Experience and Self-Reflection”
- Jukka Mikkonen – “The (Literary) Stories of Our Lives”
- Harry Deutsch – “Making Up Stories”
- Daniel Just – “Transformative Fictions: Literature as Care of the Self”
- *Watch*: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – “The Danger of a Single Story”

Week 5: Philosophy of Theatre 1

- Plato – selections from *The Republic* (from Books III and V)
- Aristotle – *Poetics* (section 2)
- Noël Carroll and Sally Banes – “Theatre: Philosophy, Theory, and Criticism”
- Paul Woodruff – selection from *The Necessity of Theater: The Art of Watching and Being Watched*
- *Watch* – William Shakespeare – “All the World’s a Stage” from *As You Like It*

Week 6: Philosophy of Theatre 2

- David Saltz – “How to Do Things on Stage”
- Bert States – “The World on Stage” from *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*
- David Osipovich – “What is a Theatrical Performance?”
- *Watch*: The Wayang Puppet Theatre
- *Watch*: Suzan-Lori Park – excerpt from *Topdog Underdog*

Week 7: Philosophy of Music 1

- Andy Hamilton – selections from *Aesthetics and Music*
- Will Hermes – “The Story of 4’33” (NPR)
- Roger Scruton – “Understanding Music”
- Kathleen Marie Higgins – selections from *The Music Between Us: Is Music a Universal Language?*
- *Listen to*: Leroy Anderson - Ritvélin (The Typewriter)
- *Listen to*: Schoenberg - Tres piezas para piano op.11 n° 3
- *Listen to*: John Cage – 4’33

Week 8: Philosophy of Music 2

- Leo Tolstoy – selection from *What is Art?*
- Jenefer Robinson - “The Expression and Arousal of Emotion in Music”

- Stephen Davies - “Artistic Expression and the Hard Case of Pure Music”
- Peter Kivy – “Feeling the Musical Emotions”
- *Listen to:* Chopin – Nocturne no. 20 in C Sharp Minor
- *Listen to:* Batzorig Vaanchig - Chinggis khaanii Magtaal
- *Listen to:* Glen Miller – In the Mood

Week 9: Philosophy of Dance

- Marcia Siegel – *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance*
- Kimerer LaMothe – selections from *Why We Dance: A Philosophy of Bodily Becoming*
- Susan Leigh Foster – “Taken by Surprise: Improvisation in Dance and Mind”
- Constance Vallis Hill – “Stepping, Stealing, Sharing, and Daring”
- *Watch:* finale from *Swan Lake* (American Ballet Theatre)
- *Watch:* Dance Battle: Majid vs Mamson
- *Watch:* “Meguri” performed by Sankai Juku (Butoh)
- *Watch (optional):* Gadu Doushin – “What is Butoh?”

Week 10: Philosophy of Film

- Hugo Münsterberg – “Why We Go to the ‘Movies’”
- Virginia Woolf – “The Movies and Reality”
- Stanley Cavell – selections from *The World Viewed*
- Katherine Thomson-Jones – selections from *Aesthetics and Film*
- *Watch:* “The Great Train Robbery” (1903)

Week 11: Philosophy of Video Games

- C. Thi Nguyen – selections from *Games: Agency as Art*
- Thomas Hurka – “How Much are Games like Art?”
- Aaron Smuts – “Are Video Games Art?”
- *Check out:* Video game studio [Might and Delight](#)

Week 12: Art and Science

- Judith Wechsler – selections from *Aesthetics in Science*
- Milena Ivanova – “Aesthetic Values in Science”
- Mary Kirsch Boehm – selections from *Exploring Science and Art: Discovering Connections*

