

Lingnan University
Department of Visual Studies

Course title	: Philosophy of Visual Arts
Course code	: VIS 2202
No. of credits/term	: 3
Mode of tuition	: Lecture and tutorial
Class contact hours	: 2 hours lecture per week, 1 hour tutorial per week
Category in major program	: Foundation course
Prerequisite	: N/A
Co-requisite	: N/A
Exclusion	: N/A
Exemption requirement	: N/A

Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations.

Brief course description

The course is an introduction to philosophical thinking about the visual arts. One part of the course is devoted to issues concerning the visual arts in general. The other part is devoted to issues concerning particular visual arts such as painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, photography, and film.

Aims

The aim of the course is to render students capable of understanding and evaluating philosophical (and quasi-philosophical) theories about the visual arts.

Learning outcomes

On completion of the course, students will:

1. demonstrate a grasp of the concept of a visual art by providing suitable examples, a rationale for inclusion in the visual arts, and making comparisons between visual arts;

2. be able to demonstrate understanding of key texts in the history of thinking about the visual arts;
3. be able to explain and evaluate influential theories about the visual arts;
4. be able to relate philosophical theories to particular artworks and practices;
5. demonstrate the importance of philosophical thinking about the visual arts, by explaining the purpose of philosophical thinking about the visual arts, and assessing the relative merits of philosophical and non-philosophical approaches.

Indicative content

Issues concerning the visual arts in general include, first of all, their scope and limits, for example: what are the visual arts? Do they include performing arts, and if so, which ones? What artistic and other goals can be achieved in the visual arts that cannot be achieved in (certain) other arts? Vice versa, what can be achieved in (certain) other arts that cannot be achieved in the visual arts? Secondly, there is the issue of comparison: are all of the visual arts equally important or do they constitute a hierarchy? How fundamental is the singular/multiple distinction (distinguishing, for example, paintings from etchings)? How do stories get told by paintings, photos, and films respectively? Do sculptures represent things from a point of view, like paintings and photos? Finally, there are questions regarding the evaluation of works in the visual arts, for example: how are visual designs to be evaluated? Is the visual design all that matters in the evaluation of visual art? Can visual artworks become better or worse after they have been completed, and if so, what are the implications for restoration?

Issues that are less general and that are best discussed in connection with particular visual arts include the nature of depiction (pictorial representation), realism, visual expression, photographic images, seeing-in, design, and cinematic adaptation. In addition, there are normative issues pertaining to particular art forms, such as the evaluation of architectural designs. Naturally, the discussion of these issues will remain at an introductory level.

Teaching Method

Lectures are supplemented with more practical, tutorial-like sessions in which students have to find answers to questions concerning the lectures and/or required reading.

Measurement of learning outcomes

Students' engagement with the examples, lectures, and readings, and corresponding progress towards the learning outcomes outlined above, will be measured principally by means of examinations comprising both short-answer and more substantive, reflective essay questions.

- A student's understanding of a key text will be measured by asking her or him to rephrase a passage, to correct a misquotation, to draw inferences from what the author is saying, to sum up his or her (main) claims, to reconstruct his or her arguments, to find more examples supporting the author's theory, to find counterexamples to the author's theory, to detect agreement or disagreement with other authors, and so on.

- A student's grasp of the concept of a visual art will be measured by asking her or him to give examples of visual arts, to provide a rationale for reckoning them to the visual arts and for excluding others from this category, to provide a definition of 'visual art', to compare the concept of a visual art to that of a fine art or a performing art, to make comparisons between particular visual arts such as painting and sculpture, to compare visual arts to non-visual arts such as poetry, and so on.
- A student's awareness of the importance of philosophical thinking about the visual arts will be measured by asking him or her to explain the purpose of philosophical thinking about the visual arts, to assess the relative merits of philosophical and non-philosophical approaches, to identify philosophical questions or presuppositions in non-philosophical contexts, and more generally by observing his or her responsiveness in class, for example, his or her readiness to raise and answer questions.

Assessment

Mid-term exam: 40%.

The mid-term is an open-book examination. Students will be asked to assess definitions of visual art, to provide a rationale for including specific examples in the relevant category, to reflect on the importance of philosophical thinking about visual art, and to detect agreement or disagreement between authors' views on visual art. Outcomes 1, 2, and 4 are thus being examined.

Final exam: 40%.

Before the final exam, students will receive feedback on their mid-term exam performance and class participation.

The final exam is also an open-book examination. Students will be asked to make comparisons between different visual arts, such as painting and sculpture, to explain and evaluate influential theories about the visual arts, and to apply the relevant conceptions to particular artworks and practices. Outcomes 3, 4, and 5 are thus being examined.

Participation: 20%.

Students are required to keep a reflective diary that articulates their current understanding of the visual arts and expresses changes in that understanding over time. Students are to use examples based on problems, texts, or visual art forms they encounter in the course to explicate their own philosophical positions, critique them, and eventually render them more robust. Eventually they will be expected to be able to defend the position they adopt, rather than merely holding a position in an unexamined manner. Students will be encouraged to use a range of media in order to support their arguments. Parts of the reflective diary may be shared with fellow students for the purposes of peer development and feedback.

Required readings

Selections from:

Alperson, P. (ed.), *The Philosophy of the Visual Arts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992.

Hyman, J., *The Objective Eye: Color, Form and Reality in the Theory of Art*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Supplementary readings

Budd, M., 'How Pictures Look', reprinted in P. Lamarque & S. H. Olson (eds.), *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004.

Carroll, N., 'Narration', in P. Livingston & C. Plantinga (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, London, Routledge, 2009.

Edwards, T. A., *The Things Which Are Seen: A Philosophy of Beauty*, London, John Tiranti, 1947.

Gombrich, E. H., *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, London, Phaidon Press, 1996.

Goodman, N., *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1976.

Goodman, N., 'Twisted Tales; or Story, Study, and Symphony', *Critical Inquiry* 1981, Vol. 7, pp. 109-119.

Hopkins, R., 'Painting, Sculpture, Sight and Touch', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 2004, 44:2, pp. 149-166.

Hopkins, R., 'Depiction', in P. Livingston & C. Plantinga (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, London, Routledge, 2009.

Levinson, J., 'Hybrid Art Forms', *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 1984, 18:4, pp. 5-13.

Levinson, J., 'The Work of Visual Art', in Id., *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell UP, 2006.

Livingston, P., 'On the Appreciation of Cinematic Adaptations', *Projections* 2010, 4:2, pp. 104-127.

Savile, A., 'The Rationale of Restoration', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1993, 51:3, pp. 463-474.

Scruton, R., *The Aesthetics of Architecture*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1979.

Walden, S. (ed.), *Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2010.

Walton, K. L., *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1990.

Walton, K. L., *Marvelous Images*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2008.

Wilson, G. M., 'Le Grand Imagier Steps Out: The Primitive Basis of Film Narration', *Philosophical Topics* 1997, 25, pp. 295-318.

Wollheim, R., *Art and Its Objects*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1980.

Wollheim, R., 'On Pictorial Representation', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1998, 56, pp. 217-226.

Important Notes:

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3* hours of class contact and 6* hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.

* Numbers of hours are subject to adjustment for individual courses.