Art History

Semester 5: European Art 1870–1950

This semester traces the development, peak, and decline of European modernism, from Impressionism through the avant-garde movements to the post-World War II transition.

**Thematic units:**

Impressionism and Post-Impressionism

Historical styles and eclecticism

The beginning of modernity: Art Nouveau, symbolism

**Featured works:**

Monet: Impression, the rising sun

Van Gogh: Starry Night

Picasso: Les Demoiselles d'Avignon

Duchamp: Fountain

Dalí: The Persistence of Memory

Kandinsky: Composition VII

Mondrian: Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue

Malevich: Black Square

**Weekly breakdown (14 weeks)**

Week 1: Introduction to the era of modern art

The concepts of "modernity" and "modernism"

Academic art and the Salon system

Photography, urbanization, the impact of industrial society

"Why did painting become modern?" – sociocultural reasons for the change

Week 2: Impressionism

Monet, Renoir, Degas, Pissarro

Capturing the view, light, moment

A new painterly vision of nature and urban life

Monet: mechanics of vision or lyrical memory?

Week 3: Post-Impressionism

Cézanne: form and structure

Van Gogh: emotion and color

Gauguin: exoticism, myth, symbolism

Transcending the visual: preparation for the avant-garde

The Post-Impressionists and the “inner reality”

Week 4: Symbolism and Art Nouveau

Symbolism: dream, mythology, psyche

Moreau, Redon, Klimt, Böcklin

Art Nouveau: line, decorativeness, female figure

Klimt: the language of decoration as a spiritual program

Week 5: Fauvism and Expressionism

Matisse and the Fauves: color as an independent expression

German Expressionism: Die Brücke, Der Blaue Reiter

Kandinsky, Kirchner, Marc

The aesthetics of expression: a cry on the canvas?

Week 6: Cubism

Picasso and Braque: form analysis, multiple perspectives

Analytical and synthetic cubism

Influence on architecture, design, typography

Picasso: Les Demoiselles d'Avignon and the birth of modern painting

Week 7: Futurism and the Italian avant-garde

Speed, technology, war as aesthetics

Boccioni, Severini, Marinetti

Painting, sculpture, typography

Futurism as cultural criticism – or propaganda?

Week 8: Abstraction and Constructivism

Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich

The Birth of Abstract Art: Autonomy of Forms

Russian Avant-Garde: Suprematism, Constructivism

Mondrian: Order, Rhythm, Spirituality

Week 9: Dada and Surrealism I. Dada

The Trauma of War as Artistic Denial

Duchamp, Arp, Höch, Picabia

Anti-Art, Ready-Made, Performativity

The Urinal as a Work of Art – Duchamp’s Provocation

Week 10: Surrealism II.

André Breton and the Surrealist Manifesto

Automatism, Dream, Unconscious

Dalí, Magritte, Tanguy, Ernst

The Surrealist Image: Sight or Thought?

Week 11: The Bauhaus and Avant-Garde Design

Integration of Art and Industry

Gropius, Moholy-Nagy, Klee, Albers

Typography, Architecture, Color Theory, Design

The Bauhaus as a School of Form for Modern Life

Week 12: The Art Policies of Totalitarian Regimes

Soviet Socialist Realism

Nazi “Degenerate Art” Campaign

The Relationship between Artist and Ideology

Art in Dictatorship – Compromise or Resistance?

Week 13: The Post-War European Transition

Existentialist and Traumatic Art

Giacometti, Dubuffet, Wols

Antecedents to Art Informel and Abstract Expressionism

The Remains of Man – Giacometti’s Sculptures as Metaphor

Week 14: Summary and Overview

The Legacy and Limits of Modernism

Transition to New Formal Languages after 1950 (Action Art, Conceptualism)

Rethinking the Function of Art

What Comes After Modernism? – The beginning of the “contemporary”

**Suggested reading:**

Herbert Read: A history of modern painting

Giulio Carlo Argan: European art 1770–1970

Charles Harrison – Paul Wood (eds.): Art in Theory 1900–2000

Werner Haftmann: A history of modern art

**Exam questions (20)**

Impressionism and post-impressionism

1. The artistic revolution of impressionism in France: Monet, Renoir, Degas; light, moment, landscape, city

2. Masters of post-impressionism and their new vision: Cézanne (structure), Van Gogh (emotion), Gauguin (symbolism)

Symbolism, Art Nouveau, expression

3. Art of Symbolism in Europe: Moreau, Redon, Böcklin, images of the inner world

4. Stylistic features and regional variations of Art Nouveau: Klimt (Vienna), Mucha (Prague), Guimard (Paris)

5. Fauvism and the liberation of color: Matisse, Derain; autonomous color, decorativeness, flatness

6. German Expressionism (Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter): Kirchner, Nolde, Kandinsky, Marc – inner content, intensity, abstraction

Formal decomposition and new structures

7. Cubism as a new language of image creation: Picasso, Braque – multiple perspectives, planes, collage

8. The ideas and visual language of Futurism: Boccioni, Severini – speed, movement, machine, war

9. Dadaism as anti-art: Duchamp, Arp, Schwitters – ready-made, chance, irony

10. The theory and practice of Surrealism: Breton, Dalí, Magritte, Ernst – dream, unconscious, automatism

Abstraction and constructivism

11. The birth of non-representational art: the beginnings of abstract painting: Kandinsky, Mondrian – form, color, spirituality

12. The Russian avant-garde: suprematism and constructivism: Malevich, El Lissitzky, Rodchenko – geometry, social function

New media and all-art aspirations

13. The Bauhaus as an art school and aesthetic program: Gropius, Moholy-Nagy, Klee – form, function, design

14. The role of photography and montage in the avant-garde: Höch, Rodchenko, Man Ray – experimentation, typography, collage

Politics, ideology and war

15. The art policies of totalitarian systems (1930s–40s): Nazi art, socialist realism, censorship

16. Art and memory: war, trauma, responses – Otto Dix, Beckmann, collage, deformation

17. The Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) in Germany – Grosz, Schad, Realists and Critical Attitude

Thematic Items

18. Representation of the Body in Avant-Garde Art (1900–1950) – Abstract Body, Distortion, Eroticism, Politics – Bacon’s Antecedents

19. On the Border of Art and Science: Space, Time, Soul, Dream – Psychoanalysis, Relativity Theory, Images of the Inner World

20. Pushing the Boundaries of Art Before 1950 – What Counts as a Work of Art? Duchamp, Malevich, Germs of Performativity

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