

# Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art

## *Course Proposal for Fall 2023*

Art may be understood as an encounter, experience, or activity that engages our senses and provokes an emotional response. Aesthetics and philosophy of art seek to describe this experience. What happens when we reflect on the way we are moved by an aesthetic experience and attempt to translate our perceptions into words? Does language fail to capture embodied experience? Can the description or analysis of sensation and emotions produce new sensations and emotions?

A phenomenological approach to aesthetics focuses on the layers of experience that take place between the artist and the audience. From one perspective, art is a kind of representation that is one step removed from life; philosophy of art, which reflects on aesthetic representation, is two steps removed from life. However, we will explore how each of these layers is itself a sensuous experience that can also alter the way we experience life.

This course will allow us to encounter artists who use different mediums to bring their audiences in touch with their own underrepresented experiences. We will reflect on the potential ethical and political significance of the way these aesthetic encounters move us.

### **Course Structure and Assignments**

Our time together will be divided into seven units, each devoted to a single mode of aesthetic experience: sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, movement, language. Each unit will include readings and artworks by philosophers, art theorists, and artists who focus on a particular sensuous relationship to art. How does the focus on each sensation expand or challenge our conception of art? Is it possible to isolate the senses in order to arrive at a sharpened description of our experiences?

Each unit will also include an experiential component, which may be held on or off campus. You will maintain a sensation journal in which you will describe your aesthetic experiences. As part of your final assignment you will be asked to write a conclusion to your journal entries that reflects on the experience of describing your experiences. Please incorporate three texts from our syllabus.

*[The following are initial ideas for materials and activities that could be included in each unit. I would also consider short passages from Aristotle's De Anima and Kant's Critique of Judgment for each section. My preference is to assign short readings so the students can focus on the ideas. I would select focused excerpts from the texts below.]*

## Sight

Merleau-Ponty. *Visible and Invisible*

Umberto Eco. *On Beauty and On Ugliness*

Artists: Kara Walker, Forough Farrokhzad (film: *The House of Black*)

Sensory Experience: off campus trip to art exhibit or film screening

## Sound

Don Ihde. *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*

Federica Buongiorno. "Reduction in Computer Music: Bodies, Temporalities, and Generative Computation." in *The Case for Reduction*

Artists: Philip Glass, Caterina Barbieri

Sensory Experience: synthesizer demonstration on manipulating sound waves. Recording of student collaboration of sustained sound creation.

## Touch

Jean-Luc Nancy. *On Touching*

Amber Jamilla Musser. *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance*

Artists: Robert Morris, Valie Export (film: *Tapp and Touch Cinema*), Peter de Rome (film: *Encounter*)

Sensory Experience: Haptic workshop on finger tips including partner activities and replicating Morris's instructions for "Blind Time Series"

## Taste

Carolyn Korsmeyer. *Making Sense of Taste: Food & Philosophy* and *Savoring Disgust: The Found and the Fair in Aesthetics*.

*The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*

Artists: Janine Antoni; Lasse Hallström (film: *Chocolat*)

Sensory Experience: student curated blind taste testing

## Smell

A. S. Barwich. *Smellosophy*

Piet Vroon. *Smell, the Secret Seducer*

Artist: Anicka Yi

Sensory Experience: a communal walk that stops at selected locations on campus

## Movement

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone. *The Phenomenology of Dance*.

Dorothea Olkowski. "Dancing Tango: The Realm of Appearances"

Artists: Scott Burton; Alex Baczyński-Jenkins (film: *Such Feeling*)

Sensory Experience: movement workshop guided by guest artist

## Language

Nathalie Borgé. "Aesthetic Experience, Gestures and Language Creativity"

Sarah A. Mattice. *Metaphor and Metaphilosophy: Philosophy as Combat, Play, and Aesthetic Experience*.

Sensory Experience: each student selects a passage from sense journal to discuss with the group