

# Image and Perception

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**Meeting Time:** [To be determined]

**Meeting Room:** [To be determined]

**Office Hours:** [To be determined]

**Semester:** Fall 2025

## Course Description

This interdisciplinary course explores visual literacy and intelligence at the intersection of creative practice, art history, and philosophy. Students will examine diverse visual works from Eastern and Western traditions – including paintings, sculptures, photographs, and digital media including Generative AI – to develop skills in visual analysis and cultural interpretation. The course addresses fundamental questions about visual experience: How do we derive meaning from images? How do different cultures construct visual significance through spiritual, social, and aesthetic frameworks? How have artists subjectively represented the world through form, color, and space? Students will explore both the tangible and ineffable aspects of visual experience, examining how seeing and creating images can teach us about perception itself. We'll investigate the ontological and epistemological dimensions of images, comparing iconic and aniconic representations across cultures. Special attention will be given to Indian artistic traditions including tantric art, temple architecture, and tribal art forms (Bhil, Gond, Warli, Pichwai etc.), alongside Western artistic movements and contemporary digital media. The course combines theoretical engagement with hands-on creative practice, helping students develop visual acumen and aesthetic judgment.

## Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Visual Analysis and Interpretation:** Analyze visual works using theoretical frameworks, understanding how spiritual, cultural, and social contexts shape meaning-making.
2. **Cross-Cultural Visual Literacy:** Compare Eastern and Western approaches to visual representation, with particular knowledge of Indian artistic traditions and contemporary global visual culture.
3. **Philosophical Understanding:** Engage with key concepts in philosophy of perception, including phenomenology, Gestalt theory, *darshan*, and cognitive theories of seeing.
4. **Creative Practice:** Complete concept-based image-making projects that demonstrate understanding of visual principles and personal creative development.
5. **Critical Writing:** Produce clear, well-researched papers that combine visual analysis with theoretical frameworks and comparative cultural perspectives.

6. **Visual Vocabulary:** Develop sophisticated language for discussing form, content, space, color, scale, and symbolic meaning in visual culture.

## **Course Evaluation**

### **Written Papers (50% total)**

#### **Paper 1: Visual Analysis (20%)**

*Length: 800-1000 words*

Choose one artwork and demonstrate understanding of an analytical approach that reveals different aspects of visual meaning.

#### **Paper 2: Visual Interpretation (30%)**

*Length: 1200-1500 words*

Compare and contrast two (or more) visual works from different cultural contexts, examining how formal/cultural/philosophical/cognitive frameworks influence interpretation and meaning making.

Draft 1 – 10%, Final Draft – 20%

### **Photography Project (30%)**

#### **Concept-Based Image-Making**

Create a series of 12-15 photographs exploring a specific concept from the course (such as sacred space, cultural identity, or phenomenology of seeing), accompanied by a 500-word artist statement connecting your work to course readings and discussions.

### **Participation (20%)**

Regular attendance, thoughtful contribution to discussions, and preparation evidenced through engagement with readings.

## **Course Content and Key Topics**

### **Foundations – What is an Image?**

## **Ontological and Epistemological Dimensions**

Investigation of what constitutes an image and how images function as vehicles of knowledge and experience. We examine the relationship between the tangible and ineffable aspects of visual encounter.

## **Space, Form, Color as Visual Dimensions**

Analysis of fundamental visual elements and their representation across different artistic mediums. Exploration of how size, scale, dimensionality (2D vs 3D), and spatial relationships create meaning.

## **Form and Content Relationships**

Investigation of the tension and relationship between form and content in visual art. Distinction between illustration and art, exploring how formal elements carry conceptual weight.

## **Modes of Representation**

### **Artistic Mediums and Their Languages**

Comparative study of painting, sculpture, photography, prints, and digital media. Examination of how different mediums afford different possibilities for meaning making.

### **Photography and Mechanical Reproduction**

Analysis of how photographic technology transformed artistic practice and cultural perception, drawing on Benjamin's influential essay.

### **Digital Media and AI**

Contemporary challenges in visual culture, including virtual reality, AI-generated imagery, and the changing nature of authentic artistic expression.

## **Cultural Frameworks of Seeing**

### **Iconic vs Aniconic Representations**

Examination of how different cultures approach visual representation, from highly detailed figuration to abstract and symbolic forms. Analysis of visual metaphors, symbols, and archetypes.

### **Indian Artistic Traditions**

Focused study of tantric art, temple architecture, sculpture, and tribal art forms including Bhil, Gond, Warli, and Pichwai traditions. Understanding of how these forms embody spiritual and cultural worldviews.

## **Philosophy of Perception**

### **Conceptual vs Non-Conceptual Thinking**

Exploration of different modes of visual cognition, drawing from Western phenomenology and Eastern concepts of *darshan*.

### **Cognitive and Spiritual Dimensions**

Study of Gestalt theory, optics, and vision science alongside spiritual approaches to visual experience in Indian philosophical traditions. Exploration of the concept of beauty.

## **Supplemental Readings**

- Arnheim, Rudolf. Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
- Kojève, Alexandre. Kandinsky: Incarnating Beauty
- Siegel, Susanna. The Contents of Visual Experience
- Berger, John. Ways of Seeing
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Eye and Mind"
- Eck, Diana. Darshan: Seeing the Divine Image (selections)
- Kepes, Gyorgy. Language of Vision
- Jung, Carl G. Man and His Symbols
- Additional contemporary articles and essays

## **Materials for Photography Project**

- Digital camera or smartphone
- Access to photo editing software