

Vesalius College

Course description

Course title:

Society and Values: Modernism and the European Avant-garde: 1899-1930

Course code: COR 391

Teacher responsible: Dr. C. Adamson

Course description:

The purpose is to examine the cultural history of Europe during the early decades of the Twentieth Century. A period of daring innovation, it is a time when artists across Europe seemed to be of one mind as they challenged traditional notions of aesthetic values and the established canon. Artistic dialogue and debate across the languages of English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, and Italian set this phenomenon apart from other movements and "isms".

Definition will form the backbone of our study: modernism, avant-garde, impressionism, cubism, futurism, expressionism, surrealism, DADAism will be examined in terms of their first contemporary definition (often as a manifesto) as well as later 20th century application of these terms.

At the heart of the course is, however, the close examination of the texts themselves, and here "texts" is used in the widest sense possible: primarily literary texts, but also musical texts, plastic texts, graphic texts, celluloid texts. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this period is the cross-fertilization—both cultural and artistic—that occurred between these "texts" and their authors. Serge Eisenstein writes on Cubism's influence on montage in film; Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* reiterates that juxtapositioning of montage in prose to build character; Gertrude Stein explains Cezanne's influence on her writing to Picasso; his "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon" is in part inspired by African masks and sculpture brought back to Europe as trophies; Conrad returns to the source of those trophies with his terrifying voyage to the darkness at the heart of European imperialism.

Course objectives:

Students will understand the philosophies and the chronology of modernism and its various manifestations; they will be able to define these movements. Participants will be able to decipher texts, paintings, film in the context of the various movements, and they will be able to identify important works. Finally, they will be able to discuss the key factors that shaped the philosophy and work of these writers, painters, composers, and directors.

Grade weighting scheme:

20% Two short papers: Conrad debate (required) and one other text discussion.

20% One extended essay/project with oral presentation:

→Survey of a Movement: Researched exploration of a particular movement and can be limited to a particular country. Goal is to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of one aspect of modernism; or

→Creative Project: An essay, story, poem, painting, musical composition in the style of a certain movement (futurism, DADAism, cubism, surrealism, existentialism, etc.) a group of paintings, or a film; with a discussion of your project's inspiration, rationale and bibliography.

10% Review of "outside event": concert, film, exhibition related to our period

10% Class participation (attendance, brief written preparations, contribution to class discussion).

20% Midterm

20% Final

Used course material (handbooks, readers, readings, newspapers, magazines) and references:

- Bradbury, Malcolm and James McFarlane. *Modernism: 1890-1930*. London: Penguin Books, 1991.
- Conrad, Joseph. *The Heart of Darkness*. Ed. Paul B. Armstrong. 4th ed. N.Y. and London: Norton, 2006.
- Joyce, James. *Dubliners*. London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. London: Penguin Books.

Reader + Online: Tracts, essays, poems, short stories from T.S. Eliot, Charles Baudelaire, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Guillaume Apollinaire, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Michel Foucault, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Luis Buñuel, Ezra Pound, André Breton, Tristan Tzara, Serge Eisenstein.

