

Freie Universität Berlin
FU-BEST Program
Dr. Matthias Vollmer

PERSPECTIVES ON 20th CENTURY ART IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Course description:

This course surveys the visual arts in Central Europe from the rise of modernism around 1900 to the present after postmodernism, with a strong focus on German art. It aims to study the individual works closely and interpret them critically by analyzing their formal structure, style and technique, iconography etc.; consider the concerns of the artists who created them; and place the works within their wider historical, political, economic, social, and cultural backgrounds as well as within the international development of the visual arts in Western Europe and – in the second half of the 20th century – the U.S.

A consideration of the theoretical context is of particular importance for the understanding of 20th century art and its role in society. Thus the course will also introduce students to major philosophical ideas of the period and will focus on various links to the visual art works including reflections on the methods that art historians have found appropriate in studying the objects and ideas that constitute their discipline.

Berlin houses some of the most splendid art collections in the world, such as the Neue Nationalgalerie, the Hamburger Bahnhof (with the recently opened Friedrich Christian Flick Collection), the Kupferstichkabinett (Graphic Arts), the Brücke-Museum, and the Bauhaus-Archiv, not to mention the collections of ancient art.

In addition, a vibrant scene of art galleries provides new perspectives on contemporary art that has not yet been established in the museums. An essential approach of the course will be to work not only with slides and text sources in class but also with the originals during excursions to different museums. Thus the specific material qualities of the art works discussed in class will be experienced in front of the originals. This can serve as an eye-opener for understanding the reasoning and the artistic procedure of the artists in their respective period.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Participation 20%

Attendance is required and will be taken into consideration for grading purposes; tardiness will also be considered. Assignments are to be read before coming to class. Each student will prepare brief commentaries and questions on the assigned readings to demonstrate reflection on the content of the readings. Also included in this percentage are in-class discussions.

Oral Presentation in Class: 15%

Presentation of a certain topic (artist, art movement; ca. 15 minutes) to be discussed during the assigned class. Each member of the class will be given a finished outline on the day of the presentation (1-2 pages, typewritten) by the presenting student.

In-Class Midterm: 30%

Slide identification (material covered in the course): include artist, title, date/period style/art movement: **10%**

Short questions that require brief explanations of philosophical topics and/or artworks: **10%**

One longer essay written in-class: topic of the essay may be selected out of several questions that will be given to the students one week before midterm: **10%**

Term Project: 15 %

Research paper (8-10 pages, double-spaced) on a topic chosen by the students themselves but discussed and approved by the teacher. You may elaborate a particular aspect from the topic you chose for your oral presentation.

Work on an artist or an idea from the time period. Look through your text for ideas. Choose a major artist or philosopher and select some aspect of his/her career that you want to research. Bibliographical material can be found in the textbook/reader. The topic has to be approved by the teacher by November 29. The paper is due on the day of the final exam December 13, 2 p.m. If you fail to hand in your paper on time you will receive an F (0 points) unless there are serious reasons that you explain in written form to us by December 12. You might then be given a new deadline after we have discussed the case with the director of FU-BEST.

In-Class Final Exam: 20 %

Slide identification (material covered in the course since midterm): include artist, title, date/period style: **10%**

Short questions which require brief explanations of philosophical topics and/or artworks:
10%

General Reading

Readings provide a general outline of the theoretical and formal characteristics of the art in the 20th century, leaving specific problems and issues for class discussion and independent work. Specific reading assignments will be given in the form of a photocopied course Reader.

- Art in Theory 1900 – 2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas, ed. by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Oxford 2003.
- German Art in the Twentieth Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1905-1985, ed by. Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal and Wieland Schmied, ex. cat. Royal Academy of Arts, London 1985.
- German Art from Beckmann to Richter. Images of a divided country, ed. Eckhart Gillen, exhibition cat. Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin 1997/98.
- Eberhard Roters (ed): Stationen der Moderne. Kataloge epochaler Kunstaussstellungen in Deutschland 1910-1962, Köln 1988 (Kunstbibliothek 8/1997/122 11)
- The Romantic Spirit in German Art 1790-1990, ed. Keith Hartley, Henry Meyric Hughes, Peter-Klaus Schuster and William Vaughan, Stuttgart 1994.
- Paul Gorner, Twentieth Century German Philosophy, Oxford 2000.
- Michael Hatt/Charlotte Klonk, Art history. A critical introduction to its methods, Manchester 2006.

Course Schedule

I: Introduction

- Course overview and assignments
- Central Europe and Germany
- Case study around 1800: The romantic tradition in German Art
- 19th century background in German philosophy: Arthur Schopenhauer

2: Around 1900 in Austria

- What does Art History want, and how to approach a painting?
- Arts and Craft, Art Nouveau (Vienna Secession)
- Sigmund Freud: Reality and Dream

3: Expressionism and the Birth of Abstract Art

- The *Brücke*

- *Blauer Reiter*

4: Feeling and Construction

- Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Apollonian and Dionysian*
- Russian Avantgarde: Suprematism and Constructivism
- Bauhaus
- Ferdinand de Saussure – The Linguistic Turn

5: The Experience of the Disintegration of Reality

- The Dada Movement in Central Europe
- New Objectivity
- Walter Benjamin “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

6: Midterm Exam

7: Beyond Realism

- Surrealism
- Two exemplary artists: Paul Klee and Max Beckmann

8: Fieldtrip Neue Nationalgalerie

9: The Destruction of the Arts in Nazi-Germany and Art in Post-War Central Europe:

Abstract versus Figurative art

- “Degenerated art” and Nazi ideology
- Art Informel, Tachisme, Lyrical Abstraction, Zero
- Socialist Realism

10: Perceptions of Reality

- Myth, ideology and the German past (Joseph Beuys, Sigmar Polke, Anselm Kiefer, Markus Lüpertz, Jörg Immendorff, Georg Baselitz)
- Frankfurt School and the critical social theory (Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer).
- The search for new artforms : Happenings, Fluxus, Actions, Performances, concept art, Body art.

11: Fieldtrip Hamburger Bahnhof Museum

12: Postmodernism and Deconstruction

- Art Theory and philosophy in postmodern central Europe: Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault
- Painting, Photography: Neo Rauch, Gerhard Richter, Rebecca Horn

13: Final Exam