



Boston University Study Abroad
London

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Writing about Art and Society: Perception, Display and Criticism

“Is Art necessary?”

CAS AH 411 (*Elective B*)

Instructor Information

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B. Day and Time	tbc
C. Contact Hours	36 + 2 hour exam
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Course Overview

Is art necessary? The aim of this course is to examine a number of topics whose focus is the relationship between art and society, look in depth at a selected number of works of art across a wide range, and visit a selected number of London galleries. The purpose is to ask how best to reach out to the non specialist audience who visit museums and galleries, and to examine what it is that makes art and museums necessary for that audience). One of the features of the class will be the encouragement of mutual exploration and discussion of works of art, places, ideas, personal observation, and styles of writing. No previous knowledge of art or art history is required, and students from all disciplines are welcome. Pre-requisite: Junior standing or permission of the instructor.

Students will work on and examine, by means the first hand scrutiny of works of art, by means of case studies, and through visits to museums and galleries, aspects of: art and perception; art and national identity; art and morality; art and money; art and public museums. In the classroom students will study in detail a selected number of works of art which can be seen in London, and in the follow up field trips they will explore these works further in situ, as well as analyse and assess the museums and institutions where they now reside. At the same time students will study these works and the topics listed above through the writings of four best selling authors whose intended audience was/ is not that of the specialist art historian, but the public at large. In their different ways they all took/ take a contemporary and critical standpoint in order to make art more understandable and accessible. The selected writers are: the British scholar, collector, Museum Director, arts administrator and television celebrity, Kenneth Clark (1903-1983); the American novelist, art and literary critic, John Updike (1932-2009); the Australian journalist, art critic for Time Magazine, and broadcaster, Robert Hughes (1938-2012); the contemporary British novelist, essayist and shopkeeper, Jeanette Winterson (b. 1959).

Course Methodology

The course will be taught over nine 4-hour sessions, which will be divided between the classroom and field trips. Students will be expected to participate in group-discussions and will be asked to work individually or in groups, and make presentations. On field trips students should be dressed for all weather walking. Please note you may bring your camera. Mobile phones and MP3 players must be switched off at all times. Smoking is not permitted. Attendance at all classes and visits is mandatory – please see the attendance policy at the end of this syllabus.

Required Reading

The required reading for each class session is indicated in the Course Chronology from the following texts. All readings are available through the BU London library.

- Kenneth Clark *Civilisation: A Personal View*
- Robert Hughes: *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change*
- John Updike *Just Looking/Always Looking*
- Jeanette Winterson *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*

Students new to the study of art /art history are recommended to read, as preliminary reading

- Lynton/ Smith / Cumming / Collinson : *Looking into Paintings*.

Additional readings may be posted on Blackboard Learn:

- <https://lms.bu.edu> (you must be logged in to view materials)

Assessment Method

1. Essay and Presentation: Students will be asked to hand in a 1,000 word formal essay on a given topic (with a bibliography/ further reading), and to give a 5 minute illustrated presentation on the same topic, followed by Q&A, in class. The essay counts for **25%** of the overall mark. The topic of the essay will be to compare any two of the four authors in terms of their personalities/ writing styles/ interests/ priorities/ audience.

2. Questionnaire: During each Field Trip students will be asked to complete a questionnaire (see example at the end of this syllabus) and make recommendations. These will count together for **35%** of the overall mark.

3. Final Essay and Presentation: Students will be asked to write an essay, of 2,000 words in length, and make a presentation. The essay and presentation are intended for an audience of actual or potential visitors from North America who will be visiting London for the first time, and for whom one of the museums/galleries studied in the Semester will be on their itinerary. The audience will be reached prior to arriving via a magazine and website (hence the essay), and on arrival by group talks (hence the presentation). The essay/ presentation is intended to encourage them to have a fulfilling art and museum/ gallery experience in one of the museum / galleries discussed in the Semester, and to engage them with the two works that have been discussed in Class for that museum gallery. As well as the written essay– which is to be handed in on exam day – students will present the same topic in an illustrated presentation followed by Q&A, to the Class on the Final Exam Day. This will count for **40%** of the overall mark.

Grading

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria and the BU Academic Conduct Code statement on plagiarism: <http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester>

Course Chronology

Class One: February 24th 2014, 1:15-5:15pm

Meeting place: Classroom

Topic: Art and perception. Two late 19th century paintings from the Courtauld Collection will be examined in depth and in detail as a group discussion. The difference between observation and perception will be addressed. There will be a discussion on Renaissance collecting and patronage with a discussion on the difference between collecting and patronage, and the use of art, then and now. The personalities and writings of Kenneth Clark, Robert Hughes, John Updike, and Jeanette Winterson will be introduced. An episode from Robert Hughes's television series *The Shock of the New* will be shown and discussed.

Readings

Required Reading for Classes 1 and 2:

- Kenneth Clark *Civilisation* Chapters 1-5
- Robert Hughes: *The Shock of the New* Chapters 1-3
- John Updike *Just Looking: What MoMA Done Tole Me* pp 3-19
Always Looking: A case of monumentality et al pp 162-192
- Jeanette Winterson *Art Objects* Imagination and Reality pp 133-151

Readings for Classes 1-9

Online Readings

- For Robert Hughes see:
 - <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/105862/the-decline-the-city-mahagonny>
 - <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1984/dec/06/on-art-and-money/?pagination=false>
 - <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/W/whistler.html>
 - <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/P/poussin.html>
 - <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,102958-1,00.html>
 - <http://www.time.com/time/>
 - <http://hbmonsters.blogspot.co.uk/2009/08/robert-hughes-1981-1985.html>
 - <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1979/dec/20/only-in-america/?pagination=false>
- For John Updike see:
 - www.nybooks.com/contributors/john-updike/
 - <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2008/jun/26/the-clarity-of-things/>

- For Jeannette Winterson see:
 - <http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp>

Readings posted on Blackboard

- John Updike *Museums and Women and other Stories: Museums and Women* pp 3-17
Still Looking: An oil on canvas pp xi - xv
- Emil Zola *Edouard Manet*

For Courtauld Gallery and paintings discussed see:

- <http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/index.shtml>

Further Reading for Classes 1-9

- E H Gombrich *Art and Illusion*
- Robert Cumming *Annotated Art*
- Robert Cumming *Great Artists*
- Kenneth Clark *Another Part of the Wood; The Other Half*
- Robert Cumming et al *Looking into Paintings*
- John Pope Hennessy *Learning to Look*
- Robert Hughes *American Visions - The Epic History of Art in America*
- Thomas Hoving *Making the Mummies Dance*
- Kenneth Clark: *100 details from Pictures in the National Gallery*
- Robert Hughes *Things I didn't know*

Class Two: Monday March 3, 2014, 1:15-5:15pm

Meeting: Courtauld Galleries, Somerset House

Topic: Students will explore further and in situ the two paintings discussed the previous week, making a critical assessment of their display and, presentation, their relationship with other works of art, and the information made available to the public. Students will also critically assess the purpose and organisation of, and visitor behaviour and perceptions in the Courtauld Galleries.

Required Reading and Further Reading: See Class 1

Class Three: Monday March 10, 2014, 1:15-5:15pm

Meeting place: Classroom

Topic: Art and national identity. Two paintings from the National Gallery will be examined in depth and in detail as a group discussion. There will be a discussion on 19th century collecting and patronage and a discussion on the difference between collecting and patronage, and the use of art, then and now. There will also be opportunity to discuss the visit to the Courtauld Galleries. An episode from Kenneth Clark's television series *Civilisation* will be shown and discussed.

Topics for student presentations in Class 5 will be assigned

Readings

Required Reading for Classes 3 and 4

- Kenneth Clark *Civilisation: Chapter 6-9*
- Robert Hughes *The Shock of the New Chapters 4-6*
- John Updike: *Always Looking: The Clarity of American Art* pp3-26;

The Love of Facts: pp 36-51

- John Updike *Just Looking*; Some Rectangles of Blue; Violence at the Windows pp 113-125
- Jeanette Winterson *Art Objects* pp 3-24

Additional Readings for Classes 3 and 4 (posted on Blackboard)

- Kenneth Clark *Landscape into Art*: Chapter IV: Ideal Landscape pp 54-73; Chapter V: The Natural Vision pp 74-96 ; Chapter VI: Northern Lights pp 97-112
Looking at Pictures Constable pp111-123; Turner pp 143-155
- John Updike *Still Looking* “O Beautiful for Spacious Skies” pp 26-45; An oil on canvas pp xi - xv
- Robert Hughes *Nothing if not Critical*: John Constable 78-81

Website for National Gallery:

- <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/>

Class Four Monday March 17, 2014, 1:15-5:15pm

Meeting: National Gallery, Trafalgar Square

Topic: Students will explore further and in situ the two paintings discussed the previous week, making a critical assessment of their display and, presentation, relationship with other works of art, and information made available to the public. Students will also critically assess the purpose and organisation of, and visitor behaviour and perceptions in the National Gallery.

Required Reading and Further Reading: See Class 3

Class Five Monday March 24, 2014, 1:15-5:15pm

Meeting place: Classroom

Topic: Students will make their presentation on the topics assigned at the end of Class 3. Robert Hughes’s film on *Goya* will be shown and discussed.

Required Reading and Further Reading: See Classes 1-4

Class Six Monday March 31, 2014, 1:15-5:15pm

Meeting place: Classroom

Topic: Art and money. Two works from the Wallace Collection will be examined in depth and in detail as a group discussion. There will also be an opportunity to discuss the visit to the National Gallery. An episode from Clark’s *Civilisation* will be shown and discussed.

Readings:

Required Reading for Classes 6 and 7

- Kenneth Clark *Civilisation* Chapters 10-13
- Robert Hughes *Shock of the New* Chapters 7-8
- John Updike *Just Looking* Is Art worth It? pp79-93; Something Missing pp 46-65
- *Always Looking: The Artful Clarks* 50-67
- Jeanette Winterson: *Art Objects* Art and Life pp 153-164; A work of my own pp 165-192

Recommended Readings for Classes 5 and 6 (posted on Blackboard)

- Kenneth Clark *Moments of Vision* Bernard Berenson pp 108-130
- Robert Hughes *Nothing if not Critical* Bernard Berenson pp 352-367

- John Updike: *Still Looking* Jackson Whole pp 200-211

For Wallace Collection website see:

- <http://www.wallacecollection.org/>

Class Seven Monday April 7, 2014, 1:15-5:15pm

Meeting place: Wallace Collection

Topic: Students will explore further and in situ the two works discussed the previous week, making a critical assessment of their display and, presentation, relationship with other works of art, and information made available to the public. Students will also critically assess the purpose and organisation of, and visitor behaviour and perceptions in the Wallace Collection.

Set Reading and Further Reading: See Class 6

Class Eight Monday April 14, 2014, 1:15-5:15pm

Meeting place: Classroom

Topic: Art and morality. Two paintings from Tate Britain will be examined in depth and in detail as a group discussion. An episode from Hughes' *Shock of the New* will be shown, followed by discussion. The visit to the Wallace Collection will be discussed.

Readings

Required Reading for Classes 8 and 9

- John Updike *Just Looking* Writers and artists pp 191-200
- Jeanette Winterson *Art Objects* The Semiotics of Sex pp103-118; The Psychometry of Books pp 119-132; Writer, Reader, Words pp 25-44

Additional Readings for Classes 8 and 9 (posted on Blackboard)

- Kenneth Clark *Moments of Vision: Art and Society* pp 63-82; Art History and Criticism as Literature pp 82-91
Ruskin Today: Ruskin's writings on Art and Architecture pp 123-136
- John Updike *Always Looking: Whistler in the Dark* pp 82-95
- J A M Whistler *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890) Whistler v. Ruskin: Art and Art Critics

Website for Tate Britain

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain>

Class Nine Tuesday April 15, 2014, 1:15-5:15pm

Meeting place: Tate Britain

Topic: Students will explore further and in situ the two works discussed the previous week, making a critical assessment of their display and presentation, relationship with other works of art, and information made available. Students will also critically assess the purpose and organisation of, and visitor behaviour and perceptions in Tate Britain.

Exam Thursday April 24, 2014, 11:30- 1.30pm

Final Essay and Presentation: Students will be asked to write an essay, of 2,000 words in length, and make a presentation. The essay and presentation are intended for an audience of actual or potential visitors from North America who will be visiting London for the first time, and for whom one of the museums/galleries studied in the semester will be on their itinerary. The

audience will be reached prior to arriving via a magazine and website (hence the essay), and on arrival by group talks (hence the presentation). The essay/presentation is intended to encourage them to have a fulfilling art and museum/ gallery experience in one of the museum/galleries discussed in the semester, and to engage them with the two works that have been discussed in class for that museum gallery. As well as the written essay– which is to be handed in on exam day – students will present the same topic in an illustrated presentation followed by Question and Answer, to the class on the Final Exam Day.

Attendance Policy

Classes

Boston University London Programme students are expected to attend each and every class session, tutorial, and field trip in order to fulfill the required course contact hours and receive course credit. Any student that has been absent from two class sessions (whether authorised or unauthorised) will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their continued participation on the programme.

Authorised Absence:

Students who expect to be absent from any class should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorized Absence Approval Form 10 working days in advance of the class date (except in the case of absence due to illness, for which students should submit the Authorised Absence Approval Form with the required doctor's note as soon as possible). **Please note: Submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Form does not guarantee an authorized absence**

Students may apply for an authorised absence only under the following circumstances:

- Illness, supported by a local London doctor's note (submitted with Authorised Absence Approval Form).
- Important placement event that clashes with a class (verified by internship supervisor)
- Special circumstances which have been approved by the Directors (see note below).

The Directors will only in the most extreme cases allow students to leave the programme early or for a significant break.

Unauthorised Absence:

Any student to miss a class due to an unauthorised absence will receive a **4% grade penalty** to their final grade for the course whose class was missed. This grade penalty will be applied by the Academic Affairs office to the final grade at the end of the course. As stated above, any student that has missed two classes will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their participation on the programme as excessive absences may result in a 'Fail' in the class and therefore expulsion from the programme.

Terms and Conditions

Promptness and punctuality are expected, slackness in this respect is discourteous and disruptive, and will be penalised. Weekend trips and family visits are not acceptable reasons for either lateness or absence. Students must check their e-mail and the weekly Student Newsletter for field trip updates and reminders.

Museum/ Gallery Survey Template

Date of Visit..... Name of surveyor.....

Museum/ Gallery visited

Exercise 1: Observation and Perception

(To be completed immediately)

Identity of work	
Please record the information on the gallery label.	
What is your initial observation/ perception in front of the work of art compared with your observations /perceptions in class? Please note particularly anything that you can now see that you could not see or did not notice before.	
Having seen and experienced the work at first hand, is there any thing you would now like to have answers to, or explanations for?	
What do you think of the display of this work?	
How easy was it to have a good look at it?	
Describe the context / room in which it is displayed?	

<p>What do you think of the information available in this room? eg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did it provide answers to what you might want to know? • Did it make you want to look further at this work? • Did it make you want to look further at other works? • Did the information available tell you anything you did not know already? If not, why not? 	
<p>How many visitors are there in this room?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are they doing? • How long on average do they look at any one individual work? • How long do they stay in the gallery? • Is there any one work which attracts more attention than the others 	

Identity of work

<p>Please record the information on the gallery label.</p>	
<p>What is your perception in front of the work of art compared with your perception of it in class? Please note any changes in perception, and anything that you can now see that you could not see or did not notice before.</p>	
<p>Having seen and experienced the work at first hand, is there any thing you would like to have answers to, or explanations for?</p>	
<p>What do you think of the display of this work?</p>	

<p>How easy was it to have a good look at it?</p>	
<p>Describe the context / room in which it is displayed?</p>	
<p>What do you think of the information available in this room? eg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Did it provide answers to what you might want to know? ○ Did it make you want to look further at this work? ○ Did it make you want to look further at other works? ○ Did the information available tell you anything you did not know already? If not, why not? 	
<p>How many visitors are there in this room?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are they doing? ○ How long on average do they look at any one individual work? ○ How long do they stay in the gallery? ○ Is there any one work which attracts more attention than the others? 	

Museum/ Gallery Survey Template

Date of Visit..... Name of Surveyor

Museum/ Gallery visited

Exercise 2: Observation of and critical commentary (to be started during the visit and completed later)

Have you been before?	
What were your expectations?	
What were your first impressions?	
How easy was it to find the works you were looking for?	
How helpful are the staff?	
How good is the signage?	
If you can, discreetly follow a visitor entering the museum/ gallery and record what they do and in what sequence?	

<p>Which Rooms /areas of the Museum attracted the most interest from visitors?</p>	
<p>Which rooms/ areas of the museum attracted the least interest from visitors?</p>	
<p>What is your assessment of the public facilities eg bookshop/ toilets/ café</p>	
<p>Have your expectations been fulfilled/ exceeded/ altered?</p>	
<p>What do you think of the museum gallery website? What aspects would you rate highest, and which lowest?</p>	

<p>What recommendations would you make for improving/ refocusing the visitor experience</p>	
<p>Between the field trip and the next class please note any changes of view in your perception and understanding of the two works and the institution where they now are.</p>	