

Date: August 12,

Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

The Birth of Modernism: From Revolution to the White Cube

Maya Balakirsky | Hermeneutics

Course No

Course Type:	Class/seminar
Academic credits:	1
Year of study:	2026
Semester:	ב
Day & Time:	Tuesday, 16.00—17.30
Reception Time:	Tuesday, 17.30-19.30
Lecturer Email:	mkatz307@gmail.com
Moodle Site:	lemida.ac.il



Course description and learning goals

Course Abstract ([expand](#))

This course offers a bold rethinking of modernism's emergence in visual culture, tracing its complex roots from the revolutionary ferment of the late 18th century to its institutionalization in New York's Museum of Modern Art. Far from treating modernism as a linear progression of styles, we approach it as a contested field of political transformation, epistemological rupture, and aesthetic reinvention.

Rather than beginning with the usual parade of "-isms," we open with Diderot's *Encyclopédie*—a visual and intellectual matrix that illuminates how Enlightenment ideals shaped the production and dissemination of knowledge. From there, we follow the pressures that reshaped art's function and meaning through revolution, industrialization, urbanization, and empire.

The course privileges critical theory and interdisciplinary methods, emphasizing thinkers who have interrogated the myth of aesthetic autonomy, including Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial perspectives. While our central aim is to engage deeply with individual works of art and their formal and conceptual complexity, we also foreground their embeddedness within the historical matrices of ideology, power, and perception.

Learning objectives ([expand](#))

What the student is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate having completed the course. Advisably, use 3 types of learning objectives: Knowledge, Skills, Values.

Knowledge

Familiarity with facts, content, concepts, issues, and key ideas in the domain. It is recommended to use application verbs (write, analyze, establish, plan, collect – not: understand). Examples:

1. Learners will analyze the development of Modernism in the visual arts.
2. Learners will gain familiarity with the institutionalization of modernism and its afterlives in museological contexts.

Skills

The ability to reach a product or result effectively using the knowledge that has developed.

1. Learners will trace the development of Modernism in aesthetic theory.
2. Learners will draw interdisciplinary connections between art, literature, philosophy, and socio-political theory.

Values (if applicable)

Learners will develop their ideas on the place of modernism in their own worldview.



Lessons plan (Including active learning):[\(expand\)](#)

Lesson No.	Topic	Active learning	Required reading	Assessment
1	Introduction: Theories of Modernism and Modernity	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Jonathan Crary, "Modernity and the Problem of the Observer," <i>Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century</i>, 1-24. Walter Benjamin, <i>The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction</i>. Look: Getty Research Institute's Optical Devices Collection, which includes many of the 19th-century visual technologies that Crary discusses.	Class participation
2	Enlightenment Media: Knowledge and the Rewiring of Vision	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	John R. Pannabecker, "Diderot, the Mechanical Arts, and the Encyclopédie: In Search of the Heritage of Technology Education." <i>Journal of Industrial Teacher Education</i> 34, no. 4 (1997): 6-23. Michel Foucault, <i>The Order of Things</i>. New York: Vintage, 1994, 136-179. Look: Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert. <i>Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers</i>. Selected plates and accompanying texts.	Class participation

3	Power and Ornament: Imperial Aesthetics and Bourgeois Fantasy	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Emma Barker, "Rehabilitating the Rococo," <i>Oxford Art Journal</i>, vol. 32, no. 2 (2009), 155-171. Look: National Gallery of Art's Rococo Collection	Class participation
4	Institutional Aesthetics and Canon Formation	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	<i>Simon Schama</i>, excerpts from <i>Citizens</i>; <i>Lynn Hunt</i>, "The Family Romance of the French Revolution." T.J. Clark, "Painting in the Year Two." Look: Jeanne Willette's essay on the role of the French Academy on world art,	Class participation
5	The Aesthetics of Emotions: Romanticism and the Sublime	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Kant, Immanuel. <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> [excerpts]. Edmund Burke, <i>A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful</i> [excerpts]. Look: Joseph Wright of Derby, <i>An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump</i> (1768); Henry Fuseli, <i>The Nightmare</i> (1781); Caspar David Friedrich, <i>Wanderer above the Sea of Fog</i> (c. 1818).	Class participation
6	Hausmannization, the Flaneur, and the Urban Gaze	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Walter Benjamin, "The Arcades Project" (selections) T.J. Clark, <i>The Painting of Modern Life</i> (selections). Look: <i>Gustave Caillebotte, Paris Street</i> (1877); <i>Rainy Day</i> (1877) and <i>Le Pont de l'Europe</i> (1876).	Class participation

			Edouard Manet, <i>View of the 1867 Exposition Universelle; The Railway</i> (1873). Mary Cassatt	
7	Realism and Class Consciousness	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Pollock, Griselda. <i>Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art</i> (excerpts). Emile Zola, "Salon of 1868," <i>Mon Salon</i>. Look: Edouard Manet, Portrait of Emile Zola, 1868 Edouard Manet, Olympia, 1868	Class participation
8	The Impressionists, Modern Life, and Commodification	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Meyer Schapiro, <i>Impressionism: Reflections and Perceptions</i>. T.J. Clark, <i>The Painting of Modern Life</i> (continued). Zola, <i>The Masterpiece</i> (excerpt). Look: Art Institute of Chicago—Manet Digital Catalogue	Class participation
9	Landscape and Loss: Nature, Nostalgia, and Capitalist Vision	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Bernard Denvir: <i>The Impressionists at First Hand</i>. Look: Recreation of the first Impressionist exhibition The Barnes Foundation Online Collection	Class participation

10	The Avant-Garde as Critique and Anti-Institution	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," 1-35. Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics." Look: National Gallery of Art on Constantin Guys	Class participation
11	The Fragmentation of the Subject	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Guillaume Apollinaire, "On Painting," <i>The Cubist Painters</i> Look: 10 canonical Cubist works	Class participation
12	The Revolution of a Single Artist and Mythologies of Artistic Genius	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Leo Steinberg, "The Philosophical Brothel." Look: Picasso's <i>Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)</i> Movie: Picasso by Henri-Georges Clouzot	Class participation
13	Dada, Surrealism, and the Unconscious	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	André Breton, <i>Manifesto of Surrealism</i> Rosalind Krauss, "The Optical Unconscious." Look: Marcel Duchamp, <i>Fountain</i>, 1913	Class participation
14	Museum and Markets: Instituting Modernism	Collaborative learning/ Active participation/Guided observation	Carol Duncan, "The Art Museum as Ritual" Alfred H. Barr Jr., <i>What is Modern Art?</i> Look: Museum of Modern Art's digital archive includes exhibition histories, architectural plans, and curatorial statements. You can use this resource to find a work of art for your final papers. Also, to visualize the "ritual architecture" a la Duncan, explore	Class participation

(In a course that lasts a whole year, the additional sessions should be added)

* There may be changes in the syllabus depending on learning progress and effectiveness



Final grade

Description of the learning product	Weight in the final score
Participation	25% of final grade
Midterm Assignment	25% of final grade
Object Study	50% of final grade



Course requirements

25% of final grade—**Participation**. Up to 2 classes excused.

25% of final grade—**Midterm Assignment**. The Midterm assignment will serve as a springboard to the final paper. Choose a single visual artifact from the period 1750-1930 that does *not* belong to the canon of modernist “masterworks” (i.e., exclude works by Picasso, Duchamp, etc.). This could be a print from the Encyclopédie, a political cartoon, or a street poster, a photograph, a lithograph, a textile pattern, a museum acquisition letter, or an artist’s manifesto. Analyze this object’s relationship to the emerging discourses of modernism. Frame your analysis using one interdisciplinary theoretical lens (Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, epistemological, etc.). This assignment should help you to uncover overlooked moments in the genealogy of modernism and allow you to test-drive theoretical frameworks for your final paper. Include the image you are working with. 4-5 pages. Due Class 7.

50% of final grade—**Object Study**. A critical essay re-evaluating a canonical modernist work through interdisciplinary theory. Choose a canonical work of modernist art or a new medium of visual culture (e.g., movie posters, postcards, etc.) and develop a critical essay (8-10 pages) that interprets its meaning, function, or reception through the lens of at least two interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks (e.g., Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, media theory, etc.). You are encouraged to challenge established readings, bring in unconventional disciplinary perspectives, and explore how this work continues to shape (or be shaped by) cultural, political, or epistemic shifts. You are encouraged to integrate

letters, manifestos, and museum acquisition documents to frame your object or media. Papers will be graded on the originality of the argument, sophistication and integration of interdisciplinary theory, and historical and visual analysis. Due Class 13.



Prerequisites

Course number	Course name
	N/A

Bibliography: Up-to-date reading, viewing, and listening content items



Online Resources (listed in order of classes):

Getty Research Institute's Optical Devices Collection, which includes many of the 19th-century visual technologies that Cray discusses:

https://www.getty.edu/research/special_collections/highlights/optical_devices/index.html

Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. Selected plates and accompanying texts.

<https://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>

National Gallery of Art's Rococo Collection, <https://www.nga.gov/artworks/rococo>

Jeanne Willette's essay on the role of the French Academy on world art,

<https://arthistoryunstuffed.com/french-neoclassicism/>

Art Institute of Chicago—Manet Digital Catalogue

<https://www.artic.edu/digital-publications/4/manet-paintings-and-works-on-paper-at-the-art-institute-of-chicago>

Recreation of the first Impressionist exhibition:

<http://www.artchive.com/74nadar.html>

The Barnes Foundation Online Collection, <https://mymodernmet.com/free-art-images-barnes-foundation/>

National Gallery of Art on Constantin Guys
<https://www.nga.gov/artists/2551-constantin-guys>

10 canonical Cubist works, <https://www.thecollector.com/10-iconic-cubism-art-and-their-artists/>

Museum of Modern Art's digital archive includes exhibition histories, architectural plans, and curatorial statements. You can use this resource to find a work of art for your final papers.
<https://www.moma.org/research/archives/>

For "ritual architecture" à la Duncan, explore
<https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/moma-the-museum-of-modern-art>

Zola, Émile. *The Masterpiece*. Translated by Ernest Alfred Vizetelly. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. Available here:
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15900/15900-h/15900-h.htm>

Barr, Alfred H., Jr. *What Is Modern Painting?* New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943. Available here: <https://archive.org/details/whatismodernpain0000barr>

PDFs Available on Moodle:

Apollinaire, Guillaume. *The Cubist Painters: Aesthetic Meditations*. Translated by Peter Read. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004 (1913).

Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne. London: Phaidon Press, 1964, 1-35.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Translated by J. A. Underwood. London: Penguin Books, 2008.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Breton, André. *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Edited by James T. Boulton. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968 [orig. 1757].

Clark, T. J. *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Clark, T. J. *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*. Revised edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.

Duncan, Carol. "The Art Museum as Ritual." In *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*. London: Routledge, 1995. 7-20.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage, 1994.

Fry, Roger. "An Essay in Aesthetics." In *Vision and Design*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1920. 11-36.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [orig. 1790].

Krauss, Rosalind. *The Optical Unconscious*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993.

Nochlin, Linda. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" In *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, 145-78. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

Pannabecker, John R. "Diderot, the Mechanical Arts, and the Encyclopédie: In Search of the Heritage of Technology Education." *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education* 34, no. 4 (1997): 6-23.

Pollock, Griselda. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*. London: Routledge, 1988.

Schama, Simon. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. New York: Knopf, 1989.

Steinberg, Leo. "The Philosophical Brothel." *October* (1972).