

**ART AND ETHICS:
CURRENT CONTROVERSIES IN THE LIBERAL ARTS
(LSHV 383-01)**

INSTRUCTOR

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Monday evenings 6:30-8:40 p.m., January 14-April 28, 2008

Georgetown University Liberal Studies Evening Degree Program

DESCRIPTION

This course will explore recent debates surrounding the visual arts. The material is structured around three broad themes: the value judgments we make about works of art, questions of ownership, and art in a democracy. Our discussions will be oriented toward Western art but not restricted to work from any one period. We will explore art ranging from landmarks in the Western tradition, such as the Parthenon, to less familiar but more provocative contemporary pieces.

DISABILITIES STATEMENT

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Graded assignments** (guidelines will be provided separately; percentages indicate amount counted toward your final grade):
 - a. Thoughtful **written responses to each set of weekly readings**, to be posted on Blackboard 24 hours prior to class, and oral participation (40%);

- b. **Research paper and related assignment (60%).** A preliminary bibliography and prospectus for your paper, which will be graded, are due midway through the semester. The content and length requirements for graduate and undergraduate student papers will differ.
2. **Careful preparation and attendance are essential** as this is a reading-based, discussion-oriented course.
3. **Policy on late assignments:** Late postings on the weekly readings are unacceptable, as these materials provide critical content for each week's session. Final papers and related assignments will be graded down one-half letter grade per day past the deadline. I will not accept final papers that have been faxed or e-mailed.
4. **Course readings:** Our primary text, David E. Fenner's Ethics and the Arts: An Anthology, will be available in the campus bookstore. Supplemental readings will be available for free on e-reserves. Because this class is new, the complete readings list will be finalized in late autumn.

KEY DATES

Class sessions: Jan. 14, 28; Feb. 4, 25; Mar. 10, 17, 31; Apr. 7, 14, 21, 28; April Saturday session TBA

Prospectus/bibliography: Due in class Mar. 17

Final research paper: Due in class on Apr. 28

COURSE SCHEDULE

(1) Introduction

I will introduce the course and review its Blackboard site. No readings are assigned for this first session.

PART I: THE ART OBJECT

How we decide what constitutes "art", and what this says about us as a culture.

(2) Should There Be a Canon of Western Art?

In constructing canons of art history we make value judgments about what is "good art". But is quality the sole criterion? What cultural biases might be embedded in decisions to include or exclude certain artists?

(3) Artists, Celebrity, and Authenticity

What happens when artists become wealthy celebrities? To grab the public's attention, do they make compromises in terms of the depth and genuineness of their work? Our discussion will be framed within a larger debate about the concept of "authenticity" in Western esthetics.

(4) The Nude: Art and Eroticism

We imagine ourselves to live in an era of greater sexual freedom, yet depictions of the naked human form can be just as controversial now as in the past. We will discuss factors that continue to make the nude provocative, including conditions of viewing, debate about the line between "erotic" and "pornographic", and artists' tendency toward increasingly varied and complex interpretations of this traditional subject matter.

PART II: FINDERS, KEEPERS?

Under what circumstances does art ownership cease to be legitimate? What special ethical responsibilities confront owners of "contested" art?

(5) Elgin Marbles

The Elgin (or Parthenon) marbles are among the British Museum's most prized possessions. Removed from the Acropolis in Napoleonic times, they have become the focal point of one of the world's most famous cultural property disputes. We will explore the history of the Elgin marbles and debate their rightful ownership.

(6) The Acquisition, Display, and Repatriation of Native American Art

Questions surrounding the acquisition and display of Native American art are the subject of this session. Our topics include the procurement of artifacts with ritual significance, the conservation and interpretation of Native American art in public collections, and the repatriation of funerary objects. We also will discuss NAGPRA, which was passed in 1990 to provide a legal framework for returning sacred objects to indigenous peoples.

(7) World War II: Looting and Restitution

By the end of World War II, Nazi officials had looted more art than was held in several major European museums combined. Treasures from German national museums lay buried in mines for safekeeping, where, once found, they were susceptible to theft by Allied forces. In this session we will explore practical, legal, and ethical complexities associated with the ongoing

process of restitution. Particular emphasis will be placed on art confiscated from Jewish art collectors and dealers.

PART III: ART IN A DEMOCRACY

When and why might artistic freedom be restricted?

(8) Censorship

We will discuss notable instances of censorship in America over the past two centuries and evaluate different kinds of censorship (state-level, museum-level, etc.) as well as the various types of art that have prompted it.

(9) Sensation: Case Study in Public Funding, Sponsorship, and the 1st Amendment

The Brooklyn Museum's 1999 exhibition Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection dealt provocatively with the themes of death and sexuality. The show sparked a public outcry, pitted New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani against the New York Civil Liberties Union, and raised questions about public funding for the arts, corporate sponsorship, and First Amendment rights. We will investigate the various strands of this controversy and the cultural context in which it emerged.

(10) Public Monuments

What challenges do artists face in commemorating emotionally charged historical events, such as the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, or 9-11? To what extent should special interest groups be involved in determining the content of public monuments? We will tackle these questions through analysis of a variety of works.

(11) Conclusion

Class participants will submit final papers and give brief (10-minute) overviews of their research.

SPECIAL SESSIONS, DATES T.B.A.

(12) Special Library Session

We will discuss the objectives of your major research paper, explore potential topics, and review essential library resources.

(13) Saturday Museum Field Trip in April