HD 315 Ethics for Artists Dr. Douglas Chismar Ringling College of Art & Design Spring, 2009



Our course website is located at: <a href="https://ontario.ringling.edu/portal">https://ontario.ringling.edu/portal</a> or click on the Campus Connections link from the Ringling portal. Use your Ringling username and password to access the materials on the site. You can find all the assignments, readings, handouts, and your grades on the site. You can also upload writing assignments to this site.

# Course Description

This course explores the primary ethical issues and professional standards applicable to the contemporary practices of creating, showing, sharing, selling, buying, collecting, and displaying art and design in various media. We will work together to develop responses to the ethical issues arise from artists' and designers' interactions with the art and entertainment world, with family, friends and collaborators, and with the public. The course is thus a group inquiry into how professional artists and designers can practice their craft as "artist-global citizens" in a way that gives heed to our mutual responsibilities to one another, locally and worldwide, and to our planet.

## Course Objectives

- 1. To introduce you to the language and concepts of ethics, especially those applicable to the world of art and design
- 2. To encourage the growth of ethical awareness and moral imagination concerning situations commonly facing artists and designers as they create and show their work
- 3. To strengthen your critical reasoning, writing, and oral communications skills in the context of lively philosophical discussions
- 4. To expand, through practice, your ability to see and describe issues from multiple perspectives and your capacity to listen to and dialogue comfortably with those who hold views different from your own

# Content of the Course

Working from a framework designed around four interactive areas of focus—the artist(s), the audience(s), the art world, and the community—we will identify some of the ethical "hot spots" in the practice of art and design. These will include issues such as:

- issues arising from the balancing of work, self-care, and relationships
- the rights of artists to control the destiny of their work
- the authenticity, veridicality, reproduction, and commodification of works of art

- intellectual property rights, especially pertaining to technological simulations and appropriations
- ethical issues arising from work for hire
- "offensive" depiction of ethnic, religious sexual, violent, and political content
- treatment of humans, animals, and the ecosystem in the making of art
- colonialism, museums, and the "theft" of indigenous cultures and artifacts
- the impact of public art on community spaces
- · issues of censorship and public funding of the arts

# Instructional Approach

The course consists of a mix of occasional lectures, student presentations, case studies, group interactions, film excerpts, and guest lectures.

### Evaluative Criteria

Case Study write-ups (15 @ 10 points each)	150
Presentations	150
Analytical paper	150
Personal Ethics Paper	150

TOTAL: 600 points

An A or A- will be in the 90% range of the 600 points, B or B- in the 80% range, etc.

Details about each of the four requirements are provided on the following pages.

Attendance and participation will raise or lower borderline grades. For example, someone within a few points of an A who has regularly attended and added to class discussions would receive the A. On the other hand, someone who skipped a lot of classes or attended and slept would most likely receive the lower grade.

Extra case studies can be written up for extra credit.



Case Studies During the semester, you will prepare 15 case study write ups from cases in the Puzzles book or from the course reader. A model case write-up will be provided the first week of class. Write-ups should average 1-2 pages. They can be

handwritten or typed.

Case write-ups are regarded as pieces of "informal writing." This means that they will be graded for content (accuracy, clarity, creativity, level of reflection) but not for grammar or spelling. They are examples of "writing to learn" where you use writing to help formulate your thoughts, rather than just to please the professor. What I will be looking for is evidence that you did the reading and gave some thought to your responses.

Each write-up should consist of three elements (1-2 paragraphs each):

- 1. Factual background an overview of what happened to the case
- 2. Analysis of ethical issues -discussion of what ethical issues arise in the case;
- 3. **My view** describe how you would approach the case; if possible, make reference to the ethical theory that shapes your view (see p. 3 of the reader) and any relevant personal experiences.

All submissions will be graded as:

- $\sqrt{-}$  5 points -- case study is leaves out required elements or is too brief/sketchy  $\sqrt{}$  7-8 points includes all required elements in an adequate way
- $\sqrt{+}$  9-10 points includes all required elements and shows evidence of sustained thinking or exceptional analysis (you really put some effort into it)

Late case studies received within one week of the due date will not be penalized for lateness. Papers received later than a week are eligible only for a  $\sqrt{}$  Papers more than a month late can receive at best a  $\sqrt{}$  (still better than a zero!).

#### Presentations

Groups of 3 students each will lead one discussion of a topic or controversy. Each group will prepare for the class a 1-2 page handout that provides:



- an abstract
- a review of some facts about the artist or controversy
- most importantly, at least 4 good discussion questions
- resources for further study including at least one book, one article and one website

Presentations, apart from discussion, should take no longer than 15 minutes. You are encouraged to incorporate some kind of visuals—e.g., JPEGS, PowerPoints, or brief (maximum of 5 minutes) film or YouTube excerpts. After the overview, the presenters will lead a class discussion of the case that relies upon questions in the handout. A sample handout will be provided the first week. Groups are required to meet with me and with Sarah Carter in the library prior to presenting to review and assist their preparations.

The topic selection list in 2009 consists of:

- >The Visual Artists' Rights Act of 1990
- >Photojournalistic treatment of crime victims and sufferers
- >Issues and controversies in Michelangelo's painting of the Sistine Chapel ceiling
- >The exploitation of social documentary style photography for advertising purposes
- >Appropriation of Star Wars content by fans for take-offs and parodies
- >Leni Riefenstahl's documentary, "Triumph of the Will" about the Nazi Nuremberg rally
- >Richard Serra's controversial NYC public art piece, "Tilted Arc"

We'll set up the groups and topics early in the semester.

## Analytical Paper

During the semester, we will read together the article by Derek Bousé, "Computer Generated Images: Wildlife and Natural History Films." It is from Larry Gross, et al, *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* and can be founded in the Extended Readings folder of our course website (<a href="https://ontario.ringling.edu/portal">https://ontario.ringling.edu/portal</a>). Copies will also be handed out in class.



Please write an *analytical* paper about the Bousé article. It should outline or summarize the basic issues and arguments in the reading and then engage in a hearty dialogue with it. This means noting the strengths of the author's point of view and weaknesses. Another good way to critique a perspective is to offer alternative ways of looking at the subject of the reading.

These should be "finished" papers that are tightly organized and proof-read for spelling and grammatical errors. *Clear thinking and good writing go together.* 

The paper should be 3–5 pages, typed double spaced (12 point font, one inch margins), preferably in Microsoft Word format. I recommend that you place your name in the header and page numbers in the footer. A draft of the paper can be handed in early for review. Papers received late will be assessed a one grade penalty if they are not received by the next class session. If you struggle with writing or simply want to improve your writing ability, I heartily recommend that you consult with the Academic Resource Center.

As an alternative to writing about the Bousé essay, you may choose another of articles from the Course Readings folder on our class web site. Please clear your choice of an article with me. Those choosing this option will have a couple of more weeks to complete the paper.

### Personal Ethics Position Paper

This 3–5 page typed double spaced paper articulates your personal approach to the ethics of being an artist or designer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The paper should offer an overview of how you determine your basic values. What are the most basic ethical principles that guide your life?

Make some reference to which of the ethical theories you tend to use to make moral decisions and why you prefer this theoretical approach.

You should then apply your method of ethical reasoning to a sample of 3 ethical issues or cases discussed in the course. Describe how you respond to them, not only in terms of what you would do, but why you believe this is the ethical way to handle these cases. You may find your case writeups to be helpful as a resource, but please do not just copy/paste them into your position paper.

Papers that make use of the ethical concepts we have used in the course will receive higher grades. A good test to apply to your paper is this: does this read like something I could have written prior to taking this class? Or does it provide evidence that I actually learned something in the course and can now discuss ethical issues at a higher level?

A model paper and grade sheet will be posted on the course website in the Resources section in the Course Information folder.

### Course Texts

Margaret P. Battin, Puzzles About Art (St. Martins Press, 1989). This book offers a great introductory overview of aesthetics but we'll use it as a source of many of our case studies for discussion.



Douglas Chismar, Ethics for Artists. This is a collection of readings, resources, and discussion questions that will be distributed in class the first day, free of charge. Please bring it to class each time.

## Learning Disabilities Policy

The Ringling School makes reasonable accommodations for qualified people with documented disabilities. If you have a learning disability, a chronic illness, or a physical or psychiatric disability that may have some impact on your work for this class and for which you may need accommodations, please notify the Director of the Academic Resource Center preferably before the end of the drop/add period so that appropriate adjustments can be made.

### Health and Safety

Ringling School of Art and Design is committed to providing students, faculty, and staff with a safe and healthful learning and work environment and to comply with all applicable safety laws and regulations and safe work practices. If there are issues regarding our classroom that interfere with your health or ability to learn, please make them known to me.

## Attendance Policy

Active participation is more important than attendance at every single session. When you come to class, you need to be alert and join in. If you are going to sleep in class (for example, because you were up all night finishing a major art project), it may be better that you not come for that session. That's fine. But it is impossible to participate if you are missing a lot of classes. If you have a legitimate reason for missing class, please inform me. Doing so is a good professional practice.

If you are shy, try to push yourself to speak now and then. I will work hard to create a comfortable atmosphere that encourages dialogue. Please let me know if you are having trouble being heard in discussion.

Please turn off your cell phone and laptop unless you are taking notes or using it for a class activity. Feel free to draw at anytime.

# Classroom civility



Worse than skipping class is acting in a manner that is rude, hostile, intolerant, or just generally obnoxious. If you make other people (or me) feel uncomfortable about expressing their ideas in class, you will be encouraged to drop the course. All those who engage in intimidating behavior that squelches our discussions will be terminated. The one prerequisite for this class is that you be open-minded enough to listen to your classmates respectfully. Please also police this amongst yourselves. If

a classmate is dominating discussion, ask him/her privately to let others speak. Talk to me if you have any concerns about the classroom environment.

### Adult content

This is a course designed for adults that may occasionally include topics of a graphic violent or sexual nature. My purpose is not to offend you. If you find it difficult to tolerate these kinds of topics, you may want to



drop the course. Please talk with me if you have concerns about the topics that will be discussed.

## Plagiarism Policy



Plagiarism is using someone else's writing without putting it in quotes or giving credit through a citation. We all use the ideas of others and will talk about the ethics of appropriation in this course. But simply taking someone else's materials and doing so without giving credit is essentially a form of stealing.

You can easily avoid this by:

- 1. Using only a limited amount of material from another source and
- 2. Citing the source

It's fine to use sources (provided you contribute something to the mix). The main thing is acknowledging when you've borrowed from someone else so they get the credit they deserve.

Since a key objective of this course is that you would develop your own ideas, plagiarism is prohibited. This will be ruthlessly enforced. If I determine that you stole content from another source and passed it off as your own, you will receive zero points for that assignment. This could knock you down two full grade levels.

As an artist, you don't want others stealing your work and profiting from it without giving you credit. Don't do that to your sources!

Besides, stealing in an ethics course would be... well, pretty damned pathetic!



Syllabus graphics:

cover image: Ĉamuccini, Morte di Giulio Cesare (Death of Julus Caesar)

http://www.summagallicana.it/lessico/c/Cesare%20di%20Vincenzo%20Camuccini%201798%20morte%20di%20G%20C.jpg
All other images are public domain clip art or book covers (Puzzles about Art, Image Ethics) except for the Brothers-Brick Lego Terminator graphic:

http://www.brickshelf.com/gallery/robbed/Other/Terminator/terminator.jpg and the movie rating graphic, from the official Motion Picture Association site: http://www.mpaa.org/FlmRat\_Ratings.asp