

**ARTH 405: SPECIAL TOPIC
READING ARTISTS WRITING**



Joan Miró, *The Body of My Brunette* (*Le corps de ma brune . . .*), 1925. Oil on canvas, 130 x 96 cm

ART HISTORY

School of Art History, Classics & Religious Studies

Victoria University of Wellington

Trimester 1 & 2, 2009

**ARTH 405: SPECIAL TOPIC
READING ARTISTS WRITING**

Course coordinator: Raymond Spiteri
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Office Hours: Monday 1.00 – 3.00 pm.

Seminar Time: 2.10–4.00 pm, Friday in OK 301

Trimester Dates: T1: March 2–June 5, 2009
T2: July 13–October 16, 2009

Art History is on level 3 (ground floor) of the Old Kirk building. Pippa Wisheart, Art History's Administrator, has her office in OK 306 (463- 5800). Notices regarding the course will be posted in your pigeon holes or communicated by email.

COURSE OUTLINE

Course Description

How do we, as art historians, read writings by artists? ARTH 405 addresses this question by focusing on artists as writers. It considers the relation between image and text, figure and discourse, from the artist's perspective, that is, of someone who is actively engaged in the process of fashioning artworks.

Each session will consider a selection of writings by an artist or group of artists, plus relevant secondary texts, to discuss the way artists describe the specific nature of their practices, particularly the way that language may resist articulating certain aspects of the creative process. In 2009 the course focuses on artists and writers associated with the surrealist movement.

Given the nature of artists' writings, the emphasis of this course is not on content, but rather the process of interpretation and its limits. It is about how we read written texts and visual images. Special attention will be paid to the tension between the discursive and figurative as a fundamental element of artistic endeavour.

For the purpose of this course, the term 'writing' is defined rather loosely. We shall look at a number of different genres of writing, from the personal journal, letters and correspondence, published statements and interviews, to more experimental approaches based on collaboration, collage and more creative forms of writing.

The course also addresses problems encountered while conducting advanced research in art history, which often involves the interpretation of artworks in the context of written texts.

Course delivery

This course is taught as a series of seminars. Students are expected to prepare for each seminar by doing the reading, and to participate in the seminar discussion.

Learning Objectives

This course has the following objectives:

- to encourage you to think critically about the nature of artistic endeavour and its relation to art historical scholarship;
- to encourage you to apply your skills of analysis to critically examine visual and textual material;
- to develop your capacity for independent work, including the formulation, analysis and refinement of topics;
- to ensure the consistent application of the conventions of academic writing and research;
- to refine your skills in seminar presentation and debate;
- to prepare you for further postgraduate study in art history;
- to introduce you to the standards required of scholarly articles and papers.

Course Content

The first three seminars look at case-studies of the way artists' writing can be read. The purpose here is to focus your attention on the process of close reading, particularly the way it can lead to surprising results. The next nine seminars focus on selections of writings by artists associated with the surrealist movement. Each week will also include a student presentation on an aspect of the week's material. Seminars thirteen and fourteen look at a number of later artists who can be related to the legacy of surrealism. The final two seminars are dedicated to student presentations of research essays.

More information on the course content can be found in the section on seminar readings.

Workload

The University recommends that approximately 12 hours per paper per week, inclusive of seminars, be given to a full-year, 4-paper graduate programme in order to maintain satisfactory progress.

General university requirements

Information about the University's general requirements can be found at the end of this course outline. This includes information about the University's policy on plagiarism, grievance procedures and facilities to assist students.

ASSESSMENT

ARTH 405 is internally assessed. There are three components to the assessment:

1. Seminar presentation	30 %
2. Reading journal	20 %
3. Research essay (5000 words)	50 %

Information about the specific requirement for each piece of assessment follows.

Students are encouraged to discuss their research plans with the course coordinator, who can advise on the suitability of a topic and indicate possible problems.

Mandatory Course Requirements

Mandatory course requirements are defined in the University Calendar. You are expected to come to all seminar sessions and you should notify the course coordinator if you cannot attend, (due to illness or other pressing reasons). In addition:

- Each student must give a seminar presentation, followed by a written paper, responding to an assigned question.
- Regularly keep a reading journal on the assigned readings for ARTH 405.
- Complete a research essay. As part of the research essay, you also have to submit a proposal with bibliography, and give a brief presentation on your research to the seminar.

Marking

The course coordinator is responsible for marking assignments. You may request a second opinion of the assessment of any piece of written work, from another lecturer in Art History. Coursework will be reviewed by an external assessor in order to ensure that academic standards at honours level are met. Your final grade for the course may be adjusted both to reflect your overall contribution to and achievement in the course and in response to the feedback from the external assessor.

Aegrotat pass

There are limited aegrotat provisions for internally assessed courses. If you are in any doubt about your ability to complete any assessment on time, you must see the course coordinator immediately. Extensions are not generally granted unless there are exceptional circumstances.

1. Seminar presentation (date to be arranged)

Each student is required to give a seminar presentation during the first trimester.

The seminar presentation requires you to discuss the relation between a specific essay or writing by an artist and his or her artistic practice. You should focus on the way that the writing addresses the process of artistic endeavour, particularly on the way that writing frames the work's significance.

You should discuss your presentation with the course coordinator in advance of the seminar. This will allow the coordinator to facilitate the week's seminar and incorporate your presentation as part of the class.

The seminar presentation is an opportunity for you to develop your critical reading skills and to demonstrate your ability to present an argument and lead discussion. The aim is to encourage students to take responsibility for presenting and contextualising a set of readings. Your ability to generate and lead the ensuing discussion is as important as your prepared remarks. Your presentation is an important contribution to the course, which will enable you to exercise your analytical skills and refine your abilities in oral presentation and debate.

You are also required to submit a 2000 word essay responding to the seminar question.

Assessment for seminar presentation will be based on the following criteria:

- ability to formulate and develop the seminar topic;
- the selection of appropriate readings;
- the clarity of your presentation and your ability to lead discussion;
- and use of visual resources.

2. Reading journal (due Friday, August 21)

As part of the assessment for ARTH 405, you are required to keep a reading journal that records your response to the assigned readings and other relevant material. The journal should not include notes taken during class (although you may wish to discuss points raised in class in your journal), nor should it include photocopies of the reading, etc.

The purpose of the journal is to promote critical engagement with the course material. It should present your response to what you are reading, focusing on what you find interesting in the reading and the questions raised by the material.

There is no single way to keep a journal, so you are free to develop your own approach. I would recommend that you include basic information about what you are reading, the date, and suggestions or questions for further research.

I will review your journals during the first trimester to give you feedback on your progress.

Further information about the reading journal will be provided in the first class.

Assessment for the reading journal will be based on the following criteria:

- critical engagement with the assigned readings
- ability to develop connections between different readings
- regular and timely contributions to the journal

3. Research essay

The research essay is a major part of the assessment for ARTH 405. Given its weight, I have divided the process into three elements: 1) a research proposal and bibliography; 2) a research presentation; and 3) the final essay. Each element is mandatory, although only the final essay will be formally graded. The purpose of this approach is to give you guidance during the year as you develop your research essay, and identify any potential problems in advance so you are able to address them before the submission of the final essay.

3.1: Proposal and bibliography (due Friday, June 5)

In discussion with the course coordinator, develop a 300 word proposal (one page) for a 5000 word research essay. You need to identify a body of artists' writings and works to consider and formulate a problem to investigate. The proposal should be stated in the form of a question: for instance, you could begin with the question "What role do artists' writings play in understanding the historical significance of Abstract Expressionism?" and then develop the implications of this question in the body of the proposal, considering the initial critical reception of Ab-Ex and its pivotal role in the construction of a particular history of modernism.

The proposal must also include a bibliography of relevant writings. The bibliography should be divided into primary and secondary sources; the primary sources should be writings by an artist or group of artists (in the above example, writings by Ab-Ex artists), while the secondary sources are critical or scholarly writings that discuss the artist or writings (e.g., for Ab-Ex, critics like Greenberg and Rosenberg, historians like Fried, Krauss, Clark, etc.).

In framing and developing your proposal, you will need to consider the topic's ability to fulfil the requirements of the research essay. Although the topic should not be too broad as to prevent a detailed discussion of the artist's writings, it should not be so limited as to focus exclusively on the interpretation of a single text. If you have any doubts about a topic's suitability, discuss it with the course coordinator.

There is a list of published artists' writings later in the course guide, which you can consult in the formulation of a topic.

The purpose of the proposal is to demonstrate your ability to think critically about the nature of artistic endeavour and its relation to art historical scholarship, and to formulate and refine a research and seminar topic.

The proposal should not address topics covered in other ARTH 405 seminars, nor be based on research being undertaken for another course or your ARTH 489 research essay.

Given that this course is focused on artists' writings, the research proposal should address existing writings and not involve correspondence or interviews with living artists. This will also avoid the need to obtain ethics approval from the University Ethics Committee for the research project.

3.2: Research presentation (date to be arranged)

Each student is required to give a 15 minute presentation on their research essay during week 7–8 of the second trimester. The presentation should outline your topic and summarize your methodology and conclusions. This is an important opportunity to receive

informal feedback from the class about your topic before you have to submit the final version of your research essay.

3.3: Research Essay (5000 words; due Friday, October 9)

The research essay is a 5000 word essay in response to the question formulated in your proposal (see above). The research essay is a major piece of work. It is worth 50% of your final grade. The research essay should build on the feedback received for the proposal and presentation.

The purpose of the research essay is to enable you to develop your knowledge and understanding of a particular topic in depth. It is designed to encourage you to demonstrate your ability to undertake a piece of independent research through the formulation and refinement of a topic, to think critically about the nature of artistic endeavour and its relation to art historical scholarship, to apply your analytical skills to a range of written and visual sources, and demonstrate your ability to follow the conventions of academic writing.

The essay should discuss both artists' writings *and* appropriate visual images.

Assessment for the research essay will be based on the following criteria:

- appropriateness of approach to the topic (relevance of question);
- critical engagement with written *and* visual sources;
- relation between proposal and essay;
- quality and development of argument;
- originality and independence of thought;
- quality and accuracy of referencing;
- style and mechanics (legibility, presentation, grammar, spelling).

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

TRIMESTER ONE (March 2-June 5, 2009)

SEMINAR	WEEK	TOPIC	DATE
1	2	Introduction	March 13
2	3	Strategies of Reading I	March 20
3	4	Strategies of Reading II	March 27
4	5	On Truth and Lie: Picasso and Duchamp	April 4
	6	<i>No class – Good Friday Holiday</i> <i>Mid-Trimester break</i>	
5	7	Origins of Surrealism	May 1
6	8	Automatism and Painting	May 8
7	9	Max Ernst and Surrealism	May 15
8	10	Artaud and the Limits of Surrealism	May 22
9	11	<i>Le grand Jeu</i>	May 29

Research proposal due Friday, June 5

TRIMESTER TWO (July 13-October 16, 2009)

SEMINAR	WEEK	TOPIC	DATE
10	2	Bataille and Surrealism I	July 24
11	3	Bataille and Surrealism II	July 31
12	4	Surreal Objects	August 7
13	5	Writing the Body	August 14
14	6	Uncanny Legacies	August 21
		<i>Mid-Trimester break</i>	
15	7	Research Presentations I	September 11
16	8	Research Presentations II	September 18

Reading journal due Friday, August 21

Research essays due Friday, October 9

GENERAL UNIVERSITY STATUTES AND POLICIES

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the *Victoria University Calendar* or go to the Academic Policy and Student Policy sections on:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy>

This website also provides information for students in a number of areas including Academic Grievances, Student and Staff conduct, Meeting the needs of students with impairments, and student support/VUWSA student advocates.

Taping of Lectures

All students in the School of Art History, Classics and Religious Studies are welcome to use their own audio-tapes to record lectures. If you want to do this, please see your lecturer, tutor or the relevant programme administrator and complete a disclaimer form, which advises of copyright and other relevant issues.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Academic integrity means that university staff and students, in their teaching and learning are expected to treat others honestly, fairly and with respect at all times. It is not acceptable to mistreat academic, intellectual or creative work that has been done by other people by representing it as your own original work.

Academic integrity is important because it is the core value on which the University's learning, teaching and research activities are based. Victoria University's reputation for academic integrity adds value to your qualification.

The University defines plagiarism as presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. 'Someone else's work' means anything that is not your own idea. Even if it is presented in your own style, you must acknowledge your sources fully and appropriately. This includes:

- Material from books, journals or any other printed source
- The work of other students or staff
- Information from the internet
- Software programs and other electronic material
- Designs and ideas
- The organisation or structuring of any such material

Find out more about plagiarism, how to avoid it and penalties, on the University's website:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/plagiarism.aspx>