

HA9H0-15 Avant-Garde Economics

27/28

Department

SCAPVC - History of Art

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Kamila Kocialkowska

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module examines the art historical concept of the avant garde through an economic and institutional lens. Foregrounding the financial foundations, promotional strategies, and market infrastructures that underpinned avant-garde activity in both historical and contemporary artistic practices, this module explores the diverse ways by which artists have approached, negotiated, or challenged commercial forces. Ranging across both canonical regions and wider international networks, students investigate how avant-gardism was not only shaped by economic systems but often deeply indebted to them.

The module focuses on the ways by which artists, dealers, collectors, and critics participated in complex transnational systems of exchange. Artistic movements are examined from the perspectives of dealer networks, collectors, and alternative exhibition spaces, revealing how new modes of branding, marketing, and speculation emerged outside established cultural institutions. These developments facilitated profound shifts in how art was produced, valued, sold, and understood.

The course also considers how market discourse shaped and continue to shape artistic writing and theory. Students analyse how artistic movements have anticipated contemporary marketing strategies through radical innovations in exhibition design, publicity, self-promotion, and the use of mass media. Scandal, spectacle, and provocation have operated as recurring strategies for engaging audiences and securing visibility as artistic contexts and publics evolved across different

historic contexts. Particular attention is given to how artists reimagined artistic commodity and value in relation to collective, political, or social aims. Overall, the module highlights the inseparable intersections of economic, aesthetic, and institutional forces that underpinned the concept of the avant-garde from its early formulations to present-day expressions.

Module aims

Through lectures and seminars students will gain a comprehensive general overview of modernist movements alongside the opportunity to conduct focused research into aspects, artists, or regions that are of particular interest to them. They will gain skills specific to MA-level humanities research, including critical engagement with primary and secondary sources, including artworks, exhibitions, manifestos, magazines, and archival materials.

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: Data-Driven Histories of Modern Art
2. The Artist-Entrepreneur and the Independent Exhibition Venue
3. Collector Culture from Stein to Saatchi
4. Artist's Print and Publishing Practices
5. The Dealer as Cultural Agent
6. Trip
7. Art, Exchange, and International Networks
8. Mass Media and Modern Art
9. Audiences and the Attention Economy: Performance & Publicity Stunt
10. Commodities, Culture, Critique

Learning outcomes

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

- Critically analyse the concept of the avant-garde art in relation to its economic, commercial, and institutional conditions of production and reception.
- Critically engage with new scholarship on data-driven and economically informed methods of art historical research.
- Evaluate the role of markets, dealers, collectors, and media systems in shaping artistic innovation, value in both historical and contemporary artistic practices.
- Apply advanced art-historical methods and theory to the study of exhibitions, manifestos, periodicals, and other primary materials.
- Construct sustained, research-led arguments that integrate visual analysis with historical, economic, and theoretical perspectives.
- Communicate complex ideas effectively in written and oral form at MA level, demonstrating clarity, critical independence, and scholarly rigour.

Indicative reading list

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

Subject specific skills

Close reading and critical analysis of art objects in their historical and contemporary contexts; close reading and critical analysis of primary sources, including exhibitions, manifestos, periodicals; familiarity with new scholarship on data-driven and economically informed methods of art historical research, and ability to critically evaluate their scholarly strengths and weaknesses; knowledge of the role of markets, dealers, collectors, and media systems in shaping artistic innovation in both historical and contemporary artistic practices.

Transferable skills

Critical thinking and the ability to construct and evaluate complex arguments across disciplinary boundaries; Visual literacy and the ability to interpret meaning through image, object, and space; Critical and analytical skills developed through lecture attendance, seminar preparation, presentation research, and independent study; Oral and written communication skills, including the ability to present ideas to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

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 essays.

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	80%		No
A 3000 word essay chosen in response to a list of 5 set questions relevant to module themes and topics.			

Reassessment component is the same

Assessment component			
Research Presentation	20%		No
Presentation on research into a topic relevant to module theme, e.g. a case study of work/sales/marketing strategies of a specific artist or group.			

Reassessment component

Reflective Essay			No
A 1,000 word reflective essay on topic relevant to module theme, e.g. a case study of work/sales/marketing strategies of a specific artist or group.			

Feedback on assessment

Essay and presentation feedback provided via written form uploaded to Tabula, for essays an annotated essay draft will also be uploaded.

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.