



Monday and Wednesday 5:30 to 6:45pm  
MC 213  
Prerequisite: none  
3 credits

Instructor: Denise Johnson  
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Office Hours: 4 to 5:30 pm  
or by appointment



Required of all freshman art majors this course provides students with the vocabulary for talking and writing about the visual arts, with the goal of making them active viewers and producers of visual culture.

This course introduces the student to the theory of signs and other conceptual structures as well as the formal language of the visual arts. How can we describe a work of art so that we can produce a meaning? How do we break down visual structures in a work of art? How do we construct a close read or a formal analysis of work of art? What is a “sign”? How does one understand images vis-à-vis a textual anchor (title, caption, etc)? More generally, how does one derive meaning from a visual image? How do we “read” or grasp meanings in artworks, advertisements, film, TV, architecture, and the designed objects? The exploration of these questions is often referred to as the study of semiotics.

## Objectives & Outcomes

### Course Objectives

This course satisfies the 7AI and 7SI components of the General Education curriculum: students will compose critical or creative works that embody or analyze an artistic form, and students will employ theories of how people frame and analyze social and/or historical phenomena.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

- Understand that images, regardless of their origin and intended audience, form a system of signs that inform the content of our contemporary visual language.
- Understand how signs function in communication and the construction of reality.
- Be able to describe and discuss visual images including artworks, design works, and film.
- Develop confidence in their role as active viewers or “readers” who construct meaning.
- Develop a formal vocabulary for discussing painting, sculpture, photography, graphic design, and employ semiotics terms, cultural codes to be able to analyze a visual image vis-à-vis contemporary culture.

### Art History Program Learning Outcomes

Students will:

1. Develop the writing competencies used in the discipline of art history.
2. Locate works of art and visual culture within the context of world art history and articulate the relationship between intended meaning/function and audience response in specific cultural and historical contexts.
3. Recognize the theoretical concerns of art history and its allied disciplines, and discuss and apply specific theoretical perspectives to a given art historical context and to their own research projects.



## Materials

### Required Textbooks

Hall, Sean. *This Means This, That Means That: a User's Guide to Semiotics*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2007.

Barnet, Sylvan. *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*. Boston: Pearson Education Inc. (any edition, 10<sup>th</sup> or 11th preferred)

### Instructional Websites

This class will be taught from the instructional website, The Slide Projector at, [www.theslideprojector.com](http://www.theslideprojector.com). Lecture presentations, assignments, and other course materials will be available for you at this site and you will need to access it regularly.

Additionally, two exams will be taken outside of class on Blackboard at <https://blackboard.chapman.edu>.

## Instructional Strategies

Lectures, student presentations, active participation in class discussions, presentation by visiting artist and possibly viewing of an off-campus exhibition that may require a commute, parking fee, and/or entrance fee.

## Major Study Units

- ▶ Introduction to semiotics
  - Basic concepts
  - Vocabulary
  - The study of visual arts as a form of communication
- ▶ Formal visual analysis
- ▶ Visual structures of meaning
- ▶ Textual structures of meaning
- ▶ Strategies of interpretation
  - Ways of seeing and meaning
  - Interpretation
  - Representation
- ▶ Framing meaning
- ▶ The audience:
  - Who are the viewers?
  - How do they produce meanings?
  - Gazes and The Other



## Methods of Evaluation

Students will be evaluated on the presentation of evidence that they have achieved the course objectives. As well, students will be evaluated on the frequency and quality of their contributions to in-class discussion; on their ability to make oral and written critical observations about the artists, movements, and concepts presented in the course; on the quality of the writing they present; and on their ability to demonstrate growth in their understanding and application of semiotic theory and how viewers formulate meaning/ interpretation of a work of art.

### **Class Participation** (10% - 50 points)

Students will earn up to 50 participation points through the following activities:

Students will participate in class discussions and will be expected to contribute consistently to in-class debate and the application of theoretical ideas to works.

Students will be required to attend one lecture in the Visual Thinker Lecture Series (two contemporary artist lectures, and one Bensussen lecture). Additional lectures may be attended for extra credit. Please be reminded that Art and Art History majors are required by the department to attend all Visual Thinker Lectures and the Art 195 assignment requires different documentation.

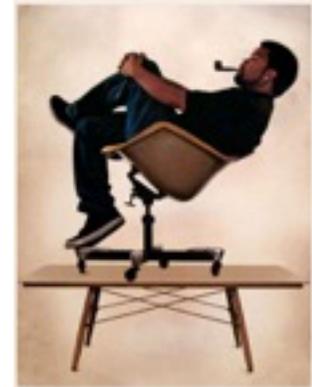
### **Glossary Project** (20% - 100 points)

Students are required to create a glossary of terms encountered in course readings and class discussions. The form that the glossary takes (flashcards, Word document, etc.) is up to the needs and learning modes of individual students. The contents and organization of your glossary should assist you in preparing for quizzes and developing coursework.

### **Assignments** (40% - 200 points)

Over the course of the semester, students will submit three writing assignments as a means of becoming more familiar with the formal and conceptual language of images.

Additionally, each student will be asked to give an in-class presentation related to the major study units of this course. Students may choose to collaborate on the presentation in small groups, with each member of the group pledging to offer equitable time and effort to the presentation. Topics and presentation dates will be arranged during the first weeks of class.



### **Final Project** (10% - 50 points)

The final project will be related to or derived from the semester's theme of words and images. Students working in small groups will compose a graphic novel offering a semiotic analysis of an object, a work of art, a designed object, or a "semiotic concept" relating to our coursework. A short analysis of this graphic novel will also be required.

### **Exams** (20% - 100 points)

Students will respond to two exams this semester, each worth 50 points. Exams will be taken outside of class on the course Blackboard page at <https://blackboard.chapman.edu>.

Make-up exams cannot be accommodated, except under extenuating circumstances!

**Extra Credit**

Students are limited to earning a maximum of five percent of the total points possible (500) in extra credit during the semester. Any points earned beyond the 25 point cap will NOT be applied to the final grade.

**Instructor Policies****Commitment to the Conversation**

Conversation and debate will be central to the learning experience this semester. Art historians do not work in secluded spaces that are entirely disconnected from the world around them. Given the importance of engagement, students will be expected to fully commit to in-class dialogues and will agree to take a break from texting, emailing, and fulfilling requirements for courses other than our own, while in class.

Laptop use will not be permitted in this class. Apart from the obvious potential for distraction, taking notes on a laptop puts you in "transcription" mode: when we attempt to write word-for-word or verbatim what we hear we are no longer processing intellectually in a discerning way. By contrast, taking notes by hand encourages you to listen, think critically, ask questions and prioritize the information in a way that makes sense. It also provides space for sketching works of art and images as they're discussed, and for doodling when your mind wanders.

**Attendance**

Regular attendance is mandatory. Up to two class absences will be tolerated, however the instructor reserves the right to deduct 5% of total available class points (25 points) for each absence beyond the second. Please also be punctual! Students arriving 15 or more minutes after class begins should expect to be marked absent for the entire class session.

**Respect is Key**

We will often consider provocative, challenging, even vulgar subject matter in this class and must therefore agree to respect each other's views and identities. Our diverse backgrounds and opinions are assets and no student shall be made to feel inferior or uncomfortable because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or physical/ intellectual abilities.

**Paper Please**

Please submit coursework that is due at the beginning of class.

As a courtesy, the instructor will accept emailed assignments as receipt of having turned in an assignment on time, as long as the assignment has been emailed to the instructor as a pdf BEFORE the start of the class session that the assignment is due. *The instructor will expect a paper copy of the emailed assignment to be submitted by the next class session for grading.* Assignments submitted in this fashion may require additional time for grading. If you know you will be absent, please make arrangements with a fellow student to submit coursework on the day it is due.

**Late Assignments**

You may submit one assignment, one class day late. The late assignment will not be marked down, however any assignments turned in more than one class late, or in addition to the one accepted assignment, will only receive credit at the discretion of the instructor.

## Chapman University Policies

### Academic Integrity Policy

Chapman University is a community of scholars which emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and for submitting coursework completed this semester, for this class. Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated anywhere in the university. Academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor/administrator and referral to the university's Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions up to and including expulsion. Please see the full description of Chapman University's policy on Academic Integrity at [www.chapman.edu/academics/academic-integrity/index.aspx](http://www.chapman.edu/academics/academic-integrity/index.aspx)

### Students with Disabilities Policy

In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. Upon recommendation of the Center for Academic Success, adaptations of teaching methods, class materials, including text and reading materials or testing may be made as needed to provide for equitable participation.

### Equity and Diversity Policy

We will often consider provocative and challenging subject matter in this class and must therefore agree to respect each other's views and identities. Our diverse backgrounds and opinions are assets and no student shall be made to feel inferior or uncomfortable because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or physical/ intellectual abilities.

Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in Chapman's Harassment and Discrimination Policy: at <http://www.chapman.edu/faculty-staff/human-resources/eoo.aspx>. Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the Dean of Students and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.

Prepared by Denise Johnson  
Spring 2016



**Class Schedule and Required Reading** - This is a tentative schedule that may change according to the needs of the class during the semester. Updates will be announced in class, and modified on The Slide Projector.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Discussion Topic</b>	<b>Assignment and Reading Due</b>
February 1	<b>Introduction</b>	
February 3	<b>Saussure &amp; the Sign</b>	Hall, <i>Introduction</i>
February 8	<b>Signs and Signing</b>	Hall, <i>Chapter 1</i>
February 10	<b>Icon, Index &amp; Symbol</b>	Barnet, <i>pgs. 1 -21 &amp; Chapter 2</i>
February 15	<b>Rhetoric of the Image</b>	Barthes, " <i>Rhetoric of the Image</i> "
February 17	<b>Metaphors We Live By</b>	Hall, <i>Chapter 2</i> & Lackoff & Johnson, " <i>Metaphors We Live By</i> "
February 22	<b>Connotative &amp; Denotative Meaning</b>	Williamson, " <i>Decoding Advertisements</i> "
February 24	<b>Making Meaning</b>	Barnet, <i>pgs. 22 - 36 &amp; Chapter 4</i>
February 29	<b>Ways of Meaning</b>	<b>Paper #1 Due</b>
March 2	<b>Conceptual Structures</b>	Hall, <i>Chapter 3</i>
March 7	<b>Visual Structures</b>	Hall, <i>Chapter 4</i>
March 9	<b>Formal Analysis</b>	Barnet, <i>Chapters 3 &amp; 5</i>
March 14	<b>In the Name of Picasso</b>	Krauss, " <i>In the Name of Picasso</i> "
March 16	<b>Analysis &amp; Evaluation</b>	<b>Glossary Part I &amp; Exam #1 Due</b>
March 21	Spring Break	
March 23		
March 28	<b>Textual Structures</b>	<b>Paper #2 Due</b> Hall, <i>Chapter 5</i>
March 30	<b>Cultural Appropriation</b>	Pritchard, <i>Essence, Identity &amp; Palmer and Tano, Mokomokai</i>
April 4	<b>Cultural Signifiers</b>	Barthes, <i>The Death of the Author</i>
April 6	<b>Matters of Interpretation</b>	Hall, <i>Chapter 6</i>
April 11	<b>Framing Meaning</b>	Hall, <i>Chapter 7</i>
April 13	<b>Guest Speaker</b>	Barnet, <i>Chapters 12 &amp; 14</i>
April 18	<b>Ways of Seeing</b>	Berger, <i>Ways of Seeing #4</i>
April 20	<b>Language &amp; Myth</b>	Barthes, <i>Myth Today</i>
April 25	<b>Stories and Storytelling</b>	Hall, <i>Chapter 8</i>
April 27	<b>Persuasion</b>	Hall, <i>Encoding, Decoding</i>
May 2	<b>Synthesis</b>	<b>Paper #3 Due</b>
May 4	<b>Presentations</b>	Barnet, <i>Chapters 7 &amp; 9</i>
May 9	<b>Presentations</b>	
May 11	<b>Presentations</b>	<b>Glossary Part II &amp; Exam #2 Due</b>
May 18	<b>Final Project Presentations 4:15 to 6:45 pm</b>	