

**FIL 2104/4700, vår 2024: Philosophical Aesthetics and Theories of Art,
Christel Fricke**

Course Description:

What is a work of art? How should we look at/listen to/read a work of art? How do we distinguish artworks from other perceptible objects, and from other perceptible artefacts in particular? Is the answer to the latter question ontological in kind, or is the distinction merely a matter of social – or individual – construction? What distinguishes an aesthetic attitude to a perceptual object from a non-aesthetic attitude? Can we have an aesthetic experience without perceiving anything at all? Is the aesthetic experience merely cognitive or merely emotional in kind? And finally, must an object, to be a work of art, have aesthetic merit (sometimes, even though somewhat misleadingly, labelled ‘beauty’)? If so, what is aesthetic merit? And how do we discover it? Is aesthetic merit a matter of taste, be it the taste of an individual person or of the members of a social class? Or is there a truth of the matter in our aesthetic judgments about works of art and their aesthetic merit? And finally, is there aesthetic merit outside the sphere of artefacts, namely in nature?

Most seminar meetings will be dedicated to the study of paradigmatic attempts to answer some of these questions. Our focus will be on selected writings by David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Nelson Goodman, and Arthur Danto. While these authors are all white and male (and not any more among the living), we shall also read critical works by female authors, including myself. Along the way, we shall rely on selected examples of artworks (mostly visual or literary) for illustrating philosophical claims about beauty and art. In the last part of our course, we shall look at contemporary art, trying to make sense of what we have learned by then in practice. Suggestions of what kind of art we should look at from the side of participants will be most welcome. A detailed seminar program will be published at the beginning of the teaching period in January 2024.

As for an introduction to the topic, and for helping you to decide whether this course might be of interest to you in the first place, I recommend reading this article from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

Shelley, James, "The Concept of the Aesthetic", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = [<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/aesthetic-concept/>](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/aesthetic-concept/).

The course will be taught in English. Most of the reading material will be in English; some of it will be made available also in Norwegian. The required written semester papers can be submitted either in English or in Norwegian. Comments will be made in English.

Requirements:

To get their study points, participants will have to write a semester paper and submit it via Inpera. In order to qualify for the exam, all mandatory activities must be completed and approved of. The mandatory activities are listed in the [course description](#) for FIL2104 and the [course description](#) for FIL4700.

Furthermore, participants are encouraged to introduce the reading of a particular seminar meeting; they can do this alone or in a small group. Those who want to improve their writing before submitting the final paper may submit a draft before the final deadline; they will get

critical feedback that is supposed to help them polish the draft and then submit a better final paper. I expect those who take the course to attend the seminar meetings on a regular basis. But I shall not keep an attendance list. The reading list is available on the leganto page.