

## AESTHETICS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART

INSTRUCTOR	Angela Sun angsun@umich.edu
DESCRIPTION	In this course, we will consider a series of questions about the nature of art and other aesthetic phenomena and the role that they play in our lives. What is art? What makes art good or bad, and who decides? Why do so many people think that art is pretentious? Can art created by morally reprehensible people nevertheless be good art? Can we love art even if the artworld is rife with injustice? And why, in the end, should we care about art and beauty? No background in philosophy or art is assumed in the course.
GOALS	By the end of this course, students will have developed the following knowledge and skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An understanding of contemporary debates in aesthetics and the philosophy of art, including what art is, aesthetic properties, and the ethical evaluation of art.</li><li>• An understanding of how injustice in the artworld affects our engagement with and appreciation of art.</li><li>• The ability to summarize an author's argument, give an objection to the argument, and respond to the argument on the author's behalf.</li><li>• The ability to defend a position with clear, rigorous argumentation.</li><li>• The ability engage in philosophical discussion respectfully and productively.</li></ul>
PHILOSOPHY	Philosophical discussion, reading, and writing might be a little unlike what you have done in other humanities courses. Philosophical reasoning is all about clarity and rigorous argumentation. One of the goals of this course is to learn to talk, read, and write philosophy. Throughout the course, we'll talk about how to do this. But here are a few resources to get you started. I recommend reading these during the first week of the course. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Olivia Bailey, "<a href="#">But How Do I Participate?</a>"</li><li>• Helena de Bres, "<a href="#">The Pink Guide to Philosophy</a>"</li><li>• Jim Pryor, "<a href="#">Guidelines on Reading Philosophy</a>"</li><li>• Jim Pryor, "<a href="#">Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper</a>"</li></ul>

## REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for this course are as follows:

- *Argument reconstruction and analysis* (15%): In 1000 words, you will (1) reconstruct Frank Sibley's argument in "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," Kendall Walton's argument in "Categories of Art," or David Hume's argument in "Of the Standard of Taste"; (2) offer an objection to the argument; and (3) respond to the argument on behalf of the author. This exercise is meant to give you some experience carefully and charitably interpreting an author's argument and inserting yourself within a debate.
- *Podcast* (25%): In randomly assigned groups of 4, you will identify an artwork that all the members of the group like, but that presents some kind of moral problem (e.g., depicts morally repugnant acts, created by an artist who has done something morally bad). You will then record a 30-minute podcast episode discussing the aesthetic and moral aspects of the work, drawing from course readings.
- *Final paper* (40%): At the end of the course, you will submit a 2000-word final paper on your choice of three topics.
- *Discussion questions* (10%): At least once a week (i.e., at least every other class), you must submit a discussion question based on that day's reading to me at least 12 hours before class.
- *Participation* (10%): Come to class having completed the reading and prepared to discuss it!

## ACCOMMODATION

I will work with every student interested in taking this course to ensure it's possible to. If you have a disability, are struggling with mental or physical health, or if there is anything else that might prevent you from fully participating in this course, let me know as soon as you can, and we will figure something out.

## SCHEDULE

## UNIT 1: WHAT IS ART? WHAT COULD ART BE?

*Day 1:* Theories of art, part 1

§6: *Definitions of Art*, in "Aesthetics," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*  
Arthur Danto, "*Works of Art and Mere Real Things*"

*Day 2:* Theories of art, part 2

Elizabeth Cantalamessa, "*Is This Really Art? Aesthetic Disagreement and Conceptual Negotiation*"

*Day 3:* Literature and cultural ethos

Margaret Atwood, "*What, Where, and Why is Here?*" and "*Chapter 1: Survival*" in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*

*Day 4:* Art and identity

Paul C. Taylor, "*Chapter 1: Assembly, Not Birth*" in *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics*

## UNIT 2: WHAT MAKES ART GOOD OR BAD? WHO DECIDES?

*Day 5:* Aesthetic and nonaesthetic Properties

Frank Sibley, "[Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic](#)"

*Day 6:* The category-dependence of aesthetic properties

Kendall Walton, "[Categories of Art](#)"

*Day 7:* True judges and standards of taste

David Hume, "[Of the Standard of Taste](#)"

*Day 8:* Why care what true judges think?

Jerrold Levinson, "[Hume's Standard of Taste: The Real Problem](#)"

*Day 9:* Critical hegemony

Adrian M.S. Piper, "[Critical Hegemony and Aesthetic Acculturation](#)"

*Day 10:* High and low art

Ted Cohen, "[High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences](#)"

Alix Rule and David Levine, "[International Art English](#)"

*Day 11:* Snobbery

Matthew Kieran, "[The Vice of Snobbery](#)"

Bence Nanay, "[The Problem of Elitism in Aesthetics](#)"

*Day 12:* Is snobbery sometimes called for?

Clement Greenberg, "[Avant-Garde and Kitsch](#)"

UNIT 3: CAN MORALLY BAD ART BE GOOD ART?

*Day 13:* Offensively ugly art

Douglas Stalker and Clark Glymour, "[The Malignant Object: Thoughts on Public Sculpture](#)"

*Day 14:* Comedy roasts

Luvell Anderson, "[Roasting Ethics](#)"

*Day 15:* Are comedy audiences too sensitive?

Phillip Deen, "[What Could It Mean to Say that Today's Stand-Up Audiences Are Too Sensitive?](#)"

*Day 16:* Separating the art from the artist

Eva Dadlez, David Heti, Shen-yi Liao, Stephanie Patridge, Matthew Strohl, and Mary Beth Willard, "[Can We Separate the Art from the Artist?](#)"

*Day 17:* Cultural appropriation

Erich Hatala Matthes, "[Cultural Appropriation Without Cultural Essentialism?](#)"

*Day 18:* Exclusion in the artworld

Jon Silpayamanant, "Classical Music and Its Slave Orchestras"

Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"

UNIT 4: WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT ART?

*Day 19:* Being moved by art

Marcia M. Eaton, "A Strange Kind of Sadness"

*Day 20:* Loving art

Martha Nussbaum, "Reading for Life"

*Day 21:* The consolations of beauty

Ariane Nomikos, "Place Matters"

*Day 22:* Images of war

Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Pain of Others"

*Day 23:* Everyday aesthetics

Yuriko Saito, "Japanese Aesthetics of Packaging"

*Day 24:* Wrapping up

Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation"