

VPS 250 Modern and Contemporary Art
Department of Creative Arts/Visual Practices
Prof. Emily Taub Webb (ewebb@agnesscott.edu)
Spring 2026
Tuesday/Thursday 11:30 am – 12:45 pm EST, Dana 204
Office hours by appointment

Course description: Modern and Contemporary Art introduces students to works of visual art, starting around 1850, with the goals of understanding, interrogating, and extending critical definitions of artistic conventions and relevant cultural contexts, both established and expanded over this period.

Course prerequisites: ART 150 or VPS 155 is the pre-requisite for this course.

Course purpose/rationale: VPS 250 builds on the outcomes of ART 150/VPS 155 to develop important context for artistic practices from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. It seeks to establish an historical trajectory, through examinations of works of art and writings by artists and critics as well as introductions to scholarly texts, as preparation for VPS 350 Criticism and Theory and CRE 320 Research in Creative Arts. CRE 210 Observation, Reflection in the Creative Arts can be taken before, alongside, or after this course.

This course fulfills a requirement for the Visual Practices concentration and also earns elective credit for Creative Arts majors in other concentrations.

Learning outcomes:

Creative Arts

- DEFINE key concepts associated with methods and modes of generating and experiencing works of art (*knowledge*)
- DESCRIBE works of art from a variety of disciplines (*knowledge, comprehension*)
- PLAN, REHEARSE, & PRESENT thinking about and research on selected creative works (*analysis, synthesis*)
- DEVELOP an individual research project that involves an analysis of selected creative work (*analysis, synthesis*)
- APPLY evidence from theory, history, and/or analysis to support observations, opinions, judgments, and critique of creative works (*application*)

Visual Practices

CRITICAL THINKING:

- Compose thorough visual analyses, including crafting an objective description of a work of art and situating the work within its historical context
- Use works of art effectively to support an argument, whether oral or written
- Analyze a scholarly argument: read a source critically, see its structure, thesis, presuppositions, and other features and restate an author's conclusions accurately and articulately in written and oral forms

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION:

- Use appropriate sentence structure and vocabulary
- Organize ideas to support a position

- Employ appropriate methods of citing the ideas of other authors and documenting sources according to accepted professional styles

ORAL COMMUNICATION:

- Organize an oral argument in logical sequence that will be understood by the audience
- Use works of art effectively to support an oral presentation
- Regularly practice oral presentation skills, including the ability to contribute effectively to class discussions, whether leading/speaking or listening/responding
- Demonstrate professional demeanor, speaking clearly in a well-modulated tone and engaging the audience

PROCESS AND PRACTICE:

- Take responsibility for the direction of your education
- Work collaboratively, including actively listening and thoughtfully responding to others' ideas, making oral arguments with and/or in response to others, giving support and encouragement to other members of the class, respecting diverse learning styles as well as cultural and other kinds of differences

Readings:

Readings will be available on Canvas and in McCain Library. We will use these texts, especially the last two, consistently. You may wish to purchase them:

Harrison, Charles, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds. *Art in Theory, 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

Harrison, Charles and Paul Wood, eds. *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

Stiles, Kristine and Peter Selz, eds. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings, Revised and Expanded*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Requirements:

Guidelines for assignments will be on Canvas; you will submit assignments via Canvas.

Weekly Quotes, Commentary and Images: 15%

Google Doc Contribution and Classroom Support: 15%

Close Reading and Conversation: 20%

Critical Reading Paper: 20%

Final Project: Thematic Collection, Critical Making, and Visual and Contextual Analysis (with scaffolded deadlines and check-ins): 30%

Credit and workload: VPS 250 is a four-credit course. In addition to the 1.25-2.5 hours of synchronous time, students should expect to work on preparations for class, completing readings, weekly submissions, Google doc contributions, essays, presentations for at least 8 hours a week. This work outside the classroom is an integral part of your learning experience (it counts for the 4th credit for the class); classroom work and assignments will be based on the expectation that you are doing this work on your own and with your team outside class. If you

are having any difficulties with the course material or with your team, please reach out to me for help.

Office hours: In an effort to accommodate diverse schedules and needs, I will be holding office hours via Zoom and/or in person by appointment. **To schedule a meeting, please email me with 3 days/times that you are available.**

Communication: The best way to reach me is by email: ewebb@agnesscott.edu. I will do my best to respond promptly (within 24 hours) but anticipate that you may not receive an immediate response. My email hours are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday to Friday; please know that I do not regularly check and answer email in the evenings or on weekends, but if I am online during those times, you may get a response from me.

Evaluation: I will evaluate projects according to criteria specified in the assignments. The final grade will be an accumulation of project grades accrued during the semester. I am always happy to discuss particular assignments with you as you are working on them. Please have a conversation with me, especially if you have questions. In general, grades are earned according to the following general guidelines.

In the table below, the first two columns (read left to right) show how letter grades are translated into percentages, and how course grades expressed as percentages are recorded as letter grades (e.g. when course grades are filed with the Registrar at the end of the semester). The third column provides a rough description of what the letter grade typically conveys. The fourth column, the number in brackets, reflects the "default" percentage, that is, the one that I enter for the corresponding letter if I see no reason to do otherwise.

Letter Grade - percentage range - rough expressive description - [default percentage]

A+	97-100	wow! astounding, exceptional	[98.5]
A	93-96.99	excellent, very impressive	[95]
A-	90-92.99	generally excellent, excellent in many ways	[91.5]
B+	87-89.99	very good, strong	[88.5]
B	83-86.99	good, solid	[85]
B-	80-82.99	pretty good	[81.5]
C+	77-79.99	better than OK, quite decent	[78.5]
C	73-76.99	OK, adequate	[75]
C-	70-72.99	weak but acceptable	[71.5]
D+	67-69.99	needs a lot of work	[68.5]
D	63-66.99	serious problems	[65]
D-	60-62.99	barely passing	[61.5]
F	0-59.99	failure to complete assignment with passing quality	[below 60]

In moving from letter grades on essays to percentages in my grade book, I will use a percentage within the relevant range that best reflects my evaluation of the particular work in question. The "default" percentages listed above reflect a rule of thumb, not a binding policy.

In moving from percentages to letters for your midterm and final course grades, the chart above holds except that there is no A+ given by the college for course grades (adapted from Lara Denis).

Course policies:

Classroom courtesy: All students contribute to a classroom environment of mutual respect. This means avoiding disruptive behaviors, approaching conversations diligently, listening attentively, and responding actively to one another's ideas.

Attendance and engagement: Please come to class having prepared materials thoroughly and attentively enough to discuss and present them, especially when we have conversations. I am always available, with notice, for one-on-one or team questions/discussions/assistance.

There is an attendance requirement for this class. In order to maintain the integrity of the course and ensure adequate completion of our course outcomes, students who miss more than 20% of the course will earn a failing grade and need to repeat the course; you may miss no more than 4 class periods. There is no differentiation between "excused" and "unexcused" absences and, as a result, no need to submit written documentation. This policy applies to all absences, for any reason. If you are ill, please be considerate of others; per current CDC guidelines, you do not need to quarantine if you are Covid positive and symptom-free. If you test positive and feel like coming to class, please wear an N-95 mask. Perpetual lateness or inattention will incrementally constitute absences. If I have concerns, I will discuss them with you.

Submission of assignments: Assignments are due by the stated deadline unless you have requested and received an extension in writing at least 24 hours before the deadline. Always let me know sooner rather than later if you are having issues with assignments. Failure to meet deadlines will result in a lowering of your final grade. Late work without an extension will receive a deduction of 1/3 of a letter grade off the final grade for each day it is late, including weekend days and starting at the time designated as the due date. In other words, if you have not completed an assignment by class time, it is better to come to class and submit the assignment later that day, as it is the same penalty. If you come to class late, you are missing important class time as well as losing points for attendance and a late assignment.

All assignments will be submitted on Canvas using the following naming convention: lastnamefirstinitial_assignmentname.extension (i.e. webbe_criticalreadingpaper.docx).

College Policies:

Support on issues of Diversity and Inclusion: Agnes Scott is a diverse and inclusive community. As one of the most diverse colleges in the nation, ASC is ideally positioned to be the model of a diverse and inclusive community that society can aspire to be. Such diversity raises the intellectual quality of the classroom experience, creating a unique environment for learning to understand and navigate the challenges of our times. By studying, living, and playing together, Agnes Scott College's remarkably diverse student body hones the habits of mind, skills, and knowledge essential to ethical and innovative leadership in our increasingly heterogeneous and global society. As such, this course adheres to the principles of diversity and inclusion as integral to the Agnes Scott community and respects people from all backgrounds. As a first step, this course affirms people's decisions about gender expression and identity and will use each other's preferred names and gender pronouns at all times.

The Honor Code and Academic Honesty: The Agnes Scott College honor code embodies an ideal of character, conduct, and citizenship, and is an important part of the College's mission

and core identity. This applies especially to academic honesty and integrity. Passing off someone else's work as your own, or reusing your own work for more than one course, represents intellectual fraud and theft, and violates the core values of our academic community. To be honorable, you should understand not only what counts as academic dishonesty, but also how to avoid engaging in these practices. You should:

- review each course syllabus for the professor's expectations regarding course work and class attendance.
- attribute all ideas taken from other sources; this shows respect for other scholars. Plagiarism can include portraying another's work or ideas as your own, buying a paper online and turning it in as if it were your own work, failing to cite a conversation or discussion from you which are using an idea (not your own), or not citing or improperly citing sources on a reference page, within the text of a paper, or in a presentation/discussion.
- not falsify or create data and resources or alter a graded work without the prior consent of your professor. This includes making up a reference for a works cited page or making up statistics or facts for academic work.
- not allow another party to do your work/exam, or submit the same or similar work in more than one course without the knowledge and permission of the course instructors. Cheating also includes taking an exam for another person, looking on another person's exam for answers, using exams from previous classes without permission, or bringing and using unauthorized notes or resources (i.e. electronic, written, or otherwise) during an exam.
- not facilitate cheating, which can happen when you help another student complete a take home exam, give answers to an exam, talk about an exam with a student who has not taken it, or collaborate with others on work that is supposed to be completed independently.
- be truthful about the submission of work, which includes the time of submission and the place of submission (e.g., e-mail, online, in a mailbox, to an office, etc.).

Because of the centrality of the Honor Code to our campus life, penalties result from dishonest conduct. In academic courses, these penalties can range from failure on the assignment to expulsion from the college. You should speak with me if you need clarification about any of these policies.

Modified Pledge

Students pledge that they have completed assignments honestly by attaching the following statement to each test, quiz, paper, overnight assignment, in-class essay, or other work. Please remember that the Honor Code governs your work at this college. Please remember to pledge all work in the course. Here is a statement that you can write/type on your assignments:

I pledge that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment.
(Signed) _____

Another thought on academic honesty: Academic integrity has become increasingly important and tricky as we are all accustomed, especially when using online sources, to getting information quickly and, in some cases, without considering its author(s). In all cases, **if you have not generated the content by yourself using class materials**, you must give full credit to your sources in written assignments and oral presentations, which we sometimes forget. Keep in mind that citing sources fully and accurately makes your work more honest and more credible by showing that you understand the intellectual conversation and acknowledge its participants.

To this end, it is our strong preference that you do not seek outside sources for the assignments in this course. It is more productive for you to wrestle with understanding, ask questions of yourself, of your peers, and of us rather than turn to online sources for seemingly easier (but not necessarily better) answers. Contributions from anyone or anything else, including AI sources, must be properly acknowledged and cited every time they are used.

If you choose to use AI programs (e.g. ChatGPT), apps, or websites to help generate ideas, understand readings/art/artists, or brainstorm topics, you should be aware that the material may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Such decisions may also stifle your own independent thinking and creativity; acts that hinder your learning are, by our definition, violations of academic integrity. If you use any sources other than our class material, be transparent (give credit) about your use of them – and be willing to accept responsibility for their mistakes.

Failure to credit, through direct verbal acknowledgment or written citation, all external sources constitutes a violation of academic integrity in our Honor Code. If we suspect one, we will have an educational conversation with you and invite you to self-report. We will report the suspected violation if you choose not to do so, and we will follow the current process at the College. The typical penalty we recommend in such instances is that students earn no credit for work that is not theirs, which could result in a zero on the assignment.

Course Accessibility and Academic Accommodations: Agnes Scott College views differences in abilities as an integral part of the rich diversity of our community and strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you are a student who receives academic accommodations through the Office of Accessible Education, please schedule a meeting with me within the first two weeks of classes to discuss how your accommodations will be implemented for this course. During this meeting, you are not expected to disclose any details concerning your disability, though you may discuss these details at your discretion. If you are a student with a disability—physical, medical, psychological, or learning-specific, and have not connected with Accessible Education to discuss your accessibility needs, please visit their [website](#) to learn more about accommodations, helpful resources, and support available. Students who register for accommodations during the semester should schedule a meeting with me after accommodations have been approved by the Office of Accessible Education.

Title IX: Agnes Scott is here to help you if you have experienced any form of sexual harassment or violence, dating or domestic violence, or stalking. Please talk to any faculty or staff member with whom you feel comfortable. Faculty and staff members want to support you and have been trained to help. They will also inform the Title IX office so that you learn about options available to you. If you do not want college administrators to know what you have experienced, you may talk to the chaplain, as well as nurses or counselors in the Wellness Center with complete confidentiality. They will not tell anyone what you share with them unless you give your express permission. You may contact the Title IX Coordinator directly at T9Coordinator@agnesscott.edu.