

QUEST UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL CULTURE



Block:	M-F, October 16 - December 3, 2007
Time:	1:30 - 4:00 pm
Location:	Academic Building, Room ???
Instructor:	Dr. Chris Pearson
Office:	Academic Building, Room ???
E-mail:	christopher.pearson@questu.ca
Telephone:	(604) ???-????
Office hours:	MW 2:00-5:00 pm

Course description

Image-making has been characteristic of virtually all human cultures, and visual constructions of every description—ranging from painting, sculpture, printmaking, photography and architecture to contemporary graphics, advertising, film and multimedia—have now come to saturate our everyday existence. The ability to understand, analyze and critique different modes of visual communication is therefore a crucial skill. In considering the forms of visual culture that have served the expressive, ritual, political and commercial needs of diverse societies and individuals throughout history, this course will define the basic terminology of art, examine the interaction of form and content, and suggest appropriate questions and methods which we can bring to our task. Participants will learn to translate their visual understanding into verbal expression, positioning works of art as the manifestation of both personal and societal concerns.

Textbooks

- Mark Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, 8th ed. (2006)
- Carole Gold Calo, *Viewpoints: Readings in Art History*, 2nd ed. (2001)

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- Use relevant vocabulary and major terms of reference in the analysis and critical appreciation of historical and contemporary visual culture
- Identify and critically discuss many important examples of works by period, style, meaning and ideology, providing a conceptual framework for understanding the imagery they will encounter in the future
- Carry out basic research on a given work of art, which can then be articulated in the form of a reasoned appraisal presenting visual perceptions and critical assessment in an informed, cogent and creative manner
- Demonstrate a knowledge of several traditions of visual culture, considering how a given work of art can embody the social, religious, political and economic concerns of diverse groups and individuals

Instructional methods

By means of discussion, oral and written assignments, participatory activities, presentations and field trips, we will examine selected works and topics from the history of visual culture. Emphasis will be placed on the critical evaluation of relevant texts in the context of group discussion and written critiques.

Assessment criteria

Grade points will be assigned as follows:

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION	20%
ASSIGNMENTS: 5 total, 10% each)	50%
FINAL PRESENTATION	30%
Total	100
FINAL GRADE	

Description of course work

- READINGS. Students are responsible for doing daily readings before class, and should arrive prepared to discuss the relevant issues
- ASSIGNMENTS. A total of five shorter projects will be assigned over the course of the block. These will involve research and critical thinking and will be presented by oral and written means. See below for details.
- FINAL PRESENTATION. Course participants will be assigned a final project, to be presented to the class on the last day of meeting. See below for details.

Course policies

To successfully complete this course, the student must attend each class, do all scheduled readings, participate in discussions, take an active part in group and class projects, and complete ALL required tasks and assignments. Unless there are extraordinary circumstances preventing you from submitting your assignments by the due date, points will be deducted at the rate of 5% per day late. All other relevant Quest University policies (including the Honour Code) which pertain to such matters as plagiarism, attendance, behaviour, grading, etc. will apply in this course.

BLOCK SCHEDULE

Please note that the assigned readings are to be done BEFORE the day for which they are scheduled, and that students should therefore come to class prepared to discuss the readings relevant to the day's topic.

Week 1: THE VOCABULARY OF ART

Monday (Day 1): **Introduction**

- Reading: Mark Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapter one
- Discussion of Assignment #1: *Seeing the Visual Culture Around Us*

Tuesday (Day 2): **What is Art?**

- Assignment # 1 due in class
- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapter two

Wednesday (Day 3): **Formal Analysis of Visual Elements, part I**

- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapter four
- Discussion of Assignment #2: *Formal Analysis*

Thursday (Day 4): **Formal Analysis of Visual Elements, part II**

- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapter five

Friday (Day 5): **Formal Analysis of Visual Elements, part III**

- Assignment #2 due in class
- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapter five (continued)

Week 2: THE MEDIA OF ART

Monday (Day 6): **Drawing, Painting and Printmaking, part I**

- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapters six, seven and eight

Tuesday (Day 7): **Drawing, Painting and Printmaking, part II**

- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapters six, seven and eight (continued)
- Reading: James Ackermann, "Leonardo da Vinci," in Calo, *Viewpoints*
- *Discussion of Assignment #3: Formal and Social Critique of an Advertisement*

Wednesday (Day 8): **Photography, Film, Video and Graphic Design**

- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapters nine and ten
- Reading: Margot Lovejoy, "The Electronic Era," in Calo, *Viewpoints*

Thursday (Day 9): **Sculpture and Installation, part I**

- *Assignment #3 due in class*
- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapters eleven and twelve
- *Discussion of Assignment #4: Comparison of Media*

Friday (Day 10): **Sculpture and Installation, part II**

- *Assignment #4 due in class*
- Reading: C.G. Calo, "Memorializing the Unspeakable," in Calo, *Viewpoints*
- *Discussion of instructions for the Final Presentations*

Week 3: THEMES OF ART

Monday (Day 11): **Gallery Visit**

- No reading for today: we will visit the Vancouver Art Gallery
- *Discussion of Assignment # 5: Gallery Review*

Tuesday (Day 12): **Art and Politics**

- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapter three
- Reading: Albert Boime, "Iconography of Napoleon," in Calo, *Viewpoints*

Wednesday (Day 13): **The Architecture of Authority**

- *Assignment # 5 due in class*
- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapter thirteen

Thursday (Day 14): **Art and the Sacred**

- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapters three, fifteen, eighteen, nineteen and twenty
- Reading: Albert Elsen, "Images of Gods," in Calo, *Viewpoints*.

Friday (Day 15): **Art and Gender/Identity**

- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapter three and twenty two
- Reading: Richard Leppert, "The Female Nude," in Calo, *Viewpoints*

Week 4: THEMES OF ART (continued)

Monday (Day 16): **Art and the Self**

- Reading: Getlein, *Gilbert's Living with Art*, chapter three and twenty one
- Reading: L.S. Adams, "Psychoanalysis I: Freud," in Calo, *Viewpoints*

Tuesday (Day 17): **Art and Nature**

- Reading: Vincent Scully, "The Sacred Mountain," in Calo, *Viewpoints*

Wednesday (Day 18): **FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment # 1: Seeing The Visual Culture Around Us

During the course of a given day, pay special attention to all of the art or visual expression (including paintings, sculpture, buildings, prints, photographs, advertisements, graphics, product design, etc.) that you encounter in the environments you inhabit from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep. Try to experience your living, working and recreational spaces with a new sensitivity to the visual culture around you. Write a short account (1-2 pages, typed, double-spaced) of this journey, mentioning at least two of the works that you found most striking. Why did you find these particular works interesting or effective? What do you think was the artist's intention, and how did his or her artistic choices contribute to this goal? It would be helpful to add an illustration of the work to your essay. Be prepared to discuss your chosen work in class; taking a digital photograph of your chosen work and posting it online would therefore facilitate in-class discussion.

Assignment # 2: Formal Analysis

Choose two works of art we have examined in class that can be seen to address a common theme or topic. Subject each to a formal analysis, using the criteria and methods that have been introduced in class. Compare and contrast the formal strategies used by each artist. Why did each artist make the choices he/she did? How do these formal choices relate to the subject matter? Present your findings in a short account (1-2 pages, typed, double-spaced). It would be helpful to add an illustration of the works to your essay. Be prepared to discuss your chosen works in class; posting digital photographs of your chosen works on-line would again facilitate your in-class presentation.

Assignment #3: Formal and Social Critique of an Advertisement

Select an advertisement with a visual/photographic element that you find problematic. This reaction may range from "it irritates me" to "I find it offensive," etc. Describe the advertisement briefly. What messages do you think are conveyed to the spectator/consumer, and why do you find these troubling? What social or moral values does the advertisement appear to represent, and how does it address or position you as the viewer? How are visual elements used in this advertisement to reinforce its messages? To strengthen your argument, cite other examples of works discussed in class and/or from the textbook that can be seen to share similar characteristics. Finally, can you propose a new advertisement for the same product or service using a different approach to photographic representation that might be just as commercially effective yet not as problematic?

The assignment should be no more than 2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced. It would be helpful to add an illustration of the advertisement to your essay. If you are discussing a TV commercial, please add another paragraph to describe it sufficiently. Be prepared to discuss your chosen advertisement in class; posting a digital image of it on-line would again facilitate your in-class presentation.

Assignment #4: Comparison of Media

Choose two works dealing with a similar theme or subject matter. One should be a painting and the other a sculpture (or three-dimensional work). You may choose examples from the textbooks or from any other book or art journal; it would nevertheless be preferable to choose original works that you can see in person in the Squamish or Vancouver regions. For each work, indicate the name of the artist, the title of the work, its date, medium, dimensions (if available) and a brief description using the language of visual elements introduced in class. Discuss the main differences and/or similarities between the two in regards to their medium and their effect on the viewer. To reinforce your argument, cite other examples from the course textbook that can be seen to have similar characteristics. You may also wish to do some library and/or internet research on your chosen works to back up your interpretations; all such references should be correctly cited. The assignment should be no more than 2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced. You may add Xeroxed or downloaded images to the paper, but it is not

compulsory. Be prepared to discuss your chosen works in class; posting digital photographs of them on-line would again facilitate your in-class presentation.

Assignment # 5: Gallery Review

Imagine that you have been asked to write a short review for a local newspaper on one of the exhibitions now showing at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Try to consider the following points when discussing and analyzing the exhibit in your review:

- The background of the artist
- The subject matter of the works on display
- The artist's formal treatment of the subject matter
- The conception and arrangement of the exhibition
- Are the supporting materials (the labels or pamphlets, for example) useful and informative?
- In total, what do you think of the exhibition? Support your opinion with thoughtful ideas.
- Can you find a review of this exhibition in a local paper or other media source? What does the critic have to say about it? Do you agree with his/her assessment?
- How are these works and/or this exhibition relevant to contemporary society?

The assignment should be no more than three pages, typed, double-spaced. You may add Xeroxed or downloaded images to the paper, but it is not compulsory. Be prepared to discuss your essay in class using any relevant visual material.

FINAL PRESENTATION: An (Imaginary) Public Art Commission

In anticipation of the Olympic Games to be held in Vancouver and Squamish in 2010, the city has announced a competition for the commissioning of a major work of public sculpture (which can be broadly defined to include installations, landscaping, temporal events, etc).

Working individually or in a team of up to three people, your task is to put together the best possible proposal for this commission. You will act as an advisory committee that will suggest the theme, size, style and location of the future work as well as the identity of the artist. (Since this is imaginary, you are free to choose either past or contemporary artists!) The budget is unlimited (this is *really* imaginary!), but note that the money will be donated by a major Canadian cigarette company. This and other considerations may influence the theme, size and materials of your project. You must justify why you think your chosen artist's style or technique is best suited to this commission. In addition, your team must suggest the best possible site where the new work can be installed, and explain why you have made this choice. To prepare for this task you may want to review the chapter on sculpture (Chapter 11) and the sidebar on public art in the Getlein textbook.

Your presentation should address the following issues:

- What will be the subject matter of the work, and what are the ideas behind it? How will it represent the Games? Will it be realistic, abstract, functional or something else

entirely? What will the work say about the Olympics, about Vancouver and about modern society in general?

- What will the work look like in terms of size, shape, color, materials, composition and texture?

- Why did you choose this artist? Cite examples of his/her work and approach that you feel make him or her particularly appropriate for this commission.

- Which audience is the work intended to reach, and what effect /impact would you hope that it makes? Why do you think it would be well received? Try to anticipate any criticisms or problems that the work might raise in the community.

- How will the work fit into its environment, both spatially and culturally? Will it be interactive?

To present your proposal to the class you will need to prepare some sort of preliminary sketches, diagrams or a model. It might be helpful to show pictures of the chosen location and/or earlier works by your artist. You may also choose to do a brief PowerPoint. Remember that your proposal must be very persuasive, since you will present it to the class as if you were trying to win over city officials to your way of thinking. Each team will have approximately 20 minutes to present their proposed sculpture. If you are working in a group, remember to divide the workload and presentation duties equally so that each student will be part of the presentation.
