

# Philosophy 421: Aesthetics

Prof. Miles Tucker

T/TH 4:00-5:15  
Hibbs 264

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Office Hours: T/TH 11:00-12:00  
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## *Class Summary*

Do works of art have some particular function or purpose? Must they be beautiful, expressive, or engender a certain kind of experience? Or is something a work of art simply because it is deemed so by artists and critics?

This course will provide an introduction to aesthetics by way of fundamental puzzles in the philosophy of art. Our primary focus will be the nature of art: we will examine and evaluate views about what makes something an artwork. Our secondary focus will be the value of art: we will attempt to explain why art is important and to understand how we should respond to works of art.

## *Course Readings*

Our course textbook is Noël Carroll's *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, 1999). The textbook is required; it's available at the campus bookstore, and on Amazon.

We'll also be reading excerpts from Tolstoy, Bell, Beardsley, Weitz, Iseminger, and Dickie, among others. But these readings will be made available on Blackboard.

## *Requirements*

(Please note that all dates below are tentative.)

- Exams (40%)

We'll have two in class exams.

Mid-term: Thursday, October 12<sup>th</sup>.

Final Exam: Tuesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>.

I'll discuss the nature of these exams with you in class. I'll also release a study guide on Blackboard no less than one week before each exam.

- Research Project (40%)

I encourage you to see yourselves as young philosophers. However, as philosophers, you must be able to state and defend your views. So I'll be asking you all to engage in a somewhat substantial research paper. It can seem a little unwieldy but I'll remind you about your obligations frequently and they'll be time to work. Here's an overview:

1. You must pick a topic in aesthetics and discuss it with me. I will then either approve your topic or

suggest that you pick something else. You can come by during office hours, after class, or we can set up an appointment.

2. After I have approved your topic, you may then start on your Term Paper Topic Proposal. It's a short document: you'll lay out your project and discuss the sources you hope to employ. See the "Term Paper Topic Proposals" document for more info. Your proposals are due in class on *October 5<sup>th</sup>*.

3. After I've approved your topic proposal, you can get started. Your paper should be 5-8 pages. It should be clear and concise. Please see the document entitled "Constraints on Term Papers" for more info. Your term papers are due on *November 2<sup>nd</sup>*.

4. I will ask you to sign up for a presentation date. On the date in question, you will give a 5-10 minute presentation on some element of your term paper, followed by a brief Q&A period. You'll need to construct a handout. Please see the document entitled "Constraints on Presentations."

- Quizzes (10%)

There will be no fewer than six in-class 'pop' quizzes; I want to see that you're doing the readings, and keeping up with the course. (If you're struggling, come see me; I'm eager to help.)

- Participation (10%)

I expect every student to contribute to class discussions. (You will not receive any credit for participation if you don't speak on at least a semi-regular basis.) I believe that philosophy is quite difficult—if we're to make progress we will need to work together to understand and solve the puzzles we confront.

I also expect all of us to show proper respect in our interactions with each other. Please note that minor class disruptions, especially in the form of cell phones buzzing, ringing, or singing, will damage your participation grade. (Please put those things away. I know they're fun and shiny.) More serious disruptions may lead me to ask you to leave the class, or to report your behavior to the VCU Division of Student Affairs.

## *Regulations*

- Exams Dates

Exams and quizzes will only be proctored at specified times barring a legitimate academic excuse.

- Grading

Grades will be distributed as follows:

A: 90%-100%

B: 89%-80%

C: 79%-70%

D: 69%-60%

F: 59% or below.

•Email

I check my email very frequently. If you have any questions or concerns about the class, please write me; I am eager to help and I will reply as quickly as I can. However, please note that it is your responsibility to keep up with the class: I will not reply to emails asking me to cover what you missed because of an unexcused absence.

•Late Work

I will accept late work. However, for each day your assignment is late, it will be marked down one full letter grade. The first late day begins immediately after the assignment is due (e.g. if the assignment is due by 4:00 p.m. and is submitted any time after 4:00 p.m. then it will be marked one day late.)

•Academic Honesty

I will not tolerate cheating of any kind. If I discover that you have violated the academic honesty policies of the university, I will immediately turn over the evidence I have obtained to the relevant authorities, and an investigation will begin. I encourage all of you to read VCU’s definition of academic honesty and misconduct here: <https://students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/vcu-honor-system/academic-misconduct/>

•Additional VCU Policies

Please see <http://go.vcu.edu/syllabus> for additional regulations common to all VCU classes. Topics include: “Campus emergency information, Class registration required for attendance, Honor System: upholding academic integrity, Important dates, Managing stress, Mandatory responsibility of faculty members to report incidents of sexual misconduct, Military short-term training or deployment, Student conduct in the classroom, Student email policy, Student financial responsibility, Students representing the university - excused absences, Students with disabilities, Withdrawal from classes.”

This additional information is also available on our Blackboard site as “VCU Syllabus Statements.”

*Tentative Reading Schedule*

This is an outline of how the semester *may* proceed. Please check Blackboard regularly for current handouts and assignments. Note that I reserve the right to change the course schedule at any time.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Handouts</b>
8/24	Introduction	---	---
8/29	Defending the Project	Carroll, pp. 1-15	IH, PM

*Unit 1: Representation*

9/5	Art and Representation	Carroll, pp. 19-26;	R1
9/12	Plato’s Attack	Beardsley; Plato	R2

*Unit 2: Expression*

9/19	Expressivism (1)	Carroll, pp. 61-66; Tolstoy	E1
9/26	Expressivism (2)	Carroll, pp. 66-79.	E2

*Unit 3: Form*

10/3	Formalism	Carroll, pp. 108-125; Bell	F1
10/10	Midterm Exam Week	---	---

*Unit 4: Skepticism*

10/17	Wittgensteinian Worries	Carroll, pp. 206-224; Weitz	W1, W2
10/24	The Institutional Theory	Carroll, pp. 224-240; Dickie	IT1
10/31	The Historical Theory	Carroll, pp. 240-249	IT2
11/7	The Value of Art	Thomson; Beardsley	A1

*Unit 5: Neo-Functionalism*

11/14	Aesthetic Experience (1)	Beardsley; Dickie	AE1
11/21	Aesthetics Experience (2)	Carroll, pp. 240-249	AE2
11/28	The Hybrid Theory	Iseminger	AE3
12/5	Review for Finals/Etc.		