

Course Module

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1. Introduction

The Philosophy of Art at College of DuPage offers students in Fine Arts as well as the Humanities an opportunity to examine philosophical approaches to art, interpret definitions of the nature of art, trace characteristics of creative thought and demonstrate and use aesthetic criticism and judgment.

A major focus in the course is the study of the Western tradition of conceptualizations of artworks in the discipline of Aesthetics in the West, providing students with a foundational knowledge and understanding of this particular tradition. The following module offers students an opportunity to enter into a discourse about Eurocentricism in the Philosophy of Art and an opportunity to engage students in the critical analysis of concepts of aesthetics. The goal in this context is to raise awareness of important aesthetic ideas in the traditions of Asia, in particular Japan, towards the end of the semester when students should have already gained a foundational understanding of philosophical approaches to Art in the West. Given the timeframe, this module can only provide an initial taste of particular Japanese aesthetic ideas. The goals, however, are to raise the awareness of the selection of conceptualizations studied in the course, introduce students to particular differences in foci regarding aesthetic ideas and values, and engage students in a discourse about philosophical approaches to art they have encountered in this course and, perhaps, raise an interest in Japanese ideas to be pursued in the future.

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2. Objectives

- Analyze conceptualizations of the nature of art based on textual readings performed previously in the context artworks exhibited in the Art Institute of Chicago
- Critically assess the role of the viewer, displays and choices of objects in the context of the museum space
- Describe and interpret the experience of the Ando gallery
- Analyze and critically investigate assumptions that inform the differences in which spaces are used in the Art Institute of Chicago especially considering the experience of the visitor
- Propose and defend an ideal space for locating an art object of your choice

3. Content

In contrast to the general discussions of philosophical texts in the classroom, the session will include a visit to the Art Institute in Chicago. Students will have discussed Walter Benjamin's essay "The Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in which he argues that the fabric of tradition and the context in which an artwork is located is a measure of authenticity of the work. (16) Benjamin focuses on the reproducibility of artworks in the modern age which, he claims, detaches the object from its fabric of tradition. Yet ways in which artworks are presented to the viewers in the context of modern museums also arguably frequently decontextualize artworks, radically removing the artwork from its traditional fabric. Students are given the task to examine ways in which certain spaces are used in the Art Institute to exhibit works including some pieces that originally belonged to a ritual setting (see attached assignment). The goal is that students critically examine the exhibition space of the museum regarding the role of the viewer, the kinds of objects chosen for display, and ways in which objects are displayed in order to assess how certain spaces may or may not influence what accounts for the uniqueness of the artwork. This critical investigation is meant to serve as a comparative frame for the visit of the Ando gallery.

In a second part of the visit, students will gather in the Ando Gallery, Department of Asian Art. Entering the architectural space created by the artist Tando Ando, the viewer is immediately exposed to a sense of space radically different from the other galleries in the museum. Walking

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through a set of wooden columns, modeled on the Japanese screens called *byōbu*, before reaching the exposition of Japanese artworks allows the students to experience a “feeling” of traditional Japanese architecture. In an interview in 2002, Ando speaks about his intention to create such a feeling as “spirit of the space in which these objects have been located.” (5) The play of darkness and light in the room intensifies the sense of awareness for being grounded as a person in the space that is responsive to being in a moment of time rather than coming to observe aesthetic objects. In other words, the distinction between viewing and being viewed are radically challenged and redrawn in this room.

The experience of the Art Institute visit will be the center of discussion in the following two class sessions in which the phenomenon of the museum in modernity with its rules and patterns of exhibition and ideas and values that the artist Ando intended to evoke in the creation of the gallery will be critically assessed.

The students will also write an assignment in which they are asked to imagine and defend a space for an artwork of their choice.

4. Selected Bibliography:

Benjamin, Walter. *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner, technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp. 2006. Print.

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Nute, Kevin. *Place, Time and Being in Japanese Architecture*. London, New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Tandao, Ando. "New Relations Between the Space and the Person." *The Japan Architect*. Vol. 44 (1977): 44-46. Print.

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