Course Title: Iconic Works of Modern Art  
Course Code: ARTH 196  
Instructor: Diane Zuliani  
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Grade Options and Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.

- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Attend a minimum of five classes

- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - Attend all classes
  - Submit a four-page essay drawing a connection between an iconic modern artwork and some contemporary object or form (art, media, or otherwise) that you see as fulfilling an equivalent or near-equivalent aesthetic or social role.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.

Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week One: Realism

When does modern art begin? What is the first truly modern painting? The first modern sculpture? And what are our criteria for determining what is modern, and therefore also pre-modern, and post-modern? In modern art criticism there are two key concentrations, one focusing on art’s formal qualities, the other on its content—or its lack thereof. But where these two concentrations invariably overlap is in the area of subjectivity, or the artist’s self-determination, meaning that in a very basic way, modern art projects the artist’s own free and unmediated voice. Art history often cites the Realism to be the earliest movement organized around exercising this freedom, and tonight, viewing iconic artworks by Daumier, Courbet, and Manet, we will see what art looked like when mid-19th century makers spoke freely.
Week Two: Impressionism

Of all the upheavals in art through history, only iconoclasm proved more disruptive than the invention of photography in 1839. Art was simply never the same after the Daguerreotype. What could painting do that the camera couldn’t? What should painting do? Could true artists really hope to depict the new world in an old medium? Such questions vexed painters in the second half of the nineteenth century. Fighting for relevance, Claude Monet and others challenged the supremacy of photographic verisimilitude by innovating a new type of brushwork and utilizing recent discoveries in optics and chromatics, and then they stood firmly by their invention as an artform that was, if not more accurate, then more authentic than camera vision. Tonight, we will consider how the origins of abstraction are found in this dilemma between accuracy and authenticity, and a definition/discussion of terms such as representationalism and abstraction will be in order.

Week Three: Post-Impressionism

Impressionists were concerned first and foremost with vision, yet vision is just one way to know the world. Some Impressionists, like Paul Cezanne and Vincent van Gogh, eventually found the Impressionist style lacking in substance. They sought ways to apply the Impressionist lessons they’d learned, such as the tasche, the high-key palette, and the plein-air landscape, to create something more concrete and meaningful: an artform that added the acts of knowing, feeling and experiencing to the Impressionist’s solo act of seeing. Of course, mixing such intangibles into art only deepens its abstraction.

Week Four: Expressionism

An Expressionist was a Modern artist who sought not just to speak with their inner voice but to roar with it. Expressionist artists believed that painting—in contrast to its mechanical competitor, photography—should be used a vehicle to explore the innermost of human emotions because, be they dark or bright, are universal yet intangible (thus unphotographable). Expressionists Wassily Kandinsky, Emile Nolde, and Edward Munch delved into the subjective truths of their existence, plumbing animal depths and climbing spiritual heights, in order to translate their experiences into something like a pictorial handbill for the opera of the human condition. But when art becomes so devoted to interiority, it begins to lose interest recognizable, nameable subjects. Tonight we will follow Expressionist artists as they tested how far as abstraction could take them.

Week Five: Cubism

Expressionists used painting as a way to disgorge raw emotions out into the open. But other artists felt that by leaving out the concrete truth of the three-dimensional world,
Expressionist had ignored an essential part of the human condition: the experience of being in the world. But can an artist paint the experience of being in the world? Is the two-dimensional medium of painting ever really experientially honest? Pablo Picasso and Georges Braques, inspired by their Post-Impressionist forebear Paul Cezanne, launched into an avant-garde exploration of form, inventing Analytic Cubism to test the two-dimensional limit of painting. By replacing the age-old single-point perspective with a plurality of viewpoints, their goal was to help us as viewers know their subjects more thoroughly. With time, these two Cubists pushed painting’s 2-d limits even further, creating Synthetic Cubism to force both the artist and the viewer to reckon with painting’s perpetual dichotomies of representation versus reality—or art versus life.

Week Six: Surrealism

In the era of Freud, it was all but inevitable that dreams would become the well-spring of subjects and images of inward-looking modern artists. Fantasy, incongruity, spontaneity, and humor carried by dream imagery came to be seen as a roadmap of uncharted territory in the human psyche as well as in the medium of painting, particularly as a means of shunning tradition while still remaining figurative. Art historically and critically, the result was a mess. Alfred Barr, MoMA’s founding director, championed Surrealism and organized the first major Surrealist exhibition in the U.S., yet he refused to let the movement’s leader, Andre Breton, stage the exhibition “surrealistically.” Clement Greenberg, perhaps the most important critic of modern art, derided it as nothing more than a rehabilitation of academic art, and a “disorderly aberration in the quest for abstraction.” For their part, Surrealists would have found widespread critical acceptance of their movement a sign of its weakness, and Surrealism as an artform has remained more universally popular than other forms that less convincingly insist on their universality.