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**Art 200, Art Appreciation**

**COURSE PURPOSE AND THEMES (an evolving document):**

“Art Appreciation” covers a host of courses, classes and subjects of study, for students of all ages. Definitions of art appreciation vary from teacher to teacher and from professor to professor. Definitions of art also vary from classroom to classroom and from instructor to instructor. Arguably, most professionals in the field would agree that the purpose of art appreciation is to become more familiar with and enjoy works of fine and applied art. Challenged across the academic spectrum by mandates for multiculturalism, many art and art history professionals strive to integrate non-Western art in their definitions and syllabi. Quite possibly some teachers (including Professor Bersson, author of our text and myself) include popular and media arts in their courses.

This all leads to the question, “What is Dr. Kiefer’s definition of art appreciation?” “What purpose does it serve?” Beginning with its purpose, I believe that art appreciation marks one of the foundations, if not the actual cornerstone, of culture and civilization. It honors, elevates, analyzes and critiques the objects and artifacts with which people have lived, celebrated, ritualized, warred over and memorialized. It opens golden doors to works of creative spirit and high ideals. It opens golden as well as tarnished doors to works of omnipotent power and enforced dominance. It sheds light on world history and world cultures. It also reveals the works and lives of individuals who define(d) as well as reflect(ed) world history and culture. It pinpoints human genius; it encircles human flaws.

My definition of art appreciation is fourfold: a course of cultural study that introduces students to the world of art—the world of objects, artifacts and images; a course of visual study that introduces students to and familiarizes them with the vocabulary and inner workings of art—the world of line, volume, form, color, illusion, dimensionality and composition; a course of site-specific study that brings students repeatedly into the places where art is collected, displayed, exhibited and debated—the world of museums, galleries and collections; and a course of intensive writing that challenges students to verbalize and compose analyses about art—a world of essays, texts, queries and critiques. Allied to these are my fifth and sixth definitions. Art appreciation is a course that stimulates students to look at and look for contemporary art. By means of art appreciation, students are encouraged to become involved in the arts of their respective communities, supporting or actually working in the field.

Students who have taken my art appreciation courses have seen many images, viewed a number of non-Western cultures, cruised through a chronological survey of Western art, and toured a gallery or museum (at least once and hopefully twice!). They have discussed terms, concepts, themes and individual artists. They have written visual analyses (vivid descriptions) of individual works using selected Internet exhibitions and websites. They have heard talks or lectures by art historians, artists and/or arts activists. And they have written at least four comparison and contrast papers, integrating visual analysis with research, conceptualization, fact-finding and organization. Some of my students have taken on the additional challenge and opportunity of community arts, helping to organize, write about, install and interpret art exhibitions.

My goals as a teacher of art appreciation and as a practicing artist are as follows: to refine and hone my teaching skills so that the actual material of the course is “packaged” in a way that encourages discussion and participation, to extend the course out of the classroom as much as possible, encouraging the actual viewing of art, to create lectures that incorporate current scholarship and interpretation as well as “classic” themes and ideas, and to require excellence and scholarly rigor in writing across the board. My standards are very high. My desire to involve students, not only as respondents but also as participants, is unflagging.

I trust that you will benefit from Art Appreciation. I truly hope that your world, and your world view, will be changed.