

PHIL 339, Philosophy of Art
2026W Term 2
Monday, Wednesday, & Friday 11am-12pm
ESB 2012

Instructor

Alyssa Izatt
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Office Hours

BUCH E274, in-person, M+W, 2-3:30pm
By request on zoom

Course Description and Aims

Art is an important part of human life. It enriches and engages us. The emergence of art has been taken to be an early indication of human society and development, like the Lascaux cave paintings. We all love beautiful works and places, and we consume artworks (like songs, films, paintings, theatre, books, etc.) in our leisure time. We may even engage artistically ourselves, by creating art. The purpose of this class is to examine philosophical questions related to art and aesthetics. To do this, this course will survey themes in the philosophy of art, including the nature of art and creativity, aesthetic value, and art & the good life. Each class, we will engage with individual works of art alongside philosophical literature. The first half of the class will be theory focused, engaging with fundamental questions such as, can we enjoy a work of art without knowing anything about the piece? What makes art good? Are experts better judges of art than laypeople? We will engage with classic and contemporary readings in order to explore these questions more deeply. The latter half of the class will be a survey of current issues in the philosophy of art. We will examine contemporary challenges in art, relating to ethics, feminism, and political philosophy. Selected topics will include lookism, art & technology, authenticity, and censorship. Classes will be balanced between lectures on course content and class discussion. The aim of this class will be to engage with the readings, classmates, and relevant artwork in a philosophical manner.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment Breakdown	Grade Percentage
Participation & attendance (assessed throughout)	10%
In-class writing assignments (4)	30%
Oral midterm exam (scheduled during the ? week of term)	30%
Short final Paper (due June 22nd)	30%

Assessment

Participation & attendance

- Students are expected to attend class regularly, do the readings ahead of class, and contribute to class discussion. Students will be allowed 4 unexcused absences per term (meaning: do not have to notify me of your absences or provide a rationale for missing class until **after** you have used these two absences. If you notify me of an absence before you've used up your excused absences, I will ignore your email). Participation is assessed in terms of thoughtful engagement with the course material, rather than just the frequency of contributions. Attendance will be assessed throughout the term.

In-class Writing Assignments

- There will be 4 in-class writing assignments. The dates for these are noted on the class schedule. Prompts will be based on material that has been covered **in advance** of the day that the assignment is scheduled. These assignments will be handwritten, and no online submission will be permitted, without a note from the Center for Accessibility.

Oral Midterm Exam

- Students will schedule an oral exam with the instructor during the 5th or 6th week of the course. Exams will last 10-15 minutes. Half of the assessment will be about general course content. The latter half will give the student the opportunity to engage critically with a specific reading. The exam questions will be chosen from a list that will be provided in advance of the exam. I will automatically schedule your exam. If you have a conflict with your assigned time, let me know as soon as possible and I will reschedule your slot.

Short Final Paper (1,500-2,000 words)

- Students are encouraged to meet with the instructor in advance of submitting the paper to brainstorm ideas. Prompts will be provided to students, but students are also welcome to choose their own topic for the final paper. Do not use AI to help you write the assignment, aside from help with proofreading.

Relationship between percentages and letter grades:

90-100% A+	A Range: Exceptional Performance. Mastery of the subject matter; strong evidence of original thinking; good organization in written work; impressive capacity to analyze; insightful critical evaluations.
85-89% A	
80-84% A-	
76-79% B+	B Range: Competent Performance. Evidence of grasp of subject matter; some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues.
72-75% B	

68-71% B-	
64-67% C+	C Range: Adequate Performance. Understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material; acceptable but uninspired work; not seriously faulty but lacking style and vigour.
60-63% C	
55-59% C-	
50-54% D	D Range: Problematic Performance. Some incomplete understanding of the subject matter; limited evidence of critical and analytical skills; lack of original thinking.
0-49% F	F Range: Inadequate Performance. Little or no evidence of understanding of the subject matter; little or no evidence of critical and analytical skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature.

Regrade Policy

Regrade requests must be submitted over email to the instructor, with a detailed rationale for the request. When an assignment is regraded, the grade might remain the same, increase, or decrease, depending on my reevaluated assessment of the merit of the assignment.

Late Work & General Assignment Policy

It will not be possible to complete short writing assignments outside of class hours. In the event that you must miss one of the assignment days, I have scheduled a make-up day on the last day of class. In order to write the make-up assignment, you must notify me that you will be missing the assessment in advance, alongside a rationale for missing the in-class assignment. Students can only write the make-up assignment with instructor approval. Students who are late to oral exams may miss their opportunity to complete the exam. No-shows will be awarded a grade of 0%. Late work can be assigned a penalty of up to -5% per day late. Please contact Arts Advising for accommodations, concessions, or regarding late work.

Academic Integrity

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the

academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply if the matter is referred to the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences. A more detailed description of academic integrity, including the University's policies and procedures, may be found under Discipline for Academic Misconduct in the Academic Calendar.

Email Policy

Outside of course hours & office hours, feel free to contact me by email. **Do not use the canvas direct messaging tool, as I will not respond there.** I will always do my best to respond to emails in a timely manner. I do not respond to emails in the evening, on weekends, or on holidays. Feel free to email me then, just do not expect a response until the next workday. Feel free to follow up with me after 48 hours if I haven't gotten back to you yet. **I will not respond to substantive questions over email.** See me in my office hours instead!

Course material

All course material will be posted on Canvas under the "modules" tab, or otherwise shared by the instructor. The expectation is that you should come to class having read the course material. Artworks will be considered alongside the readings, though we'll often consider the artworks together in class.

Course Schedule

- Subject to minor changes & updates. A current version of this syllabus will always be available on canvas.

Week	Date	Reading	Assessment
Unit 1: Art & the Artworld			
Week 1: the Artworld	January 5, 2026	Syllabus & welcome (no reading).	
	January 7, 2026	Arthur Danto, "The Artworld"	
	January 9, 2026	Kendall L. Walton, "Categories of Art"	
Week 2: Engaging with the Artworld	January 12, 2026	Arthur Danto, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace"	
	January 14, 2026	Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts"	
	January 16, 2026	Danto, Walton, & Sibley wrap-up	

Week 3: Criticisms of the Artworld	January 19, 2026	Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"	
	January 21, 2026	Plato, "The Republic" (Chapter 10 595a-608b)	
	January 23, 2026		Writing Assignment #1
Week 4: Taste & Perspective	January 26, 2026	David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste"	
	January 28, 2026	Monroe Beardsley, "The Aesthetic Point of View"	
	January 30, 2026	Hume & Beardsley cont.	
Unit 2: Aesthetics & Artistic Value			
Week 5: Aesthetic Value	February 2, 2026	Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Judgement" (Critique of Aesthetic Judgement, selections)	ORAL EXAMS BEGIN
	February 4, 2026	Kant, continued	
	February 6, 2026	Kant, continued	
Week 6: Aesthetic Value	February 9, 2026	Bence Nanay, "Aesthetic Attention"	
	February 11, 2026	Mohan Matten, "New Prospects for Aesthetic Hedonism."	
	February 13, 2026	Nanay & Matten cont.	LAST DAY FOR ORAL EXAMS
Week 7: Reading Week	February 16, 2026		
	February 18, 2026		
	February 20, 2026		
Week 8: Aesthetic Value	February 23, 2026	James Shelley, "The Default Theory of Aesthetic Value".	
	February 25, 2026	C. Thi Ngyuen, "Engagement Account of Aesthetic Value".	
	February 27, 2026	Shelley & Ngyuen cont.	

Week 9: Aesthetics & Ethics	March 2, 2026	Oscar Wilde, "The Picture of Dorian Gray (Preface)" Daniel Jacobson, "In Praise of Immoral Art,"	
	March 4, 2026	Anne Eaton, "Where Ethics and Aesthetics Meet: Titian's Rape of Europa"	
	March 6, 2026		Writing Assignment #3
Week 10: Aesthetics & Ethics cont.	March 9, 2026	Noel Carroll, "Moderate Moralism"	
	March 11, 2026	Moralism wrap-up	
	March 13, 2026	David Hume, "Of Tragedy"	
Unit 3: Topics in Philosophy of Art			
Week 11: Value Paradoxes	March 16, 2026	Noël Carroll, "The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart", (p.158-161, p.178-195)	
	March 18, 2026	Berys Gaut, "The Paradox of Horror"	
	March 20, 2026		Writing Assignment #4
Week 12: Art & Technology	March 23, 2026	Ted Chiang, "Why A.I. Isn't Going to Make Art" Roald Dahl, "The Great Automatic Grammatizator"	
	March 25, 2026	AI art cont.	
	March 27, 2026		Make-up Writing Assignment
Week 13: Feminist aesthetics?	March 30, 2026	Heather Widdows, "Perfect Me (selections)"	
	April 1, 2026	Andrew Mason, "What's Wrong with Lookism?"	
	April 3, 2026		No class- stat holiday
Week 14: Aesthetic Justice	April 6, 2026	Dominic Lopes, "Aesthetic Injustice" (Chapter 1)	
	April 8, 2026	Dominic Lopes, "Beauty Ideals and Ideologies" (Chapter 6).	
	April 10, 2026	Lopes, wrap-up	

	April 13, 2026		FINAL PAPER DUE
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