

GCIN2009 Art worlds: Aesthetics, money, and markets (Summer 2021)

Course Content

The course looks at how art worlds function in Europe, Asia, and the United States, and focuses in particular on the socio-cultural relations linking beauty and aesthetics with business, organizations, people, and money. It is taught primarily by lectures and class work, and is attentive to art worlds in China, Korea, Hong Kong and Japan, comparing what we find there with standard readings on art worlds in Europe and the United States. It thus looks at how local/regional variations can be found in the organization and practices of different art worlds, and tries to explain why they exist.

The course is intended as an elective for students who wish to major or minor in Creative Industries, and/or who have already taken the Introduction to Creative Industries (GCIN 1001), as well as for students in the Department of Art history at HKU. In the long-term, the course serves as a foundation for those who wish to pursue a career in art by familiarising them with the special dynamics of art worlds, alerting them especially to the challenges of managing creative people, artworks, and their accompanying ideologies.

Learning Objectives

The aim of this course is to remind students of the concept of “art worlds” put forward by the sociologist, Howard Becker, and to examine and analyse how they are organized and function. By the end of the course students should have gained an understanding of:

1. The social processes surrounding the production, appreciation, sale and purchase of art works;
2. The composition of an art world, and the relationships between the main protagonists of artist, gallery owner, collector, auction house, and museum;
3. The confused and confusing relationship between artistic ideals, and the pricing and sale of art works in the art market;
4. How reputations are made and sustained in art worlds.

Teaching Methods

Lectures, presentations and class discussions.
