

Draft Syllabus – This Syllabus is Subject to Change
HR1001: Ways of Seeing: Exploring Visual Culture
Semester 1 AY 2026-27

Course Code: HR1001
Course Title: Ways of Seeing: Exploring Visual Culture
Pre-Requisites: Nil
No of Aus: 3
Contact Hours: 39 hours

Course Co-ordinator: Sushma Griffin, PhD
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Office Location: HSS-03-30
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Aims

This course explores the interrelated realms of art and visual culture. By maintaining focus on the visual, we will examine key works of art in a global field spanning periods from ca. 2500 BCE to the contemporary. We will analyse art objects by situating them within debates and discourses specific to the contexts of their production and reception. Each week's learning activities will centre around specific case studies as a starting point for exploration. We will learn to apply important methodological approaches and major theoretical frameworks (for example: postcolonialism, decolonisation, ecocriticism and feminism alongside other critical frameworks examining the post-digital, post-truth production and reception of images including surveillance theories) and core concepts relating to art and visual culture (for instance representation, mimesis, *ekphrasis*, modernism, race, spectacle, and resistance) and develop foundational skills pertaining to analytical writing (such as framing an argument; compiling a bibliography; and so on).

Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. Learn foundational theoretical and critical approaches in the inter-related fields of art history and visual culture studies; develop methods and techniques for the visual analysis of images and articulate considered responses to images.
2. Think about and write critically about images utilising relevant visual vocabulary, and maintaining focus on the visual in your written analysis of images.
3. Display a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental critical methodologies for analysing images.
4. Use visual analysis and concepts, themes, ideas, theories and debates from the weekly readings to think about and write about images critically and in a focused and coherent way.

5. Participate respectfully in class discussion, share your research with your peers in presentation formats, and provide constructive criticism and feedback on your peers' oral presentations.

Course Requirements and Expectations

- Students are expected to attend the weekly seminars and participate fully in class discussion and other activities.
- Students must read the assigned prescribed readings prior to class in preparation for the weekly topic.
- As this course prioritises fresh perspectives and originality of thought, the use of any AI generative software such as ChatGPT, Claude and Microsoft Copilot as well as any other such software and chatbots to generate text for course assignments including the use of grammar-correcting software such as “Grammarly” must be disclosed. A disclosure of generative AI and grammar assisting software form can be found in the Course Resources folder on Blackboard. You will need to fill in relevant details pertaining to your generative AI and other grammar assisting software usage.
- Plagiarism of any material will be penalised and will result in failure in the course. Plagiarism includes self-plagiarism. Assignments plagiarising other assignments that you may have written or prepared as class presentations for other courses are not acceptable and will be penalised and may result in failure in the course.
- Late assignments: written assignments that are submitted late will receive a penalty of half a grade each day (including weekends and holidays); if I do not receive an assignment a week after it is due, you will receive a 0 for the essay.
- Please email me to arrange a consultation. I welcome consultations, both in person and over Zoom.

Course Content

This course is an introduction to the interpretation of visual imagery. It surveys images on a global scale across various media including painting, drawing, photography, moving image, sculpture, architecture and installation. It also takes into consideration everyday practices of seeing and showing. We will explore how visual culture has expanded art history's critical domains by bringing into focus images that were not previously considered as art and ways of seeing that reveal inherent political and cultural ideologies and biases. We will consider key themes in the history of vision and visual culture including the relationship between discipline, surveillance, and vision; and race, gender and visibility. We will learn to apply a variety of critical and theoretical frameworks that incorporate feminist, decolonising, postcolonial, post-truth, and ecocritical perspectives.

Weekly Schedule of Learning Activities

Weeks 1-4: An Introduction to the Art Historian's Fundamental Tool Kit: Visual Analysis and Critical and Theoretical Frameworks ILO 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Week 1: Course Introduction ILO 1, 2, 3, 4

- Week 1 Lecture: A broad introduction to the course contents. Utilising a range of images from across periods and geographies, we will consider questions such as: What is art? What is art history? What is the significance of the history of art? Why

study art history? What is visual culture? What is visual literacy? We will go over the various aspects of the course including the weekly schedule of learning activities and assessment exercises followed by Q&A.

Week 2: Locating Images in Space and Time: What is visual (or formal) analysis? How do we visually (or formally) analyse an image? What insights does this analytical method provide? How is space demarcated in an artwork? What role does temporality play in depiction and representation? Introduction to pertinent art historical vocabularies. ILO 1, 2, 3, 4

Week 2 Prescribed reading: Donna K. Reid, “Describing a Work of Art,” *Thinking and Writing About Art History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 5-9.

Week 2 Recommended reading: E.H. Gombrich, “Moment and Movement in Art”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 27 (1964): 293-306.

Week 2 Recommended Reading: M. Acton, “Space,” *Learning to Look at Paintings* (Routledge, London; New York, 1997), 25-50.

Week 2 Recommended Reading: Michael Baxandall, “Patterns of Intention,” in *The Art of Art History* [online resource], ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 45-54.

Week 3: Art and Technology: Visual Analysis in an Expanded Technological Field

Week 3 Prescribed Reading: Sean Lowry and Adam Geczy, “Where is Art” in *Where is Art: Space, Time and Location in Contemporary Art*, eds. Simone Douglas, Adam Geczy, and Sean Lowry (New York: Routledge, 2022), 4-34.

Week 4: Field Visit I to Practice Visual Analysis Skills: Field trip to the Art Design and Media Gallery at NTU or NTU Museum or the Gillman Barracks Galleries (venue tbc on the formal announcement of the exhibitions programme for August 2026).

Weeks 5: Writing Workshop: Consolidating your visual analysis skills

Visual Analysis of Contemporary Art: How to Interpret a Contemporary Work of Art
Reviewing the Week 3 reading by Sean Lowry and Adam Geczy.

Week 6-8: Art and the Politics of Representation: Representing Self and the Other; the Art and Science of Animal Representation ILO 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Week 6: Representing Self and the Other: Orientalism

Week 6 Prescribed Reading: Linda Nochlin, “The Imaginary Orient”, *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*, ed. Kymberly N Pinder, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 69-86.

Week 6 Recommended Reading: Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

Week 7: Representing Self and the Other: The Artistic and Philosophical Movement of Negritude

Week 7 Prescribed Reading: Robert Linsley, “Wilfredo Lam: Painter of Negritude”, *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*, ed. Kymberly N Pinder, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 289-307.

Week 8: The Art and Science of Representing Animals

- Week 8 Prescribed Reading: Pedro Cardoso, “Insects, Spiders, Snails, and Empathy: Representing Invertebrate Extinctions in Natural History Museums”, *Animals, Plants, and Afterimages: The Art and Science of Representing Animal Extinction*, eds. Valerie Bienvenue and Nicholas Chare (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022), 230-240.

Weeks 9-12: Modernism and Contemporary Art from the Global South ILO 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Week 9: Field Visit II to the NUS Museum to view the South and Southeast Asian Collections (transport provided).

Week 10: Modernism in the Global South

- Week 10 Prescribed Reading: Geeta Kapur, “When Was Modernism in Indian / Third World Art” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 92:3 (Summer 1993): 473-514.

Week 11: Contemporary Art in the Global South

- Week 11 Prescribed Reading: Michelle Antoinette, “Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: Regional Interventions”, *Reworlding Art History: Contemporary Southeast Asian Art after 1990* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2014), 3-77.

Weeks 12: Contemporary Art’s Decolonising Imperatives ILO 1, 2, 3, 5

- Week 12 Prescribed Reading: Nepomuceno, Nicole M. "Yuki Kihara: Trouble in Paradise." *Art Asia Pacific*, no. 129 (2022): 42-47.

Week 13: End-of-Semester Assessment: In-Class Open-Book Quiz comprising Four Short Answer Responses to Stimulus Materials: Responding with a Visual Analysis and Referencing Prescribed Readings - Weighting 40% ILO 1, 2, 3, 4

Students will respond to four images (10 marks each) provided as stimulus materials, writing short answer responses (around 300-400 words each) with a brief visual analysis and referring to the course’s prescribed readings relevant to the stimulus material.

Assessment (including continuous and summative assessment)

Class Participation Weighting 20% ILO 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 [Continuous Assessment]

Weekly attendance and participation in class discussion on the works of art and prescribed readings will count towards your final grade. Please read the prescribed readings and come to

class with prepared comments and questions to contribute to the discussion on a weekly basis.

Class Presentations (between Weeks 3 to 12) Weighting 20% ILO 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
[Continuous Assessment]

- Ten-to-fifteen-minute group presentations (by two presenters) of 1200-1400 words (around 600-700 words each) and a powerpoint focusing on visual analyses of works of art relevant to an idea / concept / theory from a prescribed weekly reading.
- **These group presentations require each presenter to situate selected works of art within one concept, idea, or theory from a prescribed weekly reading (selected by the presenters) to explain these concepts (of their choice) to their peers. Quote directly from the respective reading, adding the page number of the quote(s) to your PowerPoint. Translate the idea / concept / theory from the reading to make it accessible for your peers.**
- Please select one reading (from the prescribed weekly readings) that you would like to draw from for your presentation.
- Please submit any notes, handouts and powerpoint slides 48 hours prior to class.
- **The grading for this presentation is based around your efforts to engage closely with and translate an idea / concept / theory from one weekly prescribed reading for your peers.** Affiliated materials such as definitions and timelines may be utilised to introduce the idea / concept / theory of your choice, however marks will be granted on the basis of your presentation (and translation) of the idea / concept / or theory for your peers. Each group will respond to questions from respondents.

Mid-Semester Assessment: Short Essay on Visual Analysis (700-800 words) based on Field Visit I in Week 4.

Deadline: due in Week 7 on

Weighting 20% ILO 1, 2, 3, 4:

Your essay will focus on one work of art from the Field Visit in Week 4. This essay assignment will require you to:

- i) undertake a visual analysis of your selected work
- ii) situate it within the theme of the exhibition
- iii) comment on its contribution to the exhibition theme as a whole – how does its inclusion contribute to the exhibition -- does it problematise, challenge, or extend the exhibition in any way? Discuss, explain, and justify your critique in relation to the artwork's inclusion in the exhibition.

15 marks for the visual analysis of the work and 5 marks for the discussion and critique regarding its inclusion and relevance to the exhibition theme and connections with the other works of art. Total: 20 marks.

- NB: Regarding the use of AI: This course prioritises fresh perspectives and originality of thought and the use of any AI generative software such as ChatGPT, Claude and Microsoft Copilot and any other such software and chatbots to generate text for course assignments including the use of grammar-correcting software such as

“Grammarly” must be disclosed. A disclosure form pertaining to generative AI and grammar assisting software can be located in the Course Resources folder on Blackboard. You will need to disclose relevant details pertaining to your generative AI and other grammar assisting software usage.

End-of-Semester Assessment: In-Class Open-Book Quiz in Week 13 comprising Four Short Answer Responses to Stimulus Materials: Responding with a Visual Analysis and Referencing Prescribed Readings - Weighting 40% ILO 1, 2, 3, 4

Students will respond to four images (10 marks each) provided as stimulus materials, writing short answer responses (around 300-400 words each) with a brief visual analysis and referring to ideas / concepts / theories in the prescribed readings from the course relevant to the stimulus material. Citations may be brief and include the author’s name, title(s) of text(s) cited, and page number(s). 10 marks per short answer response (5 marks for the visual analysis and 5 marks for relating the work to a prescribed reading). The images will be selected from the weekly lectures and affiliated materials. Total: 40 marks.