

HA990-15 Ethics and the Politics of Art

27/28

Department

SCAPVC - History of Art

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Jonathan Cane

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module surveys the ethical issues surrounding the creation, consumption, and circulation of art and visual culture from the 1800s to the present day. We explore how creative expression and cultural power have historically coincided to serve socio-political ends. Through a range of geographically diverse case studies, students explore the invisible infrastructures underpinning cultural legitimacy, questioning how and why canons are formed, who is included and excluded from them, and how the contemporary art world is responding to increasingly polarising debates about practices of diversifying and decentralising public collections. We discuss pivotal issues facing museums and cultural institutions today regarding the ethics of displaying and owning contested cultural heritage, asking how, why, and when looted cultural artefacts should be repatriated. Students explore the ethics of art in relation to both economic and ecological issues, investigating how artists and art institutions are responding to environmental issues, both as activists and, arguably, as agents of 'artwashing'. We read the history of art alongside legal frameworks, asking how the thorny categories of originality, imitation, and ownership are regulated in today's artwork and what ownership entails in our increasingly digitised cultural space. Underpinning the course is the ongoing debate around art, regulation, and social responsibility in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

Module aims

The module aims to introduce students to the key debates, concepts and theories relating to ethics and cultural politics.

The module aims to develop visual and material analysis skills through engaging with a range of museums, objects, practices and processes.

The module aims to locate art and visual culture in global political and cultural history. It aims to demonstrate approaches to object-centred analysis that can elucidate political themes.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

1. Introduction: Power Relations and Creative Practice
2. Controlling the Canon: Gatekeeping Cultural Value
3. Cultural Diplomacy: Soft Power and Art's Geopolitics
4. Provenance Research and Looted Cultural Property
5. Repatriation, Reparation, Repair
6. Study trip to Manchester Museum
7. Art, Offence, and Censorship
8. The Ethics of Art Ownership: Collection, Taxation, Freeport storage
9. Art as Intellectual Property: Copyright Law and Creative Rights
10. Art and Ecology: Contemporary Art and Climate Change

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate extensive knowledge and understanding of key debates, concepts and theories relating to ethics and the politics of art.
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of key conceptual and theoretical frameworks within which museums, objects, practices and processes have been discussed by design and art historians.
- Compare and criticise the different methodological and theoretical approaches that scholars have developed to interpret visual culture.
- Provide critical analysis of the role of visual arts in social, political and ecological contexts.

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

Subject specific skills

Historical Contextualisation: Ability to situate visual art within political, social, and cultural contexts.

Visual Analysis and Critical Interpretation: Developing skills to closely analyse artworks and interpret them via a range of methodological approaches

Historiographical Awareness: Evaluating how different scholars have interpreted the art across

time.

Developing the ability to analyse primary sources and physical objects.

Transferable skills

Critical Thinking and Analysis: Evaluating complex relationships between art, politics, and society, fostering the ability to assess diverse perspectives. Synthesising information from multiple sources to form coherent arguments.

Research Skills: Conducting in-depth research using a variety of sources, including primary documents, scholarly texts, and visual materials. Developing the ability to identify reliable information and assess its relevance to specific topics.

Written Communication: Crafting clear, structured, and persuasive written arguments.

Visual Literacy: Interpreting visual materials to extract meaning, a skill relevant to media analysis, marketing, and design.

Time Management and Organisation: Balancing research, reading, and writing deadlines effectively.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
External visits	1 session of 3 hours (2%)
Private study	120 hours (80%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Required and recommended reading for seminars and presentations, external visits and research/writing of essay;
independent viewing, research and study of sites.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Essay	100%		No
Reassessment component is the same			

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback and access to office hours.

Availability

Post-requisite modules

If you pass this module, you can take:

- HA9H2-30 Independent Research Project

There is currently no information about the courses for which this module is core or optional.