



Art History 4640G/VA 9555B/9655B
Winter 2020

Seminar in Modern/Contemporary Art - Artistic Moments at the Center of the Void: Milan,
January 2, 1957
Wednesdays, 8:30-11:30
Visual Arts Building, rm. 247

Professor John G. Hatch
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Hours: Monday and Tuesdays, 13:30-14:30, or by appointment
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Prerequisite: Registration in years 3 or 4 of a Department of Visual Arts Module, or permission of the Department.

Course Description: On January 2nd, 1957, an exhibition opened at the Galleria Apollinaire in Milan that featured blue monochrome paintings by the French artist Yves Klein. This was essentially the starting point of Klein's mercurial career which involved a journey or quest to capture the void as described in a variety of sources ranging from Zen Buddhism and Grail mythology to the work of Gaston Bachelard and Marcel Duchamp. The exhibition was visited notably by two artists, the Argentinian-born Lucio Fontana and Piero Manzoni. For the former, Klein's work re-affirmed the direction Fontana's own paintings and sculptures were taking; with the latter, the exhibition marked the beginning of an intense rivalry, with Manzoni echoing in his own, very unique fashion, some of the innovative visual experiments Klein produced. Yet, and this is something Klein failed to understand, the three artists approached the idea of the void from markedly different perspectives. Klein took a spiritualist tact, Manzoni a far more empiricist approach, while Fontana represented a perfect blend of the two ends of the spectrum represented by the younger artists. The works that resulted represented the most daring of artistic gestures that paved the way for the art of generations that followed. In France, most immediately with the New Realists, and in Italy, Arte Povera. This course will examine the work of these three seminal artists, what influenced them (everything from Phenomenology and Existentialism to Jungian psychoanalysis to Japanese avant-garde art), and who they influenced.

Learning Outcomes:

The point of this course, beyond the obvious acquisition of knowledge of the topic we will be addressing over the term, is to have you engage in an open and active discussion of key historical and contemporary issues from the various perspectives offered by the authors we read, the course instructor, as well the thoughts of your peers on the topics addressed in

class discussions. You should be able to critically engage with the readings and the designs encountered in this course, both verbally and in writing, and both in a summary form and more expansively. In some cases, some students may be encouraged to take a more inventive approach to looking at the problems and issues presented in this course.

By the end of this course you will have acquired an introductory understanding of the history, theory, and practice of design, as well as have gained a knowledge of some of the issues and expectations of contemporary designers in various fields of design.

Evaluation: marks will be based on the following:

1. (50%) You will select what I call a contextual topic that is related to one, two or all three of the artists who are the focus of this course and write a research paper on that topic which you will present twice over the course of the term in two 10-minute presentations, once in February and a second time in March. The February presentation is worth 20%, while the March presentation is worth 30%. You are indeed presenting on the same topic twice, although the expectation is that the second iteration will be a bit more in-depth than the first. The topics are as follows, in no particular order:

1. Existentialism; 2. Rosicrucianism; 3. Alchemy; 4. Myth and Ritual; 5. The Aura; 6. The Role of the Artist; 7. Marcel Duchamp; 8. Eastern Philosophy; 9. The Monochrome; 10. The Sublime; 11. Art Collectors/Institutions/Market; 12. Gaston Bachelard; 13. Dualism; 14. The Neo-Baroque; 15. Neo-Dada; 16. The Gutai; 17. Materialism & Phenomenology; 18. Arte Povera; 19. New Realists; 20. Dada & Surrealism

2. (15%) You will be randomly assigned a chapter or chapters from the weekly readings and will introduce that chapter during the designated week for that reading, highlighting the key elements of that chapter, while offering up a question or two for discussion to the class.

3. (35%) The essay that is the outcome of number 1 above, 10-12 pages (around 2500-3000 words) for the undergraduate students in this course; 15-17 pages (around 3750-4250) for the graduate students. You can decide to entirely change your topic for this final assignment as I'm sure the readings for this course may inspire you to take a different path.

N.B. I am also not adverse to alternative types of projects such as reproducing some of the work of our three subjects, although such projects have to be accurate; producing a portable, miniature collection of the key works of one of the artists; developing a line of museum shop products inspired by the work of one of the artists; imaging a new work or series of works that Klein, Fontana, or Manzoni might conceive of if they were alive today (this is a tough one since you need to entirely immerse yourself into their way of conceptualizing art); producing a children's book or graphic novel, etc., etc., etc.

Penalties: any assignment submitted late will be penalized 5% per day and will not be accepted 5 days past its due date. If there are medical grounds, then documentation must be provided to the Academic Counselling Office of your home Faculty.

Resources: A number of texts have been put on reserve at the Weldon Library for this course.

Readings:

(please note that the occasional article will be assigned in addition to the readings below based on the topics raised during our seminar discussions)