Course Description:

From antiquity until the twentieth century, beauty was almost unanimously considered the supreme purpose of art and even synonymous with artistic excellence. Over the course of the last century, however, beauty came to be viewed as little less than an aesthetic crime. In the last decade and a half, however, many artists, philosophers, writers, cultural historians, and psychologists have given beauty another look.

What is beauty? Why is beauty so powerful? What attracts us to something or someone beautiful? To address these questions, we will investigate the different ways in which philosophers, artists, writers, cultural historians, and psychologists have probed the issue. Of critical importance is how, if at all, beauty fits into our lives and whether beauty is an objective feature of things or a more subjective feature determined by context.

In addition to contributing regularly and actively to class discussions and activities, students will be required to compose frequent responses and reflections, write two formal essays (4-5 pages each), present a research proposal, and complete a final research paper (8-10) pages.

Required Texts:

- CD-ROM containing miscellaneous course readings (distributed by instructor)
Grading Breakdown:

Active Class Contribution 20%
Responses and Reflections 20%
2 Essays (4-5 pages each; 15% each) 30%
Final (8-10 page) Research Paper 30%

A Further Explanation of Requirements…

Active Class Contribution (15%)

Always come to class prepared, having critically read and taken notes on the reading material. Regular attendance and lively participation – whether it be during regular class discussions or during specific class activities (such as individual free-writing, peer review workshops, etc.) – is absolutely necessary.

Missing one or two classes is understandable. However, if you are excessively absent (i.e. more than four times) this semester, your course grade will certainly suffer and, in extreme cases, you may even fail. If illness or other urgent matters require you to be absent more than twice, speak to your advisor and to me immediately. Perpetual lateness is also basis for penalty. I will count every three times late as one absence (perpetually coming late to class is very disruptive to the group dynamic). In the event that you are absent, you should email someone in the class to find out exactly what you missed in order that you do not fall too far behind. However, I cannot overstate the importance of being on time, present, alert, and active in class – both for your sake and for that of your classmates.

Responses and Reflections (20%)

Students are required to regularly post informal responses and reflections to various prompts on our Blackboard Discussion Board – sometimes before discussing readings in class, sometimes afterwards, and sometimes both. These postings are meant to give you the opportunity to reflect on, process, and expand on the content of class discussions and readings. You will be encouraged to raise questions that you might like to pursue in one of the more formal writing assignments. Ideally, these postings will help you to formulate a research problem that you can then pursue as your final project.

Analytical Essays (15% each; 30% total)

The two required analytic essays will each go through a full-period workshop utilizing various activities (including, but not limited to, peer review) which will provide you with a great deal of feedback before you begin to compose the final draft. Each essay should be 4-5 pages (double-spaced) and should follow MLA guidelines as documented in MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th Ed (which we will review in some depth). Topics – as well as more specific directions and grading criteria – will be distributed well in advance of the paper due dates. Essays should be composed in Word, saved as a Word (.doc) document, and emailed to the instructor by the specified deadlines. Your essay will then be carefully reviewed and returned to you via email with extensive commentary and a grade. You may rewrite both of these essays as long as the rewrites are submitted via email by the last day of classes. If you choose to rewrite, it is required that we meet first.
Research Paper (30%)

An 8-10 page research paper is required. The paper will utilize at least five secondary sources and be based on a research problem you develop in conjunction with the class and instructor. Like the shorter essays, the research paper will go through a series of workshops in which you will receive pointed feedback from the instructor as well as your peers. As part of the process of writing the research paper, you will also be required to present a proposal to the class. More specific information about both the requirements of the research proposal and the research paper will be given later in the term. [Note: your research proposal presentation grade will be incorporated into your overall research paper grade.]

Additional Assistance

In addition to the assistance offered by the instructor, the Gallatin Writing Center (located in Room 423) is a superb resource. Upper-level Gallatin students are employed as Peer Writing Assistants and are trained to help other students at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming about a subject to clarifying a thesis to organizing the structure of an essay. For more information and to make an appointment with a Peer Writing Assistant see: http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing/writingcenterappointments.html

Plagiarism

The University's code of academic and personal conduct applies in all instances of plagiarism. You may find this code in your NYU Gallatin Bulletin, page 110. You can download the bulletin at: http://www.nyu.edu/gallatin/pdf/GallatinBulletin.pdf

Class Schedule

1/24  Course Introduction and Writing Exercise
1/26  Scruton, pp. 1-48
1/31  Scruton, pp. 49-164
2/2   Plato, from Ion, Republic, and Symposium and White, “Love and Beauty in Plato’s Symposium” (CD READING 1)
2/7   Burke, from A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (CD READING 2)
2/9   Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste” (CD READING 3)
2/14  Hume (continued); First Essay Topics Distributed
2/16  First Essay Workshop
2/21  Sheppard, “Art, Beauty, and Aesthetic Appreciation” (CD READING 4)
2/23  Kant, from Critique of Judgment (CD READING 5)

First Essay Due via Email – 11pm 2/24
2/28 Kant (continued); Eaton, “Kantian and Contextual Beauty” (in Beauty Matters)
3/1 Baudelaire, from “The Painter of Modern Life” (CD READING 6); Second Essay Topics Distributed
3/6 Baudelaire (continued)
3/8 Second Essay Workshop
3/13 Spring Break
3/15 Spring Break
3/20 Wilde, Portrait of Dorian Gray
3/22 Wilde (continued)

Second Essay Due via Email – 11pm 3/23

3/27 Danto, from The Abuse of Beauty (CD READING 7-9)
3/29 Danto (CD READING 10-12)
3/29 Higgins, “Beauty and Its Kitsch Competitors” (in Beauty Matters)
4/3 Bordo, “Beauty (Re) Discovers the Male Body” (in Beauty Matters)
4/5 Perlmutter, “Miss America: Whose Ideal?” (in Beauty Matters)
4/10 Silvers, “From the Crooked Timber of Humanity, Beautiful Things Can Be Made” (in Beauty Matters)
4/12 Etcoff, Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty; Research Assignment Distributed
4/17 Etcoff (continued)

4/19 Research Paper Proposals/Presentations
4/24 Research Paper Proposals/Presentations
4/26 Research Paper Workshop
5/1 Research Paper Workshop
5/3 Research Paper Workshop
5/8 Optional Meetings
5/10 Optional Meetings

Research Paper Due via Email – 11pm 5/13