

# AVT 307-001: AESTHETICS

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Hours: Tuesdays, 10:30 AM – 1:10 PM

Location: Room 1005, Art + Design Building

Office Hours: 2-3PM Tuesdays and Thursdays

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will address the complexity of the contemporary aesthetic experience through a related series of questions that drive the discourse in contemporary visual and performing arts: How do we open ourselves to what is unfamiliar in the arts and what is the purpose in doing so? Who decides what is of value in the arts and how are these determinations made? How does art respond to culture and how does it lead it? What is the place of beauty in the arts and how has that concept changed over time? Just what *is* art anyway?

In this course we will look at how contemporary artists have presented us with answers to these questions that are sometimes startling and difficult, sometimes pleasurable and affirming, but always provocative and engaging.

The notion of the aesthetic will be examined as it pertains to experiences in nature, in the environment, in the senses, in social and cultural systems, conventions and institutions, and in works of art. Individuals' concepts of the aesthetic will be identified and analyzed, and the course will work at an expansion of the notion of the aesthetic to include conceptions that go beyond "beauty" and convention. Emphasis will be placed on examining a broad range of contemporary art and culture to engage an expansive, amplified, and subversive experience of the aesthetic. In addition, the current cultural wars being waged over the forms, content, and aims of contemporary art will be examined for their suggestions of a shift in the governing aesthetic paradigms. The student will become aware of how the contemporary practice of art moves.

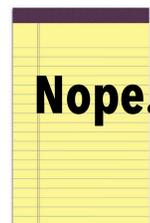
The course aims at the creation of heightened aesthetic perception. Emphasis will be placed on how the process of a refined aesthetic consciousness is grounded in the raw materials of human experience and daily life, as well as in art experiences. Through observation, contemplation, sensation, reading, writing, attendance at arts events, and heightened self-awareness, the student will engage as an aesthetic observer of and participant in the world beyond the production of artworks to involve the artist's disciplined efforts to observe, engage, and interpret the processes of living.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS:

1. Artworld Prestige: Arguing Cultural Value by Timothy Van Laar and Leonard Diepeveen (Oxford University Press, 2013)
2. Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: 30 Years of Conversations with Robert Irwin by Lawrence Weschler
3. All other texts will be available as PDFs on BB under "Course Materials" or can be digitally "taken-out" from the GMU library.
4. **A composition book (notebook).** The notebook needs to be at least 9.5" x 7.5" and have bound pages that are not designed to pull out. The paper type—lined, graph or blank—is up to you. This will be for taking notes on the readings and class discussions, writing down questions and ideas on any topic, doodling, drawing, storing paperwork, etc. Please decorate it however you like.

### The Rules of the Notebook:

- You must have this book with you in EVERY class
- You will be completing your weekly assignments in the notebook, as well as taking notes during class.
- You will turn this book in twice during the semester: around mid-terms and at the end of the semester.
- This book will be your record of this class so do not remove anything from it, even blank pieces of paper!
- Doodling and drawing are encouraged!
- I will grade your notebook at the end of the semester. I will be looking for the following for evidence of your sustained attention and engagement throughout the semester.
  - An "A" notebook would include
    - Completed Classwork:
      - ALL weekly HW assignments, completed on time
      - Notes from class discussions
      - Notes on the readings/videos
    - AND
    - Evidence of Engagement:
      - Ideas, questions, frustrations, doodles, drawings, to-do lists, breakthrough moments, receipts, stickers, movie ticket stubs, etc.



## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

- **Bring your notebook to class.**
- **Do the reading.**
- **Come to class prepared to talk.**
- **No laptops to be used during class.** I will print out several copies of the readings we will be discussing for reference during discussion, but I will expect you to use your notebooks for everything else.
- **Cell phones must be OFF in class.** This means no calling, texting, checking email/game scores/social media during class. If you think you might need to take a call/text during class—ie. in a family emergency—please let me know ahead of time.
- **Check Blackboard regularly.** I will post information about the class on Blackboard and will send out class-wide Announcements regarding assignments or scheduling changes.
  
- You are welcome to email me at [rgeffen@gmu.edu](mailto:rgeffen@gmu.edu). Class communications will be sent via GMU email. You must activate, maintain, and regularly check your GMU email. You are responsible for notices sent via email.
  
- Should students have to miss class for any reason, they are expected to take initiative in obtaining notes, assignments, and handouts from Blackboard, and for letting me know.

## GRADING

Attendance:	20%
In-class participation:	20%
Presentation:	10%
Notebook:	30%
Final Paper:	20%

- A grade of **A** is given only for **superlative** work that demonstrates a profound commitment to the course material and demonstrates mastery of its content, and further, that goes on to employ this material as a springboard for independent thought and work.
- A grade of **B** is given for **exceptional** work that completely fulfills all the requirements of the course in a conscientious and dedicated manner, and further, that demonstrates mastery of the course content.
- A grade of **C** is given for work that fulfills all the requirements of the course in a **satisfactory** manner, but that falls short of demonstrating rigor and mastery. This is the average grade.
- A grade of **D** is given for work that **falls short of being satisfactory** in terms of completion and/or engagement.
- A grade of **F** is given for work that **fails** to fulfill the requirements of the course as listed above.

**An Important Note about Grading:** Class participation and completion of assignments are the **minimum** requirements for a satisfactory (i.e., C) grade.

## CLASS SCHEDULE:

You may notice that some of the reading assignments are still TBD. This is because, as a seminar, I would like to get a sense of how the class is responding to the material before setting the assignments. However, all the long-term assignments are listed, and I will fill in the rest of readings/materials within two weeks of the beginning of the semester.

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### 1/22/19

#### In Class:

- Introduction, Lynda Barry

#### HW: Due 1/29/19

1. **Watch: Lynda Barry's lecture** (under Course Content)
2. Write: In your notebook, write at least 3 questions that you really want to know the answer to. You will have to pick one of these to put up in class on 1/29/19, but others can be private. Also write down any thoughts/comments/reactions to the lecture that you have. Doodling/drawing is encouraged.
3. **Sign up** for a presentation topic/date

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### 1/29/19

#### In Class:

- Copy one question you would like answered onto a piece of paper (NOT TORN OUT OF YOUR NOTEBOOK!) at the beginning of class for our discussion.
- Discussion
- Jill Bolte-Taylor's TED talk
- Presentation on Lynda Barry

#### HW: Due 2/5/19

1. **Read Tim Van Laar + Leonard Diepeveen's essay, 'Signs of Pleasure'** through the end of Section I. I've kept this reading short so you can go through it really carefully.

**2. Write: Make the following lists in your notebook:**

1. List all the artists the authors mention. Put a star next to any artist that you aren't familiar with so you can remember to look up an image of their work.
2. List all the theorists the authors mention. Put a star next to any you have heard of.
3. Write down any quotations (and their page numbers) that really confuse you.
4. Write down any quotations (with page numbers) you really like.
5. Write down one idea you really agree with.
6. Write down one idea you really don't agree with.

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**2/5/19**

**In Class:**

- Discuss 'Signs of Pleasure'
- Presentation on 'Signs of Pleasure'

**HW: Due 2/12/19**

1. **Read** the rest of Tim Van Laar + Leonard Diepeveen's essay, 'Signs of Pleasure'
2. **Write** in your notebook:
  1. What do you think of the authors' arguments? Do you think art should be 'serious'? What kind of pleasure, if any, can be allowed in art?
  2. Any other questions/comments
  3. A list of anything you looked up while reading: artists, artworks, word definitions, etc.

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**2/12/19 (class cancelled; professor ill)**

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**2/19/19**

**In Class:**

- Discuss 'Signs of Pleasure'

- Presentation on 'Signs of Pleasure'
- Presentation on Pierre Bonnard

**HW: Due 2/26/19**

1. **Read** Lawrence Weschler's book about artist Robert Irwin, Seeing is about forgetting ..., Chapters 5, 6, + 7
2. **Write** in your notebook:
  1. What do you think of Irwin's process?
  2. At least two other questions/comments
  3. A list of anything you looked up while reading: artists, artworks, word definitions, etc.

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**2/26/19**

**In Class:**

- Discuss Weschler/Irwin
- Presentation on Weschler/Irwin
- Presentation on artist Philip Guston
- Watch some of documentary on Irwin

**HW: Due 3/5/19**

1. **Watch** documentary on Eva Hesse
2. **Write** in your notebook:
  1. While Hesse is in Germany, she gets a letter from her friend Sol Le Witt, in which he gives her advice about her work. What did you think of his suggestions?
  2. At least three other questions/comments
  3. A list of anything you looked up: artists, artworks, word definitions, etc.

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## 3/5/19

### In Class:

- Presentation on Hesse
- Discussion of Julia Bryan-Wilson's '*Eleven (Contradictory) Propositions in Response to the Question: What is Contemporary Craft*'
- **TURN IN NOTEBOOKS FOR GRADING**

### HW: Due 3/12/19

**NOTE: even though we don't have class on 3/12/19, please do this assignment before Spring Break, while our discussion of craft is still fresh in your mind. Submit this via BB since I will have your notebooks.**

1. **Read** Richard Kalina's review 'Gee's Bend Modern'
2. **Write and submit on BB:**
  1. Do you agree with the author?
  2. How do these quilts relate to Julia Bryan-Wilson's '*Propositions on Craft*' we discussed in class?
  3. At least one other question/comment
  4. A list of anything you looked up: artists, artworks, word definitions, etc.

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## 3/19/19

### In Class:

- Presentation on Kalina's essay on Gee's Bend quilts
- Presentation on sculptor El Anatsui
- Discuss interview with sculptor El Anatsui (we will read this in class)

### HW: Due 3/26/19

1. **Watch** 3 segments (by this I mean the 8-15 minute long videos about individual artists) of your choice from the Art21 website.
2. **Write** in your notebook:
  1. A list of all the segments you watched.

2. Any thoughts/questions you had about them. What did you think about the work you saw? Were you interested in/inspired by/confused by the way the artists described their practice?
  3. **SUBMIT** THE LIST of segments on Blackboard to the class Art21 Wiki **THE DAY BEFORE OUR NEXT CLASS, ie. 3/18/19.**
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## 3/26/19

### **In class:**

- Discuss Art21 artists
- Presentation on artist Cindy Sherman
- **Turn in your notebooks at the end of class**

### **HW: Due 4/2/19**

- **Read** Tim Van Laar + Leonard Diepeveen's essay 'Eclectic Practices'
  - **WRITE** any questions/comments on a piece of paper
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## 4/2/19

### **In class:**

- Presentations on 'Eclectic Practices'
- Presentation on artist Gerhard Richter

### **HW: Due 4/9/19**

1. **Read** Hilton Als's article on artist Kara Walker
2. **Watch** Art21 video on Kara Walker
3. **Write** in your notebook, assignment TBD

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## 4/9/19

### In class:

- Presentation on Kara Walker
- Presentation on Bettye Saar

### HW: Due 4/16/19

1. **Read** Introduction to bell hooks's book, [Black Looks: Race and Representation](#)
2. **Watch** *The Radiant Child* (documentary on artist Jean-Michel Basquiat)
3. Write in notebook (TBD)

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## 4/16/19

### In class:

- Presentations on bell hooks, Basquiat

### HW: Due 4/23/19

1. **Read** final Van Laar + Diepeveen article
2. **Watch** video TBD
3. **Finalize** paper topic + be prepared to discuss in class

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## 4/23/19

### In class:

- Presentations on V L + D article, video
- Discuss final papers

### HW: Due 4/30/19

1. **Work** on final paper
2. **Watch** video TBD

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## 4/30/19 LAST CLASS

### **In Class:**

- **TURN IN YOUR NOTEBOOK**
- TBD

# ASSIGNMENTS:

## **PRESENTATIONS (10% of final grade):**

Everyone has to do one 15 minute Powerpoint\* presentation in front of the class.

This presentation will be your take on one of the course materials (readings or videos) or on an assigned artist. You will present it on the day we are scheduled to discuss that material in class.

Please review the syllabus and sign up for a reading—I will post a sign-up list on BB on the first day of class.

### **Option 1: Present on a reading or documentary**

The goal of this assignment is for the presenter to focus on one of the course materials (readings, videos, etc.) and connect it **IN A MEANINGFUL WAY** to something they have encountered outside the class. I want you to draw comparisons between things that are different, so if the reading is about a painter, I'd recommend choosing a text by a scientist, or a piece of music, or a poem instead of another painter. Try to find something you have some real familiarity with or depth of knowledge about so your connections have some nuance to them: "both things have dogs in them" isn't much of a relationship, for example.

Some successful presentations in the past have been:

- a comparison between an artist and the poems of Emily Dickenson
- a comparison between an essay by Alice Walker and the quilts of Gee's Bend
- a comparison between an essay on art theory and a statistics paper
- a comparison between an essay on art theory and the music video and lyrics of a hip hop artist

### **The Format:**

#### **Your Powerpoint presentation\* should include at least 7 slides:**

1. A brief overview of the course material
2. A brief introduction to whatever you are comparing it to
3. At least one slide illustrating/discussing how they are similar
4. At least one slide of images of the artwork being discussed. Please make sure all the artwork is captioned correctly.
5. At least one slide illustrating/discussing how they are different
6. A bibliography
7. A discussion question for your classmates

### **Option 2: Present on one of the artists on the list**

The goal of these presentations is to introduce the artist to the class. The artist may have been mentioned in one of your readings or may just be an artist whose work relates to our discussions. Your job is to give the class a well-rounded, thoughtful and thorough mini-lecture on this artist, so you will need to research the artist for this assignment, using at least three reputable sources. This may involve you going to the library rather than just researching on-line; I will not accept 'I couldn't really find much out about this person' as an excuse for a skimpy presentation. I will be expecting you to include:

1. Biographical information—please be sure to cross-check your information rather than just relying on a single source.
2. Descriptions (in your own words) of their work.
3. Images of their work. Please make sure all the artwork is captioned correctly (Hint: this usually means cross-checking artwork information using another source)
4. Information on their art historical/cultural contexts. By this I mean, how does their work relate to other artwork? Were they part of an art movement? How was their work received at the time? How is it thought of now? Was their work controversial?
5. Your own take on the artist. What do you think of their work? Their art practice? Had you heard of this artist before? Have you seen any of their work in person?
6. Your take as to how this artist relates to our class discussions. Do you think this artist's work is 'serious'? What do you think their work is about? Do you agree with the critical response to the work you read while researching the artist? Did your opinions change while learning about the artist?
7. Bibliography
8. A discussion question for your classmates

*\*You are also welcome to use alternate formats for this assignment! Please make sure that you submit the presentation's information to me via BB.*

## **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:**

### **Weekly Writing Assignments :**

- These assignments are intended to deepen your experience of the reading. When I grade them I will be looking for evidence that you read/watched/listened to the entirety of the material AND that you made a real effort to understand and consider the material.
- In general, these will be short. I may give you two or three questions to answer about the material, or ask you come up with questions/discussion points to be raised in class.

- Specific assignments will vary from class to class. I will post each week's assignment on Blackboard, as well as discussing it in class. If you are absent, please check BB before emailing me for the assignment.
- These assignments must be written in your notebook. Please DATE each entry. Please bring your notebook to every class. At the beginning of class, I will ask you to copy some part of your writing assignment onto a piece of paper (not torn out of your notebook) and we will review them together in class as part of class discussion.
- Late Assignments: Although I will not be checking your notebooks at every class, do not wait until your notebook is going to be reviewed to do all the writing assignments at once. Late assignments will be graded down, but I will accept them if you **note that they are late at the top of the page**. If it is clear that they are late but you have not noted that they are late, they will get a 0. More than 3 late assignments will bring your entire notebook grade down.

### **The Final Paper:**

This paper will be a long, formal paper due at the end of the semester and should follow these guidelines:

- 2000 words, 12 pt. typeface, 1.5 spacing, normal margins. No creative spacing/layout please.
- Careful editing is crucial. You must read your work carefully for spelling, punctuation and grammar errors before you turn it in. If you have questions about your writing, you are welcome to come and discuss a rough draft with me BEFORE the due date.
- I urge you to aim for clarity in your writing above all else. Don't feel that you need to sound like an academic: short, clear sentences are often more effective than complex ones and the same goes for word choices. Do be sure that your ideas are well-organized and well-laid-out.
- Submit via BB
- Specific details of this assignment will be posted in the first few weeks of class

### **Research:**

- Research MUST be documented.
- In general, do not use direct quotes (passages taken directly from the source material) longer than 1-2 lines unless the original phrasing is crucial to your argument. If you do use direct quotations, you must make it clear that they are not your words (either place them in quotation marks/italics or off-set them in a separate paragraph) AND provide source information, either at the bottom of the page or in a separate citations page/ bibliography.
- Please use the MLA guidelines for the specific details of citing your sources.
- If you have any questions about making sure you have correctly documented your sources, come and check with me.
- See the University's Guidelines for Academic Integrity for more information.

## GUIDELINES FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

**NOTE: There are varying comfort levels with speaking extemporaneously in a group. If you are reluctant to speak in class, please challenge yourself to offer oral commentary. Your insights and questions are vital to our collective success. Participation is worth 20% of your final grade.**

Class discussion will be structured around the idea of a seminar, i.e., each member of the class is responsible for contributing to discussion of the readings, films, and assignments. Each class member is responsible for the success or failure of the discussion. The following guidelines will be followed in class discussion:

- You must come on time and come *prepared*
- You must bring your notebook
- You must discuss carefully and be prepared to *listen* as well as to talk
- Respect for the opinions of other class members forms the basis of class discussion.

Use the following guidelines for class preparation:

- Mark your books/articles when reading to note passages of interest or curiosity or confusion.
- When making a list of questions about the reading, note relevant page numbers.
- Come to class prepared to discuss the reading and videos in detail, *focusing on specific passages from the texts and videos*.
- Come prepared with written assignments for each reading, video, or outside assignment.
- After each class, write again about the reading, video, or discussion. Note how the discussion has affected your thinking about the subject.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** The grade for class discussion is cumulative, reflecting the **quality** of your discussion over the course of the semester, and on the number of times you speak in class.

The university is a place of critical inquiry and the exploration of ideas. In any classroom, you might feel uncomfortable at times when encountering unfamiliar ideas or narratives. But please keep in mind that free expression, curiosity, and open inquiry is at the heart of a university education.

### HW: Due 3/19/19

9. **Draw** the following drawings in your notebook:

1. A blind contour drawing of someone you know. (30 seconds.)
2. A drawing illustrating something you did during the break. (5 minutes)

3. A drawing of whatever you want (15+ minutes)

You can draw with any kind of pen/pencil etc that you want, but please leave a blank page on either side of your drawings and so the ink doesn't make your writing hard to read.

*\*\*I am not going to be grading your drawings or commenting on your technique so **don't worry!**\*\**