Philosophy and Painting

Seminar Leader: Peter Hajnal
Times: Wednesday 17:00 – 18:30
Friday 13:30 – 15:00
Email: p.hajnal@berlin.bard.edu
Location: P98 Seminar Room 2

Course Description
Why do philosophers look at paintings, what happens when they do, and what can we learn from these encounters? In this course we will be studying classic examples of such philosophical readings, but we will also be looking at the paintings that these arguments invoke, and thinking about what it means to read them philosophically. Not only will this activity help us to understand better art-historians’ invocation (or rejection, as the case may be) of philosophical arguments, it will also lead us to think in interesting ways about what philosophical problems are in general. In turn, these multiple perspectives will enable us to think about the relationships between the aesthetic, critical, and historical modes of evaluation. But the most important aim of the course is to develop a practical understanding of what it means to look at a painting philosophically, and thereby to enrich our ability to engage with the artworks themselves.

Requirements

Attendance
Attendance is required at all classes. Lateness can ruin a class and will therefore not be tolerated.

Assessment and Writing Assignments
Assessment for this course will be based on in-class presentations, preparation and participation, and writing. Students will be required to write one mid-term and one final paper. Tutorials will be given both before and after the papers are due. Students will also be required to hold presentations on a regular basis (there will be one presentation per class). The number of presentations therefore depends on the number of participants.

The mid-term paper is due at the end of Week 8 (23:59 Sunday, 30 March 2014).
The final paper is due at the end of Week 15 (23:59 Sunday, 18 May 2014).
Each paper should be 5000 words long.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers
As the Student Handbook states, essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.
Grade Breakdown
Presentations  20%
Participation  30%
Essays  50%

Schedule

**WEEK 1: Introduction: Philosophy and Painting**
L.B. Alberti: On Painting (entire text)
Stanley Cavell: The Thought of Movies (selections), The World Viewed (selections)

**WEEK 2: Perspective**
Erwin Panofsky: Perspective as Symbolic Form (selections)

**WEEK 3: Humanism**
Machiavelli: The Prince (selections)
Nicholas of Cusa: On the Vision of God (selections)
José Ortega y Gasset: The Dehumanization of Art (selections)

**WEEK 4: Materialism**
Plato: Republic (selections)
Denis Diderot: The Salons (selections); Denis Diderot: Isolated Thoughts on Painting (selections)
Michael Podro: Apropos Chardin (from Michael Podro: Depiction)

**WEEK 5: Innocence**
Giovanni Boccaccio: Decameron (selections)
Søren Kierkegaard: The Concept of Anxiety (selections)
Antonio di Tuccio Manetti: Fatso the Carpenter

**WEEK 6: The Unconscious**
Sigmund Freud: A Childhood Memory of Leonardo da Vinci
Richard Wollheim: On Painting (selections)
The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci (selections)

**WEEK 7: Truth and Validity**
Martin Heidegger: The Origin of the Work of Art
Meyer Shapiro: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh
A. Hofstadter: Validity in Art

**WEEK 8: Authenticity**
Jean Paul Sartre: The Captive of Venice
(FRIDAY’S CLASS WILL TAKE PLACE ON 13 MAY!)
WEEK 9: The Body
M. Merleau-Ponty: Cézanne's Doubt

WEEK 10: The Sense of Sight
M. Merleau Ponty: Indirect language and voices of silence

WEEK 11: Desire
John Berger: Modigliani and Love
(NO FRIDAY CLASS THIS WEEK!)

WEEK 12: History
G.W.F. Hegel: Aesthetic Lectures (selections)
Joseph Margolis: The Arts and the Definition of the Human (selections)

WEEK 13: Painting as Philosophy
Arthur Danto: The Transfiguration of the Commonplace (selections)
Clement Greenberg: Art and Culture (selections)

WEEK 14: Metaphysics
Wilhelm Worringer: Abstraction and Empathy (selections)
Vassily Kandinsky: On the Spiritual in Art
Michel Foucault: Manet and the Object of Painting

WEEK 15
NO CLASSES

Books and Readers
Readers will be available at the beginning of the course. Books for the course have been ordered and are available in the library. I am more than glad to help with suggesting and finding any further readings – feel free to drop me a note.