

AAD 252: Art and Gender

Course Syllabus

Description:

This course addresses socio-cultural factors influencing roles of women and men in arts, culture, and society. We will examine underlying social structures that affect how we have defined and do define art and artists. We will consider how gender is relevant to the creation and appreciation of art. We will discuss gender as a vehicle for the understanding of art and the meanings associated with art.

Instructor:

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Objectives:

Through readings, lectures, projects, writing, and discussion, students will:

- (a) consider perspectives to roles of men and women in art through a historical and cultural analysis based on education, social status, subject matter, criticism, and public perceptions;
- (b) explore select social, political, aesthetic, and economic factors that influence ways we define art and artist;
- (c) examine differences that have been articulated by critics and others regarding the values associated with art by men and women;
- (d) learn about artists and their work in the context of gender;
- (e) adopt a critical perspective regarding art, gender, and culture.

Themes, Issues, and Discussion:

Since one of the objectives for this class is for students to develop their own critical perspective of art and gender, weekly themes will be presented that pose questions, issues, and controversy. Exploring these themes through reading, writing, and discussion is the goal, not evaluating them to find “correct” answers.

Week 1 **Language, Image, and Context**

Our understanding of art and gender is affected by language, image, and the context in which information is sent and received. Art and gender are cultural constructions that vary by audience, place, and time. Language and image can be used as tools in the service of power. This week we will be looking at various perspectives of art and gender, how they are used, and asking you to define these concepts for yourself.

Week 2 **Accessibility, Marginalization, and Belonging**

The information we have access to and the limitations we incur shape who we are as individuals. Throughout history, men and women have been given different roles to play and expectations to achieve. These concepts are complicated. For example, the typical experience for women, historically, is having limited access to formal art training. This inhibited

art production, but in some instances, created new genres and treatment of subject matter.

- Week 3** **Female, Feminine, Fertility**
How women are perceived, portrayed, and posed by artists help shape our understanding of gender. Female archetypes and stereotypes give us a common language, but also may limit our understanding of the female experience. Is there a female sexual imagery and if so, how does it intersect with imagery defined by a “female sensibility”?
- Week 4** **Male, Masculine, Virility**
How men have been perceived, portrayed, and posed also shape our understanding of gender. Male archetypes and stereotypes have dominated the art history canon not only in subject matter, but also in the understanding of what it is to be an artist in society. Alternative images may appear shocking at first, until society becomes more familiar with new ideas that challenge previous expectations.
- Week 5** **Significant Others and Art Partnerships**
How the art process happens and how creative ideas come to fruition is an interesting study. Often, artists depend on the emotional and economic support of others. Relationships play an important role in making art happen. Mentor, muse, patron, collaborator, sponsor, and/or spouse are examples of relationships that create a community that supports art production.
- Week 6** **Customizing the Body and Constructing Gender**
“Marking” of the human body is used for aesthetic expression as well as social identity. Body modification includes everything from tattooing to dieting, from plastic surgery to applying lipstick. Grooming involves rituals that shape gender. Beauty and physical attractiveness are social constructions that differ culturally, yet carry powerful messages in political, economic, social, religious, and psychological realms.
- Week 7** **Fashion and Gendered Appearance**
The form and meaning of how we dress shape our understanding of gender. Though unisex clothing has been more popular in the United States and Western Europe recently; historically and cross-culturally, men and women have had different dress expectations. This topic ranges widely from how the *chador* may be perceived as limiting for Muslim women by non-Muslims yet enabling by Muslims to the art of cross-dressing for people interested in transgender study.

Week 8**The Gendered Landscape**

The boundaries of our “natural” and “urban” environment are becoming less distinct. The relationship of humans to their environment has gender implications. The concept of the “green man” is countered with the “cyborg woman” and recent discussions of a transhuman, possible future.

Week 9**Erotic/Pornographic Images in Art and Culture**

What is erotica? What is pornography? Who defines these terms? Can art be both art and pornography? Should federal tax dollars fund controversial art? Is there a special way to critique controversial art? How do legal, religious, academic, and civic interests collide on this subject?

Week 10**Reflections on Art & Gender Past, Present, and Future**

This week we will be reflecting on the conclusions we can draw from our study this term of these broad, weekly, themes. Speculation on future trends and suggestions for further study of art and gender will be presented. Students will share with their classmates the particular themes and questions they have been working on through their final projects.

Assignments and Criteria for Evaluation:

- (a) Weekly class activities: There will be one class activity each week (10 total) that are due on Fridays (by midnight). Each activity is worth 10 points. Assignments will **NOT** be accepted late. Activities are detailed in the Assignment area on Blackboard. They generally require a response through e-mail or a discussion board posting often with image attachments.
- (b) Museum/Gallery Essay. Students will write a 3 to 5 page essay responding to original art work at a local site, developing a personal perspective, and using the readings presented in class to support their discussion. This essay is worth 100 points.
- (c) Final Project. Students will research, design, and create a final project that reflects/enriches/counters one of the weekly themes presented in class. This project is worth 100 points.

Evaluation is based on a point system. Final grades are determined by the percentage of points earned. **An Incomplete is not given unless under grave circumstances and approved by the Instructor.**

Readings and Resources:

Readings and resources (in the form of quotes, Word and PDF files, book reviews, citations, and Web links) are incorporated on the site. No text is required, though thoughtful responses to activities, the essay, and the final project require the students to glean a variety of reference materials in their areas of interest.