



AH30910

CONTEMPORARY ART 1: MODERNIST PAINTING IN AMERICA 1914-1970

Co-ordinator: Prof. John Harvey

Other Staff: None

Semester: 1

Course Delivery:

Lectures:	10 x 1 hrs
Seminars:	3 x 2 hrs
Study Time:	82 hrs (General reading, Essay preparation, and Examination revision)

Assessment

Essay	2,500 words	50% (deadline 18 Dec.)
Exam	2 hrs	50%

Conditions: Both assessed elements must be passed. Only the failed component need be resubmitted

Brief Description

The module focuses on American Modernism between 1914 and 1979. The period is examined against the background of European Modernism and its transplantation in America after the Armory Show. The aim is to define Modernism in terms both of its theoretical underpinnings and the various movements it spawned. The module also seeks to relate Modernist art works to artistic practices outside Modernism, to other forms of cultural expression, and to the philosophical and political climate of the period. In particular, the lectures and seminars will discuss the bifurcation of art culture around the 1950s, consequent to the development of Pop Art on the one hand and various modes of abstraction on the other, and the evolution of abstraction from pure form to the condition of art-as-idea. The module lays the foundations for many of the issues and ideas, such as the birth of Postmodernism, developed in *Contemporary Art 2*.

Syllabus

Topics will be chosen from:

Concepts of Late-Modernism

- 1 *Lecture:* Modernism and Theory: Preliminary Considerations
- 2 *Lecture:* Modernism and History: Political Interpretations of Abstraction During the Cold War Years
- 3 *Lecture:* Modernism and Tradition: Form as Content
- 4 *Lecture:* Modernism in America: the Roots of Abstraction, from the Armoury Show to the Late 1930s.
- 5 *Seminar:* Abstraction and Representation: Past, Present, and Future.

Manifestations of Late-Modernism 1940-60s

- 6 *Lecture:* Action as Content: Jackson Pollock and Abstract Expressionism
- 7 *Lecture:* The Existential Sublime: Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman
- 8 *Lecture:* Bridging the Divide: Pop Art and the Transubstantiation of Commodity
- 9 *Seminar:* The Great Divide: Art and kitsch, Clement Greenberg and Culture

Case Studies 1930-70s

- 10 *Lecture:* The Urban Scene: Edward Hopper
- 11 *Lecture:* The Legacy of Marcel Duchamp: Jasper Johns, John Cage and the Found Object.
- 12 *Lecture:* Landscape and Abstraction: Richard Diebenkorn's 'Ocean Park' Series

Manifestations of Late-Modernism 1960-70s

- 13 *Lecture:* The Seduction of Reduction: From Post-Painterly Abstraction to Minimalism
- 14 *Seminar:* Process as Content: Minimalist and Systems Art and Music
- 15 *Lecture:* Idea as Content: Conceptualism and the Dematerialisation of Form.

Pre-Requisites

AH10120

Co-Requisites

None

Incompatibilities

None

Skill Development

The module will assist the development of the following academic and transferable skills:

- *Self-directed project work* -- through the production of the Essay and Seen Paper Examination
- *IT and information handling* -- you will be expected to word-process the Essay. Where appropriate
- *Writing in an academic context* – Essay will be composed in accordance with academic conventions.
- *Oral discussion and presentation* -- These will be developed in the context of Seminars
- *Careers need awareness* – N/A
- *Self-management* -- you will be expected to construct a realistic timetable for the completion of the Essay and preparation for the Seen Paper Examination.
- *Group activity* –Seminar Discussion.

Assessment

Components

Essay (50%) (2,500 words)

Examination Paper (50%) (2 hours)

Conditions

Both assessed elements must be passed. Only the failed component need be resubmitted.

Brief Bibliography

Sam Hunter and John Jacobus, *American Art in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Prentice Hall and Abrams, 1973.

Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds) *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992

Gregory Battock (ed.), *The New Art: A Critical Anthology*, 1966 New York: Dutton, revised edition, 1973.

Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticisms*, 2 vols, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986

John A. Walker, *Art in an Age of Mass Media*, London: Pluto Press, 1983.

Richard Hertz, *Theories of Contemporary Art*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1985.

Aims

The module aims to:

- A. examine the growth of Modernism in America and the Modernist lineage of movements from Abstract Expressionism to Conceptualism
- B. consider Modernist imagery in relation to the period of political and social upheaval during the post-war years
- C. posit Pop Art within the realist tradition of American Art and as a reactionary alternative to High-Modernism
- D. study Greenbergian Modernism as a theoretical critique and commentary on American Art in its relation to the Western European Tradition
- E. develop a critical scepticism of theory
- F. enable students to study and discuss primary source texts in relation to images with a view to their mutual elucidation
- G. enable students to perform a comparative analysis of images

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the module the student should be able to:

1. thoughtfully articulate a concept of Modernism as a theoretical construct and template imposed upon and directing the module of post-war American art (Aims: B, D)
2. thoughtfully articulate an understanding of Abstract art as an embodiment of ideology and as a metaphor for certain political and philosophical concepts during the period (Aims: A, D)
3. account for the implicit tensions and dichotomy at the heart of Modernism resulting from the conflict of realist and abstract tendencies, high and low art (Aims: A, C)
4. demonstrate knowledge of key Modernist texts and a facility to test their assertions against an experience of Modernist images (Aims: E, F)

Relation to Assessment

Outcomes 1 - 4 will be assessed through an essay that aims to assess a particular and in-depth comprehension of one aspect of the module curriculum;

Outcomes 1 – 4 will be examined through a seen paper that aims to assess a broader comprehension of curriculum content.

JH (2009)