

**Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
South Asian University**

Visual Arts and the Politics Social Transformation in South Asia
(Optional Course for MA)

Total Credits: 04

Objectives of the course

Visual art, whether it is painting, sculpture, installation, performance art, film or any other form of creativity is not a simple matter of aesthetics, beauty or generating pleasure. It is also a domain of politics that is historically and temporally embedded with meaning and can be read sociologically. This course will explore the political potential of visual arts in South Asia with a focus on painting, sculpture, installation and performance art that goes beyond the issue of aesthetics. In the context of a theoretical discussion on concepts such as aesthetics, beauty and taste and the historical emergence of art in society, the course will attempt to explore how art become a method of politics in specific locations; it will particularly pay attention to arts' social transformational attributes by focusing on how art works as repositories of memory, nationalism, violence etc within a larger discourse of politics in specific locations. The course will involve field visits to a number of galleries in New Delhi to view and review on-going exhibitions and to understand their politics as well as a number of guest lectures.

Unit 1: Unit one will attempt to place the overall course in context by focusing on the following themes: A. Art and society: emergence of art in society; B. Art in 'tradition' and the advent to modernity and postmodernity; C. Multiple ways of understanding visual arts: representation, discourse, taste, aesthetics and the politics of beauty; D. Art and local discourses of 'authenticity' and 'nationalism'; E. The reality of the 'glocal': art in the time of globalization: exploring connections beyond the local. This section also requires a visit to the National Gallery of Art, New Delhi and a curatorial talk on site.

1. Wheale, Nigel. 'Modernism and Its Consequences: Continuity or Break'. In, Nigel Wheale, *The Postmodern Arts*. London, Rutledge, 1995.
2. Wheale, Nigel. 'Postmodernism: From Elite to Mass Culture.' In, Nigel Wheale, *The Postmodern Arts*. London, Rutledge, 1995.
3. Webb, Jen. 'Art in a Globalized State' by, pp. 30-45. In, Caroline Turner ed., *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*. Canberra: Pandanus Books. 2005.
4. Bourdieu, Pierre. 'Metamorphosis of Taste'. *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage. 1993

Unit 2: This section will focus on three crucial and interrelated issues. These issues are: A. Art as a form of politics; B. Art and the politics of the everyday; C. Cultural identify and the politics of place; D. The dynamics and the politics of performance art.

1. Selz, Peter 'Prologue: A Personal View of the Interaction of Politics and Art', pp. 25-28; 'Introduction: Paths to Engagement', pp. 29-34. *Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
2. Papastergiadis, Nikos. 'Everything that Surrounds: Art, Politics and the Theories of the Everyday'. In, Nikos Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: At, Place and the Everyday*. London: River Oram Press, 2006.
3. Goldberg, RoseLee. 'The Art of Ideas and the Media Generation 1968-2000.' In, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* by. Thames and Hudson, London, 2001.

Unit 3: This section will place in context of the idea of art as a means of social transformation and will focus on the following issues: A. Art and the 'possibilities' of social transformation, B. Politics of exhibitions: what is shown and what is not shown; C. Memorializing death and other signs of politics.

In this section, students will also view the movie *Frida* to get a sense of the life of an artist in evolving contexts of 'national' and personal politics.

1. Turner, Caroline. 'Art and Social Change' by, pp. 1-13. In, Caroline Turner ed., *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*. Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005.
2. Luke, Timothy W. *Museum Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002

Unit 4: This section will focus on the idea of political transformation in the broader Asia region and its relevance to visual arts.

1. Barclay, Glen St. J. 'Geopolitical Changes in Asia and the Pacific' by, pp. 13-29. In, Caroline Turner ed., *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*. Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005.

Unit 5: (Case Study 1 - Contemporary Indian art and its politics): This section will attempt to understand contemporary Indian art with a focus on continuities from the past and the art of the 'state' and the politics of installation and site-specific post 1980s art in contemporary India, which deals with crucial issues of politics such as environmental concerns, violence and gender.

1. Kapoor, Geeta. 'A Stake in Modernity: A Brief History of Modern Indian Art, pp. 146-163. In, Caroline Turner ed., *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*. Canberra: Pandanus Books. 2005.
2. Singha, Gayatri. 'Introduction,' In Gayatri Singha ed., *Art and Visual culture in India, 1857-2007*. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009 (and selected chapters)
1. Sheikh, G. 'Sites of Art: Other Sites, Other Locations - Some Aspects of Visual Cultures in India.' In, *Mapping Art South Asia: A Visual and Cultural Dialogue between Britain and South Asia*. London: Shisha, 2006

Unit 6: (Case Study 2 - Contemporary Bangladeshi art and its politics): This section will explore the major themes of Bangladeshi art since the advent of modernism and the political trends of post-1980s art. Among the main themes that will be covered are: A. Art and the war of liberation and political violence; B. Bangladeshi art and the politics of gender.

2. Selim, Lala Rukh, *Art of Bangladesh: The Changing Role of Tradition, Search for Identity and Globalization*, 2-19. In, *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 9 (2014).
3. Islam, Syed Mansoorul. 'Remaking Traditions: Fine Arts, Crafts and Artistry of Bangladesh.' In, *Mapping Art South Asia: A Visual and Cultural Dialogue between Britain and South Asia*. London: Shisha, 2006

Unit 7: (Case Study 3 – Contemporary Pakistani art and its politics): This section will focus on post 1980s art in Pakistan which deals the politics of violence, religion and the issues of gender.

1. Hashmi, Salima. 'Tracing the Image: Contemporary Art in Pakistan' by, pp. 164-179. In, Caroline Turner ed., *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*. Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005.
2. Dadi, Ifthikar. 'Emergence of the Public Self', 177-216. In, Ifthikar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*. Chapel Hill: University o North Carolina Press, 2010.
3. Dadi, Ifthikar. *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010 (Introduction).
4. Hashmi, Salima. 'Introduction', '1977-1987: Calling Their Bluff: Women Under Martial Law' and '1987-1997: Towards the Millennium and Beyond.' In, Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan*. Islamabad: Action Aid.

Unit 8: (Case Study 4 – Contemporary Sri Lankan art and its politics): This section will explore the dynamics of post 1980s Sri Lankan art with a focus on the politics of violence, memory and gender.

1. Weerasinghe, Jagath. 'Contemporary Art in Sri Lanka' by, pp. 164-180-195. In, Caroline Turner ed., *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*. Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005.
2. Perera, Sasanka. *Artists Remember; Artists Narrate: Memory and Representation in Sri Lankan Visual Arts*. Colombo: Theerta International Artists' Collective and Colombo Institute, 2012.