

Contemporary Art Odyssey in Prague

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Course Description:

Welcome to Contemporary Art Odyssey in Prague a dynamic exploration of the city's vibrant art scene through the lens of art historical and sociological inquiry. In this semester-long journey, we will delve into the multifaceted world of contemporary art, examining how it reflects, shapes, and is shaped by the sociocultural landscape of Prague.

This course aims to bridge the gap between art and society, offering a unique interdisciplinary perspective on Prague's contemporary art scene. We will traverse museums, galleries, and art exhibited in public sphere to unravel the stories embedded in each artwork, exploring the intersections between artistic expression, societal values, and cultural identity.

Throughout the course, we will employ cultural and sociological frameworks to analyze and interpret the encountered artworks, while also examining the pivotal role of local art institutions and the public sphere in fostering dialogue with the audience. Discussions, reflections, critical analyses, and field research will be integral components of this course, encouraging students to ponder the societal implications – both at the local and global levels – of the art they encounter. Each class meeting will feature a blend of lectures and field trips to museums, galleries, and public art spaces in Prague. These excursions will provide firsthand experiences, enabling students to connect theoretical concepts studied in class with real-world examples. Guest speakers from the local art community will enrich our discussions with diverse perspectives. Get ready for an intellectually stimulating and visually captivating odyssey through the artful streets of Prague!

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will not only possess a comprehensive understanding of Prague's contemporary art scene but will also develop valuable insights into the intricate relationship between art and society. This preparation will empower them to engage critically with the broader world of contemporary art from both sociological and cultural standpoints.

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to gain knowledge in/and understand the following:

- Understand how contemporary art in Prague serves as a reflection of societal norms, values, and challenges.
- Evaluate the impact of public art on urban spaces and civic engagement.
- Develop a nuanced understanding of evolving trends and movements in contemporary art.

- Understand the interplay between personal expression and broader cultural contexts.
- Familiarize themselves with the ideas of major thinkers, theories, as well as concepts in contemporary art and sociological discourses.
- Critically assess and apply theoretical frameworks to real-world artistic expressions.
- Gain familiarity with qualitative research methods applicable to the study of contemporary art and culture.
- Develop skills in conducting interviews, observations, and analyses relevant to sociological investigations in the art world.

Course Requirements:

Formative assessment of learning will be provided through the following:

1. *Museum research project*: (a separate sheet will be provided explaining the requirements for the museum research project): 20% of your final grade
2. *In-class topic presentation*: Each student will be required to deliver a brief 10-15 minute presentation focused on a specific art theme (e.g., Czech surrealism, political art in Czech Republic in the 2000s, etc.). As a reference, students can use the class topics listed in the syllabus or focus on a specific artist covered in our course. The presentation must include a reference to at least two readings discussed in our class. These presentations will be held on the last day of the course: 15%
3. *Critical Analysis*: there will be one critical analysis written on the topic assigned by the teacher at the beginning of the course. This analysis should be **at least 3 full pages long** excluding bibliography (12-point font Times New Roman or Arial, double-spaced) and must include a discussion (not just quoting!) of arguments from at least one reading covered in our class. The shorter response will be penalized by lower grade. The due date of the assignment is indicated on the syllabus: 15%
4. *Mid-term exam*: will be on the material covered in the course (readings, lectures, class discussion, etc.) and will be given in the middle of semester as indicated on the syllabus. It will be in a form of a few short response questions related to the content of in-class readings and presentations: 20%
5. *Final Exam*: The final exam will cover the material from the second part of the course (it is not cumulative!) following the midterm exam, as indicated in the syllabus. It will consist of a few short response questions related to the content of in-class readings and presentations: 20%
6. *Class Assessment and Participation*: This part of the evaluation includes participation and discussions/debates. Active, constructive participation is required, and suggested readings will be a required and an important part of the course:10%
7. **Absences: Students must attend all classes. Excused medical absences require a written document the day of return to class. AEP program allows only one unexcused absence. Tardiness of more than 20 minutes without a reasonable excuse will be regarded as an absence.**

The summative evaluation, in the form of a letter grade, will be based on the formative assessment, class participation, the research paper, and the results of the examinations. In regard to the latter, the students will be responsible for all the topics covered in class as well as the assigned readings and class presentations.

Please be aware that the use of laptop and mobile phones during class session is strictly prohibited! This includes message texting!

Grading Policy:

The evaluation will be based on a final grade scale of 100% in the following as they relate to the course's objectives and outcomes:

Museum Research Project	20%
In-class Topic Presentation	15%
Critical Analysis	15%
Mid-term Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Class participation	<u>10%</u>
	100%

Mandatory Completion Policy

Note that all mandatory assignments and exams must be completed to the best of your ability in order for your final grade to be issued. Failure to complete a mandatory assignment or exam may result in a failing grade.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description
A+	97-100	Excellent Work
A	93-97	Outstanding Work
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good work
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Acceptable Work
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	Work that is significantly below average
D	63-66	
D-	60-62	
F	0-59	Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course

AEP Academic Integrity Policy

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not tolerated. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the development of knowledge and learning is encouraged at many stages of the learning process. While we value technology for educational purposes, we also value originality and the retainment of knowledge, and thus using AI for assignments and examinations, even if rephrased, is strictly prohibited and considered an academic integrity violation, unless the instructor explicitly allows for it in the context of evaluated work

AEP Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy

The AEP program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristics, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

AEP Diversity Policy

AEP is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming community that values diversity in all its forms. We believe that one of the most meaningful lessons of studying abroad is learning to navigate and appreciate differences with curiosity and an open mind. While engaging across differences can sometimes be challenging or uncomfortable, these moments are essential for growth and learning. We recognize that every member of our community, even with the best intentions, may occasionally make missteps. Our commitment is to provide a supportive environment where respectful and honest dialogue helps us learn from these experiences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and broaden their perspective.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

CEE Introductory Lecture Series

Introductory AEP Lecture Series

Week 2 (September 26th)

Class Topic: **Course introduction**

Explanation of course topics; discussion of conventional and alternative venues of art display, the role of art in the public sphere; introduction to the museum project and qualitative methods in art research. Historical overview of the modern and contemporary key art movements in the Czech art scene.

Required readings: Lindauer, M. (2011). *The Critical Museum Visitor*. In Marstine, J. (Ed), *New Museum Theory and Practice*. Blackwell Publishing

Week 3 (October 3rd)

Class Topic: Art and Socio-Cultural Movements in 20th-Century Modernity

Focus on art movements of the first half of the 20th century (until 1950s). How art in the Czech Republic has evolved in response to the shifting sociopolitical landscapes in between the wars and in the post-WWII period.

Required readings:

Bydzovska, L. (2002). The First Skupina Exhibition, Prague 1912. In T. O. Benson (Ed.), *Central European avant-gardes: exchange and transformation, 1910-1930*. MIT Press.

Mansbach, S. A. (1999). *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*. Cambridge University Press. (pp. 56-82).

Week 4 (October 10th) the class will not be held on Thursday due to a trip to Kraków. An alternative class meeting will be held - TBD.

Class Topic: Czech modern Avant-garde movements.

Visit to the Trade Fair Palace National Gallery in Prague.

Meeting directly at the site: [Dukelských Hrdinů 47, 170 00 Praha 7-Holešovice](#)

Required readings: Sayer, D. (2002). Surrealities. In T. O. Benson (Ed.), *Central European avant-gardes : exchange and transformation, 1910-1930*. MIT Press.

Bourdieu, P. (et al). (1997). *Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*. Polity Press. (excerpt)

Week 5: (October 17th)

Class Topic: Art and Politics: Shifting Dynamics Between Official and Unofficial Art from the Late 1950s to the 1980s.

Required readings:

Pospiszyl, T. (2016, April). How to Act: Art and Activism in the Czech Republic. *Art Review* 68 (3).

Příbáň, J. (2013). *Pictures of Czech Postmodernism*. Kant. Chapter: "The Anomic Society of Late Socialism" (pp. 15-29)

Week 6 (October 24th)

Class Topic: Visit to the Kampa Muzeum. The History of Czech Design Exhibition.

U Sovových mlýnů 503/2, 118 00 Praha 1 – Malá Strana

Required readings:

Becker, H. S. (2008). *Art Worlds: Updated and Expanded*. University of California Press. (selected excerpt on Art Worlds).

Critical Analysis is Due on Tuesday, October 22nd by midnight!!!

Week 7 (October 31st)

Class Topic: Artistic Communities and Networks. Visit to the Jeleni and Kurzor Galleries

Exploring formation and functioning of artistic communities and networks. Alternative spaces of art display.

Required reading: Černá J., Margala M., Boučková, J., & Trčková O. (2018). *The Power of the Communication and the Gallery*. Ekopress. (selected chapter)

Week 8 (November 7th)

Class Topic: Art and Collective Memory of Czechs: Public Art and Urban Spaces

Exploring how art becomes a medium for preserving and transmitting national memory, shaping collective narratives about the past. Focus on sculptures in the public sphere: from bereft artworks of the communist past to contemporary objects of aesthetic desire.

Required readings:

Pospiszyl, T. (2015). *Sculptures Which Do Not Belong to Anyone*. Aliens and Herons.

Pučerová, K. (et. al) (2022). *Outside the gallery! Art in Czech public space after 1989*. Galerie J. Fagnera & Architectura.

Week 9 (November 14th):

Class Topic: Art in the post-1989 decade: new tendencies and influences. Visit to the GHMP.

Required readings:

Přibáň, J. (2013). *Pictures of Czech Postmodernism*. Kant. Chapter: "Do You Recognize Yourself?" (pp. 111-120)

Ševčíková, L. & Žáková, E. (eds.) (2012), *Czech contemporary art guide, Praha: Arts and Theatre Institute*. Read only the part on Art after Velvet Revolution.

Week 10 (November 21st)

Class Topic: Art as a Form of Protest. Critical Art. Street Art and Murals.

Exploring how artists use their work as a means of social and political protest. Examination of activities of local art groups: Rafani, Guma Guar, Pode Bal, Ztohoven. Provocations of David Černý. Discussion of the local street art scene and its meaning in the public sphere. Exploring the role of public art in shaping urban environments and fostering community engagement.

Required readings:

Baldini, A.L. (2022). What is Street Art? *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics*. 59 (1), 1-21.

Groys, B. (2014). On Art Activism. *e-flux Journal*. 56 (6).

Week 11 (November 28th)

Class Topic: Gender, race, and identity. Visit to the DOX Gallery.

Focus on contemporary art addressing the role of gender and identity. How artists and artworks contribute to discussions on race and ethnicity?

Required readings:

Pachmanova M. (2019). From Within, From Without Configurations of Feminism, Gender and Art in Post-Wall Europe. In Robinson, H., & Buszek, M. E (Eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Art*. John Wiley & Sons.

Recommended reading: Grigar, E. (2007). The Gendered Body as a Raw Material for Women Artists of Central Eastern Europe after Communism. In J.E. Johnson & J.C. Robinson (Eds.), *Living Gender After Communism* (pp. 80-101). Indiana University Press.

Museum Research Project is Due!!!

Week 12 (December 5th)

Class Topic: Final Exam. Visit to the Kunsthalle.

Art, Technology, and Globalization. Examining the intersection of art with technology and its implications for society. Art and new media. The language of new media art and the contemporary art scene. How globalization has impacted the production and reception of contemporary art.

Required readings:

Bishop, C. (2012). *Digital Divide on Contemporary Art and New Media*. *Divide on Contemporary Art and New Media*.

Week 13:

Class Topic: Final Exam Week.

Student's topic presentations.

Readings:

Recommended books:

- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*. Stanford University Press.
- Dolanská, K. (Ed.). (2010). *Modern and Contemporary Czech Art 1890-2010*. Národní galerie v Praze.
- Janovski, A., Marcoci, R. & Nouril, K. (2018). *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*. The Museum of Modern Art.
- Morganová, P. (2014). *Czech action art: happenings, actions, events, land art, body art and performance art behind the iron curtain*. Karolinum.
- Pachmanová, M. (Ed.) (2009). *Behind the velvet curtain: seven women artists from the Czech Republic : Erika Bornová, Milena Dopitová, Lenka Klodová, Zdena Kolečková, Alena Kotzmannová, Michaela Thelenová, Kateřina Vincourová* : [American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, Washington, D.C., April 3 - May 18, 2009], Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design.
- Piotrowski, P. (2012). *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*. Reaktion Books.
- Pospiszyl, T. & Bishop, C. (2017). *An Associative Art History*. JPR Ringier
- Ševčíková, L. & Žáková, E. (eds.) (2012), *Czech contemporary art guide, Praha: Arts and Theatre Institute*.