

## **HUMN-2001 – Aesthetics (Summer 2023)**

### **Basic Info**

**Instructor:** M. Curtis Allen

**Class time:** Tues. and Thurs. 8:30-11:30AM (Eastern)

**Location:** Main Building / Sharp Centre 230

**Office Hour:** By appointment online (via Teams)

**Course Website:** <https://mcurtisallen.com/humn2001> Password: HUMN2001

### **Course Description**

This course is intended as an introduction to a wide variety of approaches and concepts used in thinking philosophically and theoretically about art and aesthetic experience. It is not exhaustive, but instead samples from diverse sources to give a sense of the breadth and depth of aesthetic thought in different places and times. Although no definition would be adequate or comprehensive, we might define “aesthetics”—sometimes called, more narrowly, the philosophy of art—as any systematic inquiry into the character and implications of experience, taken for its own sake. Using this as our guide, this course will look at the fundamental relationship that aesthetics entertains between the sensory, perceptual, affective, and cognitive modalities of experience and the determination of structures of value, especially in art. Through these we will look at how aesthetic experience appears in varied arenas of life, such as art, design, craft, religion, ethics, politics, economy, and the everyday. In investigating these dimensions of aesthetics, we will look at a variety of expressions of aesthetic thinking, generously construed, from ancient times to the present day, gathering resonant and critical threads from several cultural traditions of thought, including Chinese, European, Islamic, Japanese as well as Canadian Indigenous and Black American traditions.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course the student will demonstrate:

1. In-depth engagement with the theories of art and aesthetics experience.
2. Ability to relay critical thinking about art into their own work/practice.
3. Accurate analysis of the aesthetic components of artworks, and ability to critically evaluate traditions of art and aesthetics using various approaches.
4. Advanced reading and writing techniques through regular study and feedback.
5. Ability to think more deeply in general about the world and one’s place in it. Ability to appreciate the artistic and aesthetic depth of culture and everyday life.

### **University Policies**

Please refer to OCAD's University Policies regarding Academic Accommodations and Consideration, Academic Standing and Misconduct, and Non-Academic Misconduct. These and other policies can be found under the "Policies & Resources" tab on the course page in CANVAS.

## **Evaluation**

### **Assignment Submission:**

Assignments are to be submitted **online** through CANVAS by 11:59 pm of the due date.

**Late Assignments:** Late assignments (beyond 24hrs from due date) will not be accepted except through Official Accommodation or through individual agreement made with the instructor made prior to due date. Those assignments submitted late within 24hrs will receive a maximum 2% reduction in grade at the instructor's discretion.

Other evaluation criteria are given in Grade Breakdown (below) or in assignment sheets (to be supplied on the course website). All assignments will be given a percent grade out of 100 (0-100%) and weighted according to the overall percent of the total course grade (see Grade Breakdown).

## **Grading System**

The Grading System and Policy can be found here:

[https://www.ocadu.ca/sites/default/files/legacy\\_assets/content/registrarial/1021-grading.pdf](https://www.ocadu.ca/sites/default/files/legacy_assets/content/registrarial/1021-grading.pdf)

### **Percent Grade – Letter Grade**

90-100 – A+

85-89 – A

80-84 – A-

77-79 – B+

74-76 – B

70-73 – B-

67-69 – C+

64-66 – C

60-63 – C-

57-59 – D+

54-56 – D

50-53 – D-

0-49 – F

## **Course Website**

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**CANVAS:** All grading/announcements and video lectures are accessible on CANVAS.

## **Required Materials**

All assigned texts/media are required (unless otherwise mentioned).

All course materials will be made available to students.

## **Assignments/Grade Breakdown**

1. Attendance/Participation (15%)
  - Attendance and
  - Participation in live discussion, or OPTIONAL asynchronous written discussion points.
  - Graded at mid-term and the end of term.
2. Quizzes (30% cumulative): critical questionnaires about weekly readings. **DUE: Weekly.**
  - 5 quizzes in total
  - worth 6% each.
3. Conceptual Elaboration Assignment (25%). **DUE: June 1**
  - Focuses on a single concept (e.g. Form, imitation, catharsis, the beautiful, the sublime, wabi sabi, ren, aura, etc.)
  - Extended analysis of the concept in one required course text.
  - 2-4 pages dbl. spaced.
4. Final Project (30%) **DUE: June 22**
  - Option 1: Creative Work
    - One substantial piece of **creative work** (visual, audio, or textual, etc.) that responds in a direct way to one of the readings. This could be a painting, illustration, comic, a long poem or series of poems, short story, song or songs, sound installation, short film or video work, animation, sculpture, etc.
    - **Written didactic** explaining in detail how the piece relates in substantial ways to one or more of the course readings and its themes.
      - ~1000 words.
      - Bibliography of sources (5 or more sources, minimum 3 external research sources).
  - Option 2: Essay
    - On a topic of your choice
    - ~2000-2500 words
    - Bibliography of sources (5 or more sources, minimum 3 external research sources)
5. Extra Credit: Live Presentation/Creative Response (Max 5%)

- Give a short live presentation/response (roughly 5-10 mins) on an idea (or ideas) from the course text.
  - i. options:
    1. A straightforward expository presentation; OR
    2. a creative response (poetic, performative, etc.) that makes a clear connection with a course text.
  - ii. Can be on any course text required, optional, recommended, etc.
- Groups will be considered
- Asynchronous options will be considered only for those with Official Accommodations regarding public speaking, or for anyone after the available live spaces have been filled.
- Sign up sheet available on the course website.

### **Course Outline/Reading List**

\*Course readings/other media are subject to change at the instructor's discretion. At least one week's notice will be given in this event.

### **Art Theory in Pre-Modern Worlds**

#### Week 1A, May 16 – Introduction and Overview

Reading:

- H. Gene Blocker, "Non-Western Aesthetics as a Colonial Invention" *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35.4 (2001).

#### Week 1B, May 18 – Ancient Greece and the Philosophy of Art

Readings:

- Plato, "Book X", *Republic*

Optional:

- Sappho, "Ode to Aphrodite"
- Aristotle, *Poetics* (selections)

#### Week 2A, May 23 – Respect for the Object in Japanese Aesthetics

Reading:

- Yuriko Saito, "The Moral Dimension of Japanese Aesthetics" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65.1 (2007).

Optional:

- Sei Shōnagon, *The Pillow Book* (selections)
- Mastuo Bashō, *On Love and Barley* (selected haiku)
- Sakabe Megumi, "Mask and Shadow in Japanese Culture: Implicit Ontology in Japanese Thought" In *Modern Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader*
- Leonard Koren, *Wabi Sabi: For Artists, Designers, Poets, and Philosophers*.

- Haruo Shinare, *Trace of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Basho* (selections).

## **Modern Western Aesthetics**

### Week 2B, May 25 – NO CLASS

### Week 3A, May 30 – Kant: The Beautiful and the Sublime

Reading:

- Immanuel Kant, “The Analytic of the Beautiful” in *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*
- Immanuel Kant, “Analytic of the Sublime” (selections) in *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*

Recommended:

- Gilles Deleuze, “The Relationship of the Faculties in the *Critique of Judgment*” *Kant’s Critical Philosophy* (1963)
- Meg Armstrong, “‘The Effects of Blackness’: Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (1996), 213-236.

### Week 3B, June 1 – Marxist Aesthetics in the Frankfurt School

Reading:

- Walter Benjamin, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (second version)

Recommended:

- Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, “The Culture Industry” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*
- Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (selections)

## **Aesthetics in the Late-20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries**

### Week 4A, June 6 – Feminism/Queer Theory

Reading:

- Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975)

Optional:

- Jack (Judith) Halberstam, “Cutting” in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) (selections)

Recommended:

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (selections) (1949)

- Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971)
- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990) (selections)
- bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" (1994) in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*

#### Week 4B, June 8 – Intentionality, Artistic Authority, and Authorship

##### Readings:

- Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (1967) in *Image-Music-Text*.
- Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act." (1957).

##### Optional

- VIDEO: Gilles Deleuze, "What Is the Creative Act?" (1987), <https://vimeo.com/152865266>

##### Recommended:

- T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and Individual Talent" (1919)
- W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946).
- Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" (1969) in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*.

#### Week 5A, June 13 – Art and Signs in Anglo-American Aesthetics

##### Reading:

- Nelson Goodman, "Reality Remade" in *Languages of Art*

##### Recommended:

- C. S. Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs" in *The Philosophical Writings of Peirce*.
- Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (selections)

John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (selections)

#### Week 5B, June 15 – Contemporary Canadian Indigenous Art Thinking

##### Reading:

- Richard William Hill, "Is There an Indigenous Way to Write about Indigenous Art?" *Canadian Art* (2016) <https://canadianart.ca/essays/indigenous-way-write-indigenous-art/>
- David Garneau, "Writing About Indigenous Art with Critical Care" <https://momus.ca/writing-about-indigenous-art-with-critical-care/>

##### Recommended:

- David Garneau, "Indigenous Art: From Appreciation to Art Criticism" <https://cdn.ymaws.com/aesthetics-online.org/resource/resmgr/articles/DavidGarneau.pdf>

- Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1.1 (2012).
- Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (selections) (2014).

#### Week 6A, June 20 – Economy of Images

##### Readings:

- Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image” *e-flux journal* # 10, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_, “If You Don’t Have Bread, Eat Art!: Contemporary Art and Derivative Fascisms” *e-flux journal* # 76, 2016.

##### Optional:

- Robin Mackay, “Hyperplastic-Supernormal” (2017)

##### Recommended:

- Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp” (1966) in *Against Interpretation*.
- Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” *October* 8, 1979.
- Thierry de Duve, *Sewn in the Sweatshops of Marx: Bueys, Warhol, Klein, Duchamp* (selections) (2012).

#### Week 6B, June 22 – Blackness and Art

##### Reading:

- Huey Copeland, “The Blackness of Things” in *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America*, pp. 1-22.

##### Recommended:

- Christina Sharpe, “The Wake” in *The Wake: On Blackness and Being*.
- Frank B. Wilderson III, “Introduction: Unspeakable Ethics” in *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*
- Fred Moten, “Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester’s Scream” in *The Break: On the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*.
- Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987).
- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1945)

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## EXTRA

### Week X – Arts and Selfhood in Ancient China

Reading:

- Tu Wei-Ming (Dù Wéimíng), “The Idea of the Human in Mencian Thought: An Approach to Chinese Aesthetics” in *Theories of the Arts in China*

Recommended:

- Xun Kuang (Xunzi), “Books 19 and 20” *Xunzi: The Complete Text*. Eric Hutton, trans. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014

### Week X – Islamic Aesthetics and Aesthetic Religiosity

Reading:

- Jale Nejdet Erzen, “Islamic Aesthetics: An Alternative Way to Knowledge” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65.1 (2007).

Guest Lecture Reading:

- Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Art and the Aesthetic: The Religious Dimension” in *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (2004).

Optional:

- Rumi, *Quatrains* (selected poems)
- Omar Khayyám, *the Rubáiyát* (selected poems)