

Course sample

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Open College of the Arts

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Part one Looking

Introduction

Authenticity, recognition and comparisons

Projects The Woman from Willendorf
Description of a sculpture

Assignment one Annotations/ Project 1 or 2/ Outline study plan

Part two Reading

Introduction

Artistic intentions and critical accounts

Narratives, symbols and stories of art

Projects Critical reading of a text
Narrative painting

Assignment two Annotations/ Project 3/ Study Part 1- work in progress

Part three Understanding materials

Introduction

The vernacular, hierarchies and transformations

Flat surfaces and craftsmanship

Projects Make a copy or a detailed analysis

Part four Understanding methods

Introduction

Copies, variants and traditional methods

Planning, execution and analysis

Projects The sculptural process

A creative variation of an eastern work

Assignment three Annotations/ Project 5(copy or analysis)/ Project 6 or 7/Study Part 2 – work in progress

Part five Responding and Interpreting

Introduction

Personal and critical responses; Personal interpretations

Projects Describe your responses to different works

Analyse the response of others

Assignment four Projects 8 and 9/ Study Part 3 – work in progress

Part six Conclusions and critical review

Conclusions

The critical review; structure of final Report

Projects Carry out Critical Review of learning process

Assignment five Project 10/ Final Study Report (2000 words)

Introduction

Course overview

Aims:

- to develop broader observation and analytic skills for works from cultures other than the west
- to focus on a specific theme/ artist/ type of art form through carrying out detailed analysis and evaluation
- to carry out research on specialist subject, identifying features for closer analysis and presenting as an illustrated report
- to carry out a critical review of the learning process.

While the OCA *Understanding Art 1: Western Art* course gives a broad and general introduction to the study of the history of western art aimed at those who have some practical artistic skills, it only provides an introduction to western art. *Understanding Art 2: Pathways into Specialism* allows a deeper study of art from a broader cultural base, leading you to consider areas of specialism you wish to pursue further.

As with all OCA higher-level courses, the responsibility for devising a work programme gradually moves from the course manual to you, so there are less specific instructions about what you should do and more open-ended invitations to you to pursue your own interests. This is inevitable when one person's ultimate interest might be in pursuing impressionism, whilst another's might be in African art. The course is built around Honour and Fleming's 'A World History of Art'. This course manual is in part a guide to intelligent and sustained reading and re-reading of Honour and Fleming's book, and in part advice on how to build on your reading of the book through careful and informed analysis of art from around the world. Another important tool on this course is the Bridgman Educational Art library website which all OCA students have access to via oca-student.com.

Essay writing is only a small element of this course, but the annotation procedure is an important learning tool. Though you may annotate images 'by hand' or by typing up notes, the best way to communicate with your tutor is via email on this particular course. Therefore we recommend that for hand annotated images, you photograph what you have done and email your work to your tutor, along with the rest of your work.

Course outcomes

Upon completion of *Understanding Art 2: Pathways into Specialism* you will be able to:

- move from the general to the particular by developing sound study skills
- achieve an open-minded attitude to art of many periods and cultures
- carry out a self-directed analysis and evaluation in a specialist subject.

Understanding Art

Part One

Looking



Stonehenge Wiltshire

Introduction

To read (in WHA):

Introduction

1. Before History

Additional reading:

see the bibliography in WHA, especially under Pictorial Representation.

What do you see?

What do you see when you look at a work of art?

People have been looking at Stonehenge (pp 38-9) [see earlier notes for an explanation of page references to WHA] now for around four thousand years. What you see today is a noble ruin, with only some of the features it possessed when its construction was finished. Your perception of Stonehenge may be restricted to simple facts: huge stones



Stonehenge, Constable 1835

on an open landscape site, some supporting lintels, some fallen, some apparently missing from what you may deduce was originally a circle.

You cannot directly see its history, although you can inform yourself about it; you may then look with renewed interest at the site, which your text states is the largest prehistoric stone circle in the UK. The site has been memorably recorded. John Constable, for example, made a fine watercolour, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Henry Moore made a series of prints that recorded something of the stones and their surfaces. In more banal ways, Stonehenge has been drawn, painted and photographed, every record being part of an encounter between an individual and the objects seen.

If you wrote a letter to a friend after a visit to Stonehenge, your description would certainly be fuller than a comment on your mere perception. For example, you would certainly add to an account of what you saw some comment on how you felt about the experience. This may all seem quite obvious, and having reached the stage of taking this course, you are likely to be an experienced observer of western art. But, when you begin to look at the art of less familiar cultures, you find it makes new demands, and it is these that this course aims to help you to meet.

A new path to follow

Your text book, 'A World History of Art' explains the sequence of western art, and considers in more detail the themes of still life, the figure, the portrait, interiors, and landscape. It may throw new light on some topics, adding to others, while providing a more consistent approach to art and its history.

In addition, the text book explores art from other cultures and parts of the world, challenging to some of the things which are taken for granted in the west. The most striking difference is that while western painting and sculpture was for centuries preoccupied with representing the world in the way that your text calls 'perceptually'



Two Lobi Figures
Ghana Africa

this was not a universal concern. In other cultures western conventions of the proportions of the human figure, the modelling of forms in painting, or distance represented by perspective are not always found, nor indeed are they throughout all periods of western civilisation.

In African sculpture it is rare to find the common western proportion of one to seven for the head as to the body. The development of what is considered in the west as scientific perspective does not appear in, say, Chinese landscapes. The interior of a Japanese temple is not planned in order to inspire the worshipper through a sense of space like a European cathedral. And so on. The familiar categories of western art are not universal, nor is the same order of precedence placed on different categories of art as in the west.

The assumption of the authors of WHA is that they can help you to overcome your western prejudices by employing formal analysis, a close and purposeful looking at different works of art. Further, their enlightening accounts of western art will enable you to make comparisons.

You may wonder how relevant your existing skills are for considering art from other cultures and for reaching a more thorough understanding and appreciation of the most diverse cultures, even though their detailed particularities require deeper study. You may argue that you should acquire a thorough understanding of another culture before evaluating its art, but here we are making a start. Just as your first encounter with a stranger may develop into a friendship, your wary uncertainties in front of perhaps Japanese or Mexican art will pass. There are different points to notice, but then there were always different points to consider about a western still life or a western landscape.