How Art Works  
IDSEM-UG 1837-001

**Description:** It's commonplace to say that art "moves" us. But what does that really mean and how, exactly, does this happen? For millennia the effect/affect of art has been theorized, debated, and worried over. This class takes as its core the question "How does art work?", and looks at the ways in which various philosophic, religious, educational, political, and scientific texts, from antiquity to the present, have attempted to answer this question. Exploration of this larger question depends on others: What are the ancient philosophers' hopes and fears regarding art's affective abilities? What is at stake in the debate over Biblical iconoclasm and the defense of religious art? How do theorists talk about the ineffable sublime, or categorize aesthetic judgment? How does the avant-garde frame its intersection with the political? What does neuroscience suggest about art's impact on our brains? How does art educate? Finally, does art, as the poet Auden once pondered, make nothing happen? Through readings and in class discussions, writing individual research papers and creating a collaborative on-line database, students will tackle our major question from a variety of disciplinary and historical perspectives. Through this broad survey, How Art Works will be approached as an open question: our goal is not to arrive at a definitive destination, but instead to explore the terrain.

**Learning Goals:**
- Thinking critically from a range of intellectual positions and disciplinary traditions.
- Writing analytic essays that demonstrate creative, rigorous and original thought.
- Reading difficult texts, and communicating their relevance and importance.
- Applying theoretical and historical material to the analysis of art.
- Becoming a good “reader” of art works.

**Class Structure:** Every class will be structured in two parts. In the first half of the class we will cover the theory and texts assigned for the day. In the latter half we will “read” artworks through the theoretical lenses provided by the readings.

**Requirements:**
- Attendance, diligent reading, and active participation in all class discussions. (20% of grade)
- Four published entries -- two on texts assigned for class, two newly discovered and researched -- on HowArtWorks.org (40% of grade)
- One short analytic essay, approximately 6-8 pages, applying theory to a piece of art.
Class presentation of newly researched theory of HowArtWorks (10% of grade)

Notes:
- Syllabus, assignments, links—as well as on-line class forum—can be found on the NYU Classes site for this class.
- Plagiarism, in any form, is not tolerated. For a full review of Gallatin’s policy on plagiarism see [http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html](http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)
- Syllabus and readings are subject to change as the course develops throughout the semester.

Essays:
- W.H. Auden, “In Memory of W.B. Yeats”
- Audre Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury”
- The Bible, Exodus: 20, Isaiah: 40-45
- Qur’an, excerpt from “The Prophets”
- St. John of Damascus, On the Divine Image
- Plato, Book 10 from The Republic
- Aristotle, Poetics
- Homer, selection from The Iliad
- Ku K’ai-chih, “Notes for a Landscape”
- Tsung Ping, “The Enjoyment of Painting”
- Hsieh Ho, “The Six Techniques of Painting”
- Wang Wei, “Formulas for Landscape”
- Ching Hao, “A Conversation on Method”
- Makato Ueda, “Mitsuoki on the Art of Painting” and “Rikyū and the Art of the Tea Ceremony”
- Edward Shaughnessy, “From Liturgy to Literature”
- Friedrich Schiller, from On the Aesthetic Education of Man
- Matthew Arnold, from Culture and Anarchy
- André Breton, (first) “Manifesto of Surrealism”
- F. T. Marinetti, “Manifesto of Futurism”
- Alesandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and Aleksei Gan, “Who We Are: Manifesto of the Constructivist Group”
- Oswald de Andrade, “The Manifesto Antropófago (Cannibal Manifesto)”
- Théophile Gautier, preface to Mademoiselle de Maupin
- Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”
- Joseph Kusoth, “Art After Philosophy”
- Léopold Sédérf Senghor, “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century”
- Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture”
- Dominique Malaquais “Quelle Liberté: Art, Beauty and the Grammars of
Resistance in Douala”

- Jacques Rancière, from *The Politics of Aesthetics*
- Chantal Mouffe, “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces”
- Boris Groys, “On Art Activism”
- Augusto Boal, from *Theatre of the Oppressed*
- John Dewey, from *Art as Experience*
- Nicolas Bourriaud, from *Relational Aesthetics*
- Silvan Tomkins, “What are Affects?”
- Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect”
- Gabrielle Star, “Seen and Heard,” from *Feeling Beauty*
- John Hyman, “Art and Neuroscience”

Copies of the essays can be accessed, for reference purposes only (do not copy or download) via the How Art Works NYU Classes site.

**Semester Schedule:**

**Jan 26**  
**Does Art Work?**
W.H. Auden, “In Memory of W.B. Yeats”
Audre Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury”

**Feb 2**  
**Graven Images: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Iconoclasm**
*The Bible*, Exodus: 20, Isaiah: 40-45
*Qur’an*, excerpt from “The Prophets”

**Feb 9**  
**Banish the Poets! The Ancient Greeks**
Plato, Book 10 from *The Republic*
Aristotle, *Poetics*
Homer, selection from *The Iliad*

**Feb 16**  
**Views from the East: Imperial China and Medieval Japan**
From Lin Yutang, *The Chinese Theory of Art*:
- Ku K’ai-chih, “Notes for a Landscape”
- Tsung Ping, “The Enjoyment of Painting”
- Hsieh Ho, “The Six Techniques of Painting”
- Wang Wei, “Formulas for Landscape”
- Ching Hao, “A Conversation on Method”
Makato Ueda, “Mitsuoki on the Art of Painting” and “Rikyū and the Art of the Tea Ceremony”
Edward Shaughnessy, “From Liturgy to Literature” (optional)
Feb 23  Discovering Aesthetics: European Enlightenment
   Friedrich Schiller, from *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (pay special attention to letters 15-18)
   Matthew Arnold, from *Culture and Anarchy*

Mar 1  Art Leads the World: The Avant-Garde
   André Breton, (first) “Manifesto of Surrealism”
   F. T. Marinetti, “Manifesto of Futurism”
   Alesandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and Aleksei Gan, “Who We Are: Manifesto of the Constructivist Group”
   Oswald de Andrade, “The Manifesto Antropófago (Cannibal Manifesto)”

Mar 8  L'art pour l'art
   Théophile Gautier, preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*
   Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”
   Joseph Kusoth, “Art After Philosophy”

Mar 15  Spring Break – No Class

Mar 22 Recognizing New Subjects: Art, Africa and Post Colonialism
   Léopold Sédé Senghor, “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century”
   Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture”
   Dominique Malaquais “Quelle Liberté: Art, Beauty and the Grammars of Resistance in Douala”

Mar 29  Arts and Activism
   Jacques Rancière, from *The Politics of Aesthetics*
   Chantal Mouffe, “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces”
   Boris Groys, “On Art Activism”
   Augusto Boal, from *Theatre of the Oppressed*

Apr 5  Art as Experience
   John Dewey, from *Art as Experience*
   Nicolas Bourriaud, from *Relational Aesthetics*

Apr 12 More than a Feeling: Affect
   Silvan Tomkins, “What are Affects?”
   Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect”

Apr 19 It’s all in your Head: Neuroaesthetics
   Gabrielle Star, “Seen and Heard,” from *Feeling Beauty*
   V.S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein, “The Science of Art: A
Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience”
John Hyman, “Art and Neuroscience”

Apr 26  How Art Works: All the Rest
Readings and Presentations by Students

May 3  And More: How Art Works
Readings and Presentations by Students

All work is due by May 3