

# Phenomenology and the Work of Art

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## Course Description

What is the work of art? How are the work of art and the work of philosophy related to one another? The phenomenological tradition is known for taking the philosophical role and implications of art seriously. Many of the great figures of early twentieth century phenomenology, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty among them, offered provocative and careful analyses of the importance, value, and status of art. More recently, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, and Jean-Louis Chrétien have continued phenomenology's legacy of seriously taking up the question of art's *raison d'être*. In this course we will do the same through close readings of key phenomenological texts that examine art's philosophical import and broader cultural significance.

## Readings

### *Weeks 1 and 2*

Adorno, Theodor. (2004) *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by R.H. Kentor. London: Continuum Press.

### *Week 3 and 4*

Chrétien, Jean-Louis. (2004) *The Call and the Response*. Translated by S. Lewis. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

### *Week 5 and 6*

Chrétien, Jean-Louis. (2003) *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*. Translated by S. Lewis. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

### *Week 7 and 8*

Heidegger, Martin. 'On the Origin of the Work of Art'. In D.F. Krell ed., *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* (San Francisco, CA: Harpers Collins Publishers), 139-212.

### *Weeks 9 and 10*

Henry, Michel. (2009). *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky*. Translated by S. Davidson. New York, NY: Continuum Press.

### *Week 11*

Marion, Jean-Luc. (2002) 'The Idol or the Radiance of the Painting'. In *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*. Translated by R. Horner and V. Berraud. (New York, NY: Fordham University Press), 54-81.

### Week 12

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. (1964) 'Cézanne's Doubt'. In *Sense and Non-Sense*. Translated by P.A. Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 9-25.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. (1964) 'Eye and Mind'. In *The Primacy of Perception: And other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*. Translated by C. Dallery (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 159-192.

## Exams

There will be three examinations:

Two in-class exams; each consisting of two short essays

A term paper, at least 15 double-sided pages, that serves as the final exam

In the in-class exams, you will demonstrate what you have learned from the assigned readings and lectures. In the term paper, you will apply the gained knowledge to a personal topic of interest that relates to the world of art viewed from the perspective of phenomenological philosophy.

**In each of the in-class exams**, you will be asked to answer two short essay questions (there will be three options per question from which to choose). These two exams will not only allow you the opportunity to demonstrate what you've learned from the readings and lecture discussions; they will also acclimate you to the sort of questions and issues at stake in contemporary phenomenology of art.

**A long essay will serve as your final exam.** Shortly after the second in-class exam, you will submit a proposed topic along with a brief outline for your term paper. The paper is your chance to demonstrate at length and in detail your knowledge of what the texts say and what you yourself think about what they have to say. The assigned readings should therefore be the primary focus of the term paper; however, secondary sources can also be used. You should also of course feel free to focus on any specific works of art that we have analyzed during the semester. I will be sure to provide feedback on your proposal before you begin the actual writing of the paper.

It is useful to be thinking about the week's readings in light of the final paper. By coming to each set of readings with a mind to how you see those and the previous texts informing one another, you'll be able to better appreciate the common problems and shared issues to which the texts respond. The term paper can also be an opportunity for you to do some phenomenology of art for yourself, which is the very point of phenomenological philosophy, and precisely what makes it so great and rewarding. As Husserl himself, phenomenology's founder, said: "To the things themselves!"

## **Grades**

The first two exams each compose **30%** of your final grade.

The term paper composes the remaining **40%**.

I do not provide credit for attendance. However, if you have enrolled in the class, you are expected to attend. We will be looking at works of art and discussing what we see, so there will be material from class discussion on the exams that cannot be gleaned from the readings alone!