

HUMA 1311: Mexican American Fine Arts Appreciation
"Chicanx Art Criticism" Teamwork Project

Purpose:

The concept of "art" can be complicated and subjective since there are many different opinions and interpretations of works of art. Art "criticism" analyzes art by exploring its aesthetic beauty (visual appeal) and/or its meaning and significance to the human experience. Oftentimes, we look for what the art work is saying, or its "social commentary." This assignment will ask you to be an art critic and analyze a work of Chicanx art.

Additionally, being able to effectively work with fellow students/colleagues is an important life and work skill, and working together in an academic setting enriches individual understanding. The purpose of this assignment is to further your understanding of class concepts through a collaborative effort. This assignment also fulfills the College's **Teamwork Learning Outcome**: "Palo Alto College Students consider different points of view and work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal."

Instructions:

You will be placed into groups of four to five and are to select a work of Mexican American/Chicanx art. In order to add to the course content, you are encouraged to select art work not included in your course textbooks. Once you select an art piece, you are to complete the following:

1. **Description:** Describe the work of art including its medium (or type of art), artist, and background information. Include a visual of the art work.
2. **Making Connections:** Connect the work of art to at least one social, political or cultural concept discussed in class. You can also choose a theme or themes from *Chicana and Chicano Art* Chapter 3 "Prominent Themes in Chicano Art." Describe the concept/theme and provide evidence for your argument.
3. **Social commentary:** What is this piece of art "saying?" This does not have to be made clear by the artist, but by your argument. Provide evidence for your perspective.

Presentation:

You are to develop a presentation that includes the information above. Your group will be graded on your presentation, which should be no longer than 15-20 minutes. Because of time constraints, your presentation cannot exceed 20 minutes. Your classmates will then be allowed to ask your group questions. Your presentation should include:

1. A clear presentation of the content (Practicing helps!)
2. Visuals that enhance your presentation (i.e., PowerPoint, short YouTube video, etc.)

Working as a Team:

- **Discussion and collaboration:** It is important that each group member participate in a group discussion to decide the assignment content and presentation. It is up to the group to decide how you will do this. I will set up Canvas groups where you can collaborate online. You are also encouraged to meet face-to-face.
- **Team member roles:** It is up to the group to delegate roles to team members in order to accomplish the assignment. For example, you may choose to delegate certain questions, the compilation of the visuals, or the presentation speaking role to certain team members. This is one of the important tasks of team work.

Grading:

Your individual assignment grade will be a combination of the overall presentation grade (60%) as well as your role as a team member (40%). You will grade yourself and your teammates on your teamwork effort. You are asked to be honest and fair in your assessment. I will also grade you on your teamwork effort. See attached "Teamwork Learning Outcome" rubrics for details.

Preparation:

We will begin presentations on (date) . All groups should be ready to present by this date. We will begin with volunteers and then I will select groups. If your group is not ready, you will receive a letter grade reduction on your presentation. Therefore, you are advised to start early and manage your time wisely.

Assignment Design Worksheet: Teamwork

Course	Mexican American Fine Arts Appreciation – HUMA 1311
Assignment Title	Chicanx Art Criticism
Developers	Lori Rodriguez
Assignment ID	(to be assigned)

Criterion	How does this assignment align to this rubric criterion?
Student makes a quality contribution to the Team Activity.	Students are placed into teams of 4-5 and given a task that requires discussion, decision making/consensus, delegation of tasks and research/content contribution toward a specific goal. The assignment instructions outline the tasks to be completed, leaving the process up to the team members.
Student treats fellow team members courteously with respect.	Because this assignment requires coming to a consensus on a topic that is subjective (art), this assignment will challenge students who might initially disagree to come to an agreement respectfully. Students are made aware of team conduct expectations and rubric in assignment instructions.
Student models personal attributes that contribute to teamwork.	This assignment requires discussion, collaboration, preparation, research, critical thinking and a presentation. All of these assignment requirements will help assess the qualities included in this rubric.

INTRODUCTION TO ASSIGNMENT FOR INSTRUCTORS: THIS IS AN ASSIGNMENT I GIVE IN MY "INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY" COURSE. IN ADDITION TO THIS ASSIGNMENT, I SHOW THE VIDEOS IN CLASS TO GET THE STUDENTS' INITIAL REACTIONS AND ASK THEM TO NOTE THEIR INITIAL REACTIONS TO TURN IN WITH THIS ASSIGNMENT LATER. SINCE THIS IS AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY COURSE, WE DO NOT DELVE DEEPLY INTO ANY AREAS SUCH AS AESTHETICS. THE AIM OF THE ASSIGNMENT IS TO GET THEM TO LOOK AT ART THAT IS OUTSIDE THEIR COMFORT ZONES, TO LOOK AT ART THAT IS CULTURALLY RELEVANT (NOT JUST BEAUTIFUL) AND TO THINK CRITICALLY, ALL WHILE USING NEW PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS AND TERMINOLOGY. IN ADDITION, THEY GET PRACTICE IN WRITING AND COMMUNICATION.

I want you to write a 5-page double spaced paper on the two videos we watched in class. The first is "The Artist is Present." The work is partially depicted in this video on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS0Tg0ljCp4>

Marina Abramović e Ulay - MoMA 2010

The second is this video:

<https://vimeo.com/55563208>

Tress of Hair by Doa Aly

First, identify the cultural, social and/or aesthetic issue. The best way to do this is to check your own initial reaction. Would YOU have sat down across from Ms. Abramovic? If not, what in your cultural or social conditioning would have prevented you? As far as what she is doing aesthetically (artistically), what was your reaction? What was your reaction to the silent women in Doa Aly's video? Did you first assume that the man in the video was the artist? Perhaps your reaction was "This is not art!" or "This is really weird!" Whatever your reactions, what in your background and knowledge brought out this reaction?

Second, you also should analyze the cultural, social and/or aesthetic issue from more than one cultural perspective, noting the broader influence (local, national and/or global) of each perspective. (Remember that Abramovic is European and Aly is Egyptian.) For example, many people in the USA believe it is disrespectful to refuse to look a person in the eyes, but in many Native American and Asian cultures, staring people directly in the eyes is considered disrespectful. Now that you know that Doa Aly is one of the women in the video, do you interpret the male actor's performance differently? What in your cultural background caused you to make such assumptions?

Finally, analyze the cultural, social and/or aesthetic issue from your own cultural perspective, noting whether your own biases or prejudices affected your perspective. Include whether you think this qualifies as art, whether you think it is good art, and what the artists were trying to express about others. (See attached grading

rubric for Social Responsibility.) This should include how quickly you connected with/related to each video and whether your cultural perspective had something to with that.

Please proofread the paper carefully and insure it is clear and well-organized. Also check to be sure you are using exactly the correct word for what you are trying to express and that you use a variety of sentence structures. (See attached grading rubric for Communication.)

Please be sure to organize your response with support for the points you make. You don't need to do any further research, unless you wish to, but should use the sources that follow. This assignment is tied to the course learning outcomes (see syllabus) about applying philosophy to everyday life and about critically analyzing and evaluating philosophical ideas.

SOURCE 1:

THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM WIKIPEDIA ABOUT ABRAMOVIC:

Marina Abramović (Serbian Cyrillic: Марина Абрамовић, Serbo-Croatian pronunciation: ma ri:na ab'ra:moviće); born November 30, 1946) is a Yugoslavia-born performance artist.^[1] Her work explores the relationship between performer and audience, the limits of the body, and the possibilities of the mind. Active for over three decades, Abramović has been described as the "grandmother of performance art." She pioneered a new notion of identity by bringing in the participation of observers, focusing on "confronting pain, blood, and physical limits of the body."^[2]

[HTTPS://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/MARINA_ABRAMOVI%C4%87](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marina_Abramović)

SOURCE 2:

Aestheticians also question what the **value** of art is. Is art a means of gaining some kind of **knowledge**? Is it a tool of **education** or **indoctrination** or **enculturation**? Is it perhaps just **politics** by other means? Does art give us an insight into the **human condition**? Does it make us more **moral**? Can it uplift us **spiritually**? Might the value of art for the **artist** be quite different than its value for the **audience**? Might the value of art to **society** be different than its value to **individuals**?

Aesthetic Universals

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The contemporary American philosopher **Denis Dutton** (1944 -) has identified seven **universal signatures** in human aesthetics. Although there are possible exceptions and objections to many of them, they represent a useful **starting point** for the consideration of aesthetics:

- **Expertise or Virtuosity** (technical artistic skills are cultivated, recognized and admired)

- **Non-Utilitarian Pleasure** (people enjoy art for art's sake, and don't demand practical value of it)
- **Style** (artistic objects and performances satisfy rules of composition that place them in recognizable styles)
- **Criticism** (people make a point of judging, appreciating and interpreting works of art)
- **Imitation** (with a few important exceptions (e.g. music, abstract painting), works of art simulate experiences of the world)
- **Special Focus** (art is set aside from ordinary life and made a dramatic focus of experience)
- **Imagination** (artists and their audiences entertain hypothetical worlds in the theatre of the imagination)

History of Aesthetics

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The **Ancient Greek** philosophers initially felt that aesthetically appealing objects were beautiful **in and of themselves**. Plato felt that beautiful objects incorporated **proportion, harmony and unity** among their parts. Aristotle found that the universal elements of beauty were **order, symmetry and definiteness**.

According to **Islam**, human works of art are **inherently flawed** compared to the work of **Allah**, and to attempt to depict in a realistic form any animal or person is insolence to Allah. This has had the effect of narrowing the field of Muslim artistic possibility to such forms as **mosaics, calligraphy, architecture and geometric and floral patterns**.

Indian art evolved with an emphasis on inducing special **spiritual** or philosophical states in the audience, or with representing them **symbolically**.

As long as go as the 5th Century B.C., **Chinese** philosophers were already arguing about aesthetics. **Confucius** (551 - 479 B.C.) emphasized the role of the arts and humanities (especially music and poetry) in broadening human nature. His near contemporary **Mozi** (470 - 391 B.C.), however, argued that music and fine arts were classist and wasteful, benefiting the rich but not the common people.

Western **Medieval** art (at least until the revival of classical ideals during the **Renaissance**) was highly **religious** in focus, and was typically funded by the **Church**, powerful ecclesiastical individuals, or wealthy secular patrons. A religiously uplifting message was considered more important than figurative accuracy or inspired composition. The skills of the artisan were considered **gifts from God** for the sole purpose of disclosing God to mankind.

With the shift in Western philosophy from the late 17th Century onwards, **German** and **British** thinkers in particular emphasized **beauty** as the key component of art and of the aesthetic experience, and saw art as necessarily aiming at beauty. For **Friedrich Schiller** (1759 - 1805), aesthetic appreciation of beauty is the most perfect **reconciliation** of the **sensual** and **rational** parts of human

nature. Hegel held that art is the first stage in which the **absolute spirit** is immediately manifest to sense-perception, and is thus an **objective** rather than a subjective revelation of beauty. For Schopenhauer, aesthetic contemplation of beauty is the most **free** that the pure intellect can be from the dictates of **will**.

British Intuitionists like the **3rd Earl of Shaftesbury** (1671 - 1713) claimed that beauty is just the sensory equivalent of **moral goodness**. More analytic theorists like **Lord Kames** (1696 - 1782), **William Hogarth** (1697 - 1764) and Edmund Burke hoped to reduce beauty to some **list of attributes**, while others like **James Mill** (1773 - 1836) and **Herbert Spencer** (1820 - 1903) strove to link beauty to some **scientific theory** of psychology or biology.

http://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_aesthetics.html

SOURCE 3:

Art and aesthetics during the 20th century questioned the historical ties between morality or religion, beauty and art. Before the 1900s, art was intended to simply record the world in a realistic way. Now, art has other purposes besides inspiring the viewer to be good or making the viewer believe that what was depicted was beautiful. Art is currently seen as having many other purposes: revealing hidden cultural truths, helping us to see the world in a new way, and giving visual form to ideas or philosophies or emotions.

Doa Aly spent some of her young adulthood in Italy, but returned home to Egypt to become an artist. She had stated she was immediately struck by the “constraints on her body” that existed in Egypt and then became fascinated with depicting those in her work. She often used dance and movement as her way of depicting constraints on the body. She later became fascinated with how medical literature described how mental illnesses manifested themselves in bodily movements.

Performance art became popular in the late 20th century as “alt-art.” It is an art form with a topical theme that usually includes a live presentation to onlookers and may include acting, dance, music, or painting. Performance art emphasizes the experience for both artist and viewer.

Rena B. Denham, lecture in PHIL 1301

SOURCE 4:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/41397353?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

See below:

Henry M. Sayre

*The Object of Performance:
Aesthetics in the Seventies*

"A modernist would have to rewrite Pater's dictum that all art aspires to the condition of music," Susan Sontag announced in her series of essays *On Photography*. "Now all art aspires to the condition of photography."¹ In fact, one of the most important aesthetic developments of the seventies will probably turn out to be the art establishment's embracing of photography, epitomized by the popular success of Sontag's book itself. And at least part of the 1970's affair with photography is directly attributable to the medium's insistence on complicating—and accommodating—Pater's dictum. That is, Pater defined the art object as something we know only through "impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them." He was never interested in anything of "solidity," but only in "experience itself . . . that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves."² For him, the art object was the mere token, the trace, of an aesthetic experience forever lost, a thing always announcing absence.

For Sontag, photography gives Pater's dictum the modernist turn. A photograph is, of course, an object in its own right, irrefutably present. To borrow Murray Krieger's phrase, it can be "plucked out of all discourse as its own closed system," just like any poem or painting.³ From this sort of formalist perspective, aesthetic experience is never absent; it

¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978), p. 149. Subsequent page references are to this text.

² Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 235-36.

³ Murray Krieger, *Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and Its System* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 212.

Assignment Design Worksheet: Communication

Course	PHIL 1301
Assignment Title	Marina Abramovic's "The Artist is Present"
Developers	Rena Denham and Julie McDevitt
Assignment ID	(to be assigned)

Criterion	How does this assignment align to this rubric criterion?
Content and Purpose. The student uses relevant content that conveys understanding	The students are analyzing their own prejudices and trying to see things from another's perspective, as well as "doing philosophy" by looking specifically at aesthetics.
Organization. The student uses disciplinary conventions for organizing and presenting content.	Yes, because I have now specified some resources and I also have been much more specific on what I want the assignment response to include.
Tools. The student uses communication tools appropriately and skillfully for academic and professional contexts	It forces them look through and contemplate some sources and to analyze from more than one perspective.