

Three Rivers Community College
Course K100 Art Appreciation
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I. ABOUT THIS COURSE

WHAT IS ART APPRECIATION?

Webster's Third International Dictionary tells us that "appreciation" comes from Late Latin and Middle French words like *appretiato* and *aprecier*, meaning "evaluation", "to evaluate," and gives the following as the first definition of our word "appreciation":

recognition through the senses especially with delicacy of perception <an appreciation of fine shades of meaning> ; specifically sensitive awareness of worth or especially aesthetic value <his fine appreciation of painting>

In other words, it is not the goal of this course that you will learn to *like* art. *Liking* is a matter of taste. It tells us about ourselves. *Appreciating* is a matter of judgment and tells us about the work of art.

The difference between Taste and Judgment was set forth in a clear schematic way by the twentieth-century English poet W. H. Auden, when he said that *there are only five verdicts that one can render about a book*.

I see that this is good and I like it.
I see that this is good but I don't like it.
I see that this is good and I don't like it, but I understand that with perseverance I can come to like it.
I can see that this is trash and I don't like it.
I can see that is trash but I like it.

The same is true of painting.

Taste is liking, seeing that something is good is judgment.

"Judgment" implies seeing *how good* a good painting is with respect to other good paintings.

Therefore, appreciation precedes judgment.

And *seeing* precedes appreciation.

And, obviously, *looking* precedes *seeing*

This course is about seeing. Therefore we must begin with looking..

"It doesn't...so much matter," said the great twentieth-century American poet Ezra Pound, "where you begin the examination of a subject, so long as you keep on until you get round again to your starting point. As it were, you start on a sphere, or a cube; you must keep on until you have seen it from all sides."

“I knew I was an artist,” said the important twentieth-century American photographer Jan Groover, “when I discovered that *any* painting will reveal everything there is to know about it if you just look at it carefully and long enough.”

The key words in Ms. Groover’s statement are “everything”, “know” “look” “carefully” “long” and “enough”.

“You would think,” said Pound, “that anyone wanting to know about poetry would do one of two things or both. I.E. LOOK AT it or listen to it. He might even think about it? And if he wanted advice he would go to someone who KNEW something about it.”

And about looking, Pound tells this story about the great 19th century Harvard naturalist Louis Agassiz:

A post-graduate student equipped with honours and diplomas went to Agassiz to receive the final and finishing touches. The great man offered him a small fish and told him to describe it.

Post-Graduate Student: “That’s only a sunfish.”

Agassiz: “I know that. Write a description of it.”

After a few minutes the student returned with the description of the *Ichthus Heliodiplodokus*, or whatever term is used to conceal the common sunfish from vulgar knowledge...as found in textbooks of the subject.

Agassiz again told the student to describe the fish.

The student produced a four-page essay. Agassiz then told him to look at the fish. At the end of three weeks the fish was in an advanced state of decomposition, but the student knew something about it.

As you might conclude from all these quotations, works of art have no secrets. Everything you need to know about any painting we study this semester is indeed on the surface of that painting, in plain sight, where everyone can see it.

It is the assumption of this course that by learning to look you will learn how to see, and by learning how to see you learn how to *appreciate* works of art– in this case, paintings.

Therefore the first and constant task of this course is learning how to look and what to look at.

The Painters and Paintings in Your Textbook

Art history textbooks such as yours have two tasks. 1) To present the great major and minor artists, from 1700 to the 1990s, who helped create the art of their respective times and influenced the art that followed, and 2) to illustrate these artists’ achievements through reproductions of their greatest and most characteristic works.

In other words, the job of sifting and organizing the past has been done for you. Your task is to learn to look at and (as best one can with reproductions) see in the paintings the reason why the world has, so far, concluded and agreed that these artists and these paintings are truly good and great.

In this way you will also make indirect contact with some of the best minds of the last three hundred years. .

Why Does This Matter?

Art is of the feelings, the feelings are of both the body and the soul and the truth of our nature and part of the nature of our existence lies in both. Yet these truths of the soul are often fugitive and obscure and the soul is often in doubt and overwhelmed by confusion and pain. “As a result,” said Sigmund Freud,

as a result of the inborn conflict arising from ambivalence, of the eternal struggle between the trends of love and death—there is inextricably bound up with it an increase of the sense of guilt, which will perhaps reach heights that the individual finds it hard to tolerate. One is reminded of [Goethe’s] moving arraignment of the “Heavenly Powers”:-

To earth, this weary earth, you bring us,
To guilt you let us heedless go,
Then leave repentance fierce to wring us:
A moment’s guilt, an age of woe!

And we may well heave a sigh of relief at the thought that it is nevertheless vouchsafed to a few to salvage without effort from the whirlpools of their own feelings the deepest truths, towards which the rest of us have to find our way through tormenting uncertainty and with restless groping. —*Civilization and its Discontents*, end of Chapter VI

II. YOUR TEXTBOOK AND HOW TO USE IT

Textbook

History of Art: The Western Tradition Volume II (Seventh Edition) by H.W. and Anthony F. Janson and Others.

How to Use the Textbook

This is a course in art *appreciation*. However, for many good reasons the Art Department uses a textbook in art *history*. Therefore, the weekly reading assignments contain information that is marginal to our study—information such as artists’ biographies and references to art, artists, illustrations and texts in parts of the book we will not study

Below is the book’s section on Vincent van Gogh. It is typical of the book’s treatment of major painters. The **parts in bold face type** are the kind that are central to our study..

While Cezanne and Seurat were making Impressionism into a more rigorous, classical style, **Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890)** moved in the opposite direction. He **believed that Impressionism did not provide artists with enough freedom to express their emotions**. Since this was his main concern, he is sometimes called an Expressionist, although the term ought to be reserved for certain twentieth-century painters (see page 802). Van Gogh, the first great Dutch master since the seventeenth century, did not become an artist until 1880; he died only ten years later, so that his career was even briefer than Seurat’s. His early interests were in literature and religion. Profoundly dissatisfied with the values of industrial society and filled with a strong sense of mission, he worked for a while as a lay preacher among poverty-stricken coal miners in Belgium. **This intense feeling for the poor dominates the paintings of his pre-Impressionist**

period, 1880-85. In *The Potato Eaters*, (fig. 23-10), the last and most ambitious work of those years, there is a naïve clumsiness that comes from his lack of training. This awkwardness only adds to the expressive power of his style. [See Primary Sources, no. 27, page 968]. We are reminded of Daumier and Millet (see figs. 21-37 and 21-41), and of Rembrandt and Le Nain (see figs. 18-19). For this peasant family, the evening meal has the solemn importance of a ritual.

When he painted *The Potato Eaters*, Van Gogh had not yet discovered the importance of color. A year later in Paris, where his brother Theo had a gallery devoted to modern art, he met Degas, Seurat, and other leading French artists. Their effect on him was electrifying. His pictures now blazed with color, and he even experimented briefly with Seurat's Divisionism. This phase, however, lasted less than two years. Although [blazing color] was vitally important for his development, he had to integrate it with the style of his earlier years before his genius could fully unfold. Paris had opened his eyes to the sensuous beauty of the visible world and had taught him the pictorial language of the color patch. Painting nevertheless continued to be a means for expressing his personal emotions. To investigate his deeper spiritual reality with these new means, he went to Arles, in the south of France. It was there, between 1888 and 1890, that he produced his greatest canvases.

Like Cezanne, Van Gogh now devoted his main energies to landscape painting, but the sun-drenched Mediterranean countryside evoked a very different response in him than it did in Cezanne. He saw it filled with ecstatic movement, not architectural stability and permanence. In *Wheat Field and Cypress Trees* (fig. 23-11) the earth and sky pulsate with an overpowering turbulence. The wheat field resembles a stormy sea, the trees spring flame like from the ground, and the hills and clouds heave with the same undulating motion. The blazing color is applied with a dynamism that makes each brushstroke an incisive graphic gesture. The artist's personal "handwriting" is even more dominant than in the canvases of Daumier (compare fig. 21-37). Yet to Van Gogh it was the color, not the form, that determined the expressive content of his pictures. The letters he wrote to his brother include many descriptions of his choice of hues and the emotional meanings he attached to them. He had learned about Impressionist color from Pissarro, but his personal color symbolism probably stemmed from discussions with Paul Gauguin (see below), who stayed with Van Gogh at Arles for several months. (Yellow, for example, meant faith or triumph or love to Van Gogh, Carmine was a spiritual color; cobalt, a divine one. Red and green, however, stood for the terrible human passions.) Although he acknowledged that his desire "to exaggerate the essential and to leave the obvious vague" made his colors look arbitrary by Impressionist standards, he remained deeply committed to the visible world. [See Primary Sources, no. 78, page 969]

Compared to Monet's *On the Bank of the Seine, Bennecourt* (see Fig. 22-5), the colors of *Wheat Field and Cypress Trees* are stronger, simpler, and more vibrant, but in no sense "unnatural". they speak to us of that "kingdom of light" Van Gogh had found in the south and of his mystic faith in a creative force animating all forms of life—a faith no less ardent than the sectarian Christianity of his early years.

His *Self-Portrait* (fig. 23-12) reminds us of Dürer's (see fig. 16-6), and with good reason: the missionary had now become a prophet, Van Gogh's luminous head, with its emaciated features and burning eyes, is set off against a whirlpool of darkness. "I want to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize," the artist had written, in an attempt to define for his brother the human essence that was his aim in pictures such as this. At the time of the *Self-Portrait*, he had already begun to suffer from a form of mental illness that made painting increasingly difficult. Despairing of a cure, Van Gogh committed suicide a year later, for he felt that art alone made his life worth living.

The whole passage (857 words) is almost twice as long as the essential part (453).

Clearly, if you were to read *all* of each week's pages you would be reading twice as much as is necessary. The point is to concentrate on the essential. If you learn to skim your text, pausing to concentrate only on those parts that bear on art appreciation, you will probably cut your reading time in half and double your appreciation of art.

NB: Resale: This course is given every semester. If you keep your textbook in good condition you will most likely be able to re-sell it at the end of the semester.

III WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

A. READING

Thursday, September 7

Final overview of form: Principal paintings of our study, early eighteenth century to mid-20th century, considered with respect to changes in style and continuity of forms

Tuesday, Thursday, September 12, 14

The Rococo, pp. 757-767, 770-773, 777-781. First two tracings due September 14.

Please submit tracings in a two-pocket folder, one for the old tracings the other for the new ones. All folders will be available at the beginning of each class for you to pick up, read comments, shift tracings to "old: pocket and put new ones in "new" pocket to hand in folder at the end of class.

Tuesday, Thursday September 19, 21

The 18th Century: Neo-Classicism and the Development Toward Romanticism
pp. 789-799, 805-807, 124-821. Tracings due Thursday, Sept. 21.

Tuesday, Thursday, September 26, 28

Romanticism pp. 823-849, and 859 (summary)
Tracings due Thursday, 28 September
Term Paper Parts 1 & 2, 1st draft, due by email attachment no later than Friday, September 29

Tuesday, Thursday, October 3, 5

Realism, pp. 861-871
Tracings due Thursday, October 5

Tuesday, Thursday, October 10, 12

Impressionism, pp. 873-880
Whistler, p. 888-89 and Eakins, Sargent and Homer, pp. 889-892
Tracings Due Thursday, October 12

Tuesday, Thursday, October 17, 19 and Tuesday, October 24

Post-Impressionism with Rigorous In-Class Concentration on the paintings (reproduced in your text) of Paul Cezanne, Paul Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh, Georges Seurat, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Henri Rousseau.

Tracings due Thursday, 19 October and Tuesday, October 24: This is the only reading assignment in which two sets of tracings will be required.

1st Draft, Term Paper Part 3, together with your revisions of Draft 1 of Parts 1 and 2 due by email attachment no later than Friday, October 20

Thursday, October 26

Fauvism, Cubism, pp. 945-954 with in-class concentration on Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* and the Matisse paintings reproduced in your text.

Tracings due for this reading assignment

Tuesday, October 31

Modernism, with in-class concentration on Paul Klee, Kazimir Malevich and Giorgio de Chirico,

Tracings from this reading due Tuesday, October 31

Thursday, November 2

Dada, pp. 983-992

Tracings due

Tuesday, Thursday, November 7, 9

Surrealism, pp. 993-999; Russia, pp. 1004-1007; Mondrian, p. 1007; Leger, pp. 1015-1016; O'Keeffe, p., 1022; Hopper, pp. 1029-1030; Evans, p. 1030, Beckmann, pp. 1031-32; Hartfield, p. 1032, Picasso's *Guernica*, pp. 1032-1035.

Concentration in class on individual paintings, supplemented by other works by some of the above-listed artists.

Tracings due Thursday, November 9.

1st Draft, Term Paper Part 4 due by email attachment no later than Friday, November 10

Tuesday, Thursday, November 14, 16

Post World War II Part 1: pp. 1037-1059

Painting Only

Concentration on Jackson Pollock, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol

Tracings due Thursday, 16 November

Revisions of Term Paper, Parts 1-3 due by email attachment no later than Friday, 17 November.

Tuesday, Thursday, November 28, 30

Lectures on 19th and 20th Century Photography
Sections on photography in your textbook optional
No tracings

Revision, 1st Draft of Term Paper Part 4 Due by email attachment no later than Friday 1 December

Tuesday, Thursday, December 5, 7

Recent Art. Pp. 1058-1177 : Look at all reproductions, read accordingly as reproductions spark your curiosity, come to class with questions and ideas.

No tracings

Revisions, Term Paper Parts 1-4, due by email no later than Friday, December 8

Tuesday, December 12

Make up class if necessary, if not, general discussion about term papers.

Tuesday, December 19

Final Draft, Term Paper, Due by Email attachment.

III WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS TRACING

B TRACING

Each week you will hand in a tracing of each of two reproductions of paintings, drawings, prints or photographs included *in that week's assigned pages*.

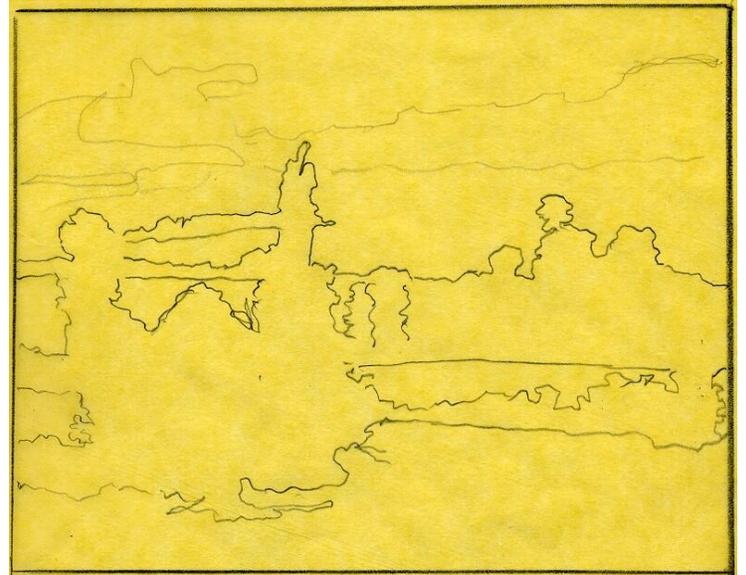
Reproductions of sculpture dominate the chapters on art after 1950. If there are no *pictures* reproduced in any given assignment, trace two reproductions from earlier chapters *beginning with Chapter 20, p. 624*

Why tracings?

Art appreciation begins with seeing and seeing begins with looking. One way of strengthening our ability to look is by tracing a picture. In order to make a good tracing we must look carefully at what the picture *represents* -- for example, the corner of a kitchen counter, in fig. 20-9, *Kitchen Still Life*, p. 629; at the *details* of the scene—kitchen utensils, two eggs, etc.; and at the *forms* – lines, shapes, light, shadow.

Here is a photograph of the French countryside by the American photographer Paul Strand, together with a tracing showing how the forms of the trees, hedges and clouds are connected to make one large form within the picture – which form is the *chief subject* of the visual structure of

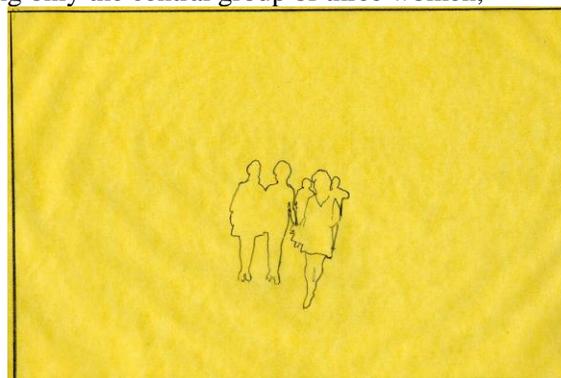
the picture just as the earth, fields, trees, etc. (but not the sky) comprise the chief subject with respect to content.



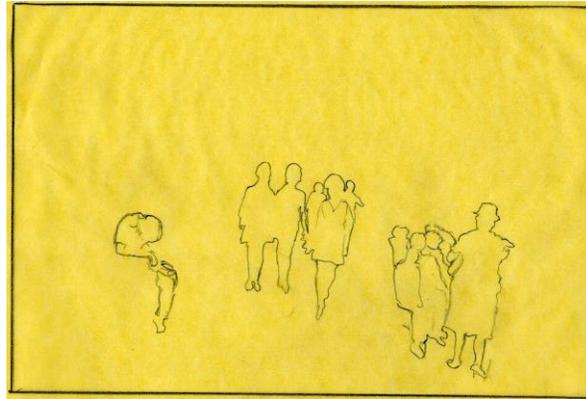
Here is a photograph of the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street, Hollywood, by the American photographer Garry Winogrand.



Here is a tracing, showing only the central group of three women,



which reveals that the group actually contains *five* figures. And here is a tracing of the same picture including all the human characters,



which reveals how *small* the figures are, how *little* of the picture they occupy, even though in the original, they appear to be so large and so strongly hold our attention.

Your tracings can be as general as that of the Paul Strand landscape or as specific to a certain aspect of a picture as are those of the Winogrand street scene.

Whenever possible, please write a brief note on your tracing, telling why you chose the picture, or what you learned from the tracing, or why you traced only the parts you did, or, indeed, anything else relating to this work.

Tracings must be turned in and kept in a folder with your name prominently written on it.

NB: Tracings must include the edges of the picture you trace. It is the edges that turn the imagery within them into a picture. Imagery without edges is not a picture.

**IV TERM PAPER: AN EXERCISE IN RESEARCH, WRITING,
LOOKING, SEEING, AND IMAGINING**

Poetry is what gets lost in translation
--Ezra Pound

Art is what gets lost in reproduction.

Therefore, until you begin to look at real paintings you will have to take on faith everything your book and teacher say about a painting's forms, composition and space *and their impact on the viewer.*

These are not the best conditions for learning how to look at, see and appreciate a work of art.

Therefore, your term paper is designed to improve this situation through a study of at least one painting by one artists.

Step-by-Step Preparation for Your Term Paper

- 1: From the artists whose works we will study, choose one whose picture or pictures interest or please or move you, etc. more than others.
2. Study the reproduction(s) of this artist in the textbook more carefully.
3. By the third week of class you will have a list of artists represented by original works in New Haven, Hartford and New York museums. Some of these paintings will be identical with the ones reproduced in your text. Go to a museums having a work by the artist you have chosen, taking your textbook with you. (*In most cases the painting on exhibition will not be the same as in your textbook. This is of no consequence*).
4. Study the original painting with respect to its surface, its forms and composition, its colors, its space, its details (especially the smallest ones), the brush strokes...
- 5.. Compare the reproduction in your book with the painting by the same artist on exhibit, noting *in writing, or on a voice recorder*) all the differences you can see between a real painting by *your* artist and the reproduction in the book. (*Because there will be many differences, this step is demanding. Therefore you are advised to spend at least two hours in the museum and preferably more. Also, the paper must be about the reproduction in your book. Therefore, if the museum in question has a postcard of the painting you're studying there, the comparison is not to be between the original on the museum's wall and the postcard available at the museum's gift store.*)

The Paper Itself

Part 1. A brief account of the artist's life and works. (No more than 1½ pages.**)

Part 2. A description of the painting represented by the text book's reproduction, with respect to its content, i.e. the scene—and in some cases, the action—that the reproduction represents. (No more than 2 pages.**)

Part 3. A description of the original painting you studied in the museum, giving some account of the scene or action it represents but concentrating more on the forms and surface. (No more than 2 pages.**)

Part 4. An account of how what you saw in the painting in the museum enables you to imagine the painting represented by the reproduction. (No more than 3 pages.**)

The paper and the individual sections must be titled in the following way.

Title: [Painter's Full Name] in Reproduction and in the Original.

1. [Painter's Full Name], [Painter's Birth and Death Dates]
2. [Painter's Last Name] in Reproduction: [Painting Title], [Date], [Medium], [Dimensions], [page number] *Art History: The Western Tradition*, Janson & Janson.
3. An Original Painting by [Painter's Last Name]: [Painting Title], [Date], [Medium], [Dimensions], [Place]

4. The Reproduction Considered in Light of the Original Described Above.

For example, suppose you chose Van Gogh's *Wheat Field and Cypress Trees*, p. 776 of your textbook, and, as the original, Van Gogh's *The Night Café* on exhibit at the Yale Art Gallery, New Haven, CT. The titles will then read:

Title: Vincent Van Gogh in Reproduction and in the Original

1. Vincent Van Gogh, 1853-1890
2. Van Gogh's *Wheat Field and Cypress Trees*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 28 ½ x 36"
3. An Original Painting by Van Gogh: *The Night Café*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 27 5/8 x 35".
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
4. The Reproduction Considered in Light of the Original Described Above

**Each part of this paper must begin at the top of a fresh page. If, in the final draft, any of the section exceeds the maximum page number, I will tear off and discard the additional page(s) before reading.

For this and other reasons, you will turn in two preliminary drafts of the paper. If any part of these drafts exceeds the page limit, my comments will show you places and ways to trim it