

# Materialities of Modern Art

Prof. Christine Mehring  
ARTH 49011  
Winter 2011  
Thursdays 10.30-1.20pm  
Smart Museum Seminar Room

Exploring the significances of materiality in art, particularly in modern art, this seminar will test the art historical relevances of theories and histories of materials, and, by extension, of matter, tactility, touch, things, objects, commodities, use, craft, and design. Readings will be drawn from a variety of disciplines, including aesthetics, art history, anthropology, literary theory, philosophy, visual and material culture. Part of the purpose of the class is to work closely on a small exhibition on materiality, entitled “After the Readymade,” at the Smart Museum.

Enrollment is limited to 12 students and permission of instructor is required. Reading abilities in one or more European languages preferable.

## REQUIREMENTS

- careful preparation of readings and substantial participation in class discussion
- two (or more) material-focused labels for object(s) at the Smart (based on groupings attached below); drafts due 1/25, final texts due 2/3
- one short presentation and discussion leading on related topic (see class schedule)
- collaborative student-led gallery tour of “After the Readymade” and selected other objects, 4/10
- final class presentation in preparation for a final 15-20pp. research paper, due 3/22; you are *strongly* encouraged to select a paper topic based on the object(s) you work on for your labels; otherwise, you should select a paper topic based on your short presentation, and you must be able to see original works related to your paper in person in Chicago or elsewhere

## READINGS

The following books might be helpful for purchase via various (used) book websites such as abebooks.com, bookfinder.com, or alibris.com—we will read significant portions of them for class. However, these and all other required readings are on reserve at the Regenstein Library, in most cases in electronic form.

Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*  
Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless*  
Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*  
Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia*

## SCHEDULE

### 1/3 Introduction

#### 1/13 Commodities, Readymades

Marcel Duchamp, *Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 138-142, 185-188

Molly Nesbit, "Readymade Originals"

Thierry de Duve, "The Ready-Made and the Tube of Paint," in *Kant After Duchamp*, 147-196

David Joselit, "Between Reification and Regression," in *Infinite Regress*, 71-109

Karl Marx, "The fetish character of commodities and the secret thereof" in *Capital* Vol 1

#### Further Reading:

George Baker, "The Artwork Caught by the Tail," in *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 95-159

Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," Brown, *Things*, 1-22

Arjun Appadurai, *Social Life of Things*, 3-63

Benjamin Buchloh, "Plenty of Nothing" in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, 257-283

Presentation on Marx

### 1/20 No Class (meet individually with me and/or Emily Capper about object labels)

#### 1/27 Matter, Informe; Label Workshop

##### Drafts of Labels

Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless*, 13-40, 235-252, selections from each section

Rachel Perry, "Fautrier's Jolie Juives"

Joshua Shannon, "A Neo-Dada City," in *The Disappearance of Objects*, 10-48

Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 15-6, 31, 45-52

Gaston Bachelard, "Indeterminate Earthen Matter," in *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 56-79

Aristotle, "Book Zeta," in *Metaphysics*

#### Further Reading:

Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 116-129

Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*

Rosalind Krauss, "six," in *Optical Unconscious*, 243-320

Idem, "Overcoming the Limits of Matter," in *Studies in Modern Art*, 123-141

Serge Guilbaut, "Postwar Painting Games" in *Reconstructing Modernism*, 30-79

Robert Morris, "Anti-Form," in *Morris, Continuous Project Altered Daily*, 41-49

Presentations on Aristotle, Bataille (Bachelard)

**Label Drafts Due 1/25, please circulate electronically to full class**

### 2/3 Iconographies of Materials

John Ruskin, *Stones of Venice* Vol. 3, chapter 1, 29-35

Michael Baxandall, "Material," in Baxandall, *Limewood Sculptors*, pp. 27-49, 219-221

Gene Ray, "Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime," in *Joseph Beuys, Mapping the Legacy*

Jeffrey Meikle, *American Plastic*, pp. TBD

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 36-8, 58-61, 97-99

Gaston Bachelard, "Metaphors of Hardness and Solidity," in *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 48-55

Jean Baudrillard, "Atmospheric Values: Materials" in *System of Objects*, 30, 38-44

#### Further Reading:

John Ruskin, "The Work of Iron in Nature, Art, and Policy" in *The Two Paths*, 151-197

Thomas Raff, *Die Sprache der Materialien* [not translated]

Christine Mehring, "Duck Hunting with Dieter Roth", in *Object Lessons*, 74-91

Eli Rubin, "Plastics and the Victory of Functionalist Design, 1945-1962," in *Synthetic Socialism*

Roland Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption"

Bruno Latour, "The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things," in *Matter, Materiality, and Modern Culture*, 10-21

Presentations on Ruskin, Barthes

### **Final Labels Due 2/3**

### 2/10 No Class (College Art Association Conference)

#### 2/17 Touching

Anni Albers, "Tactile Sensibility" in *Selected Writings on Design*, 69-72

Alois Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry*, Introduction and Chapter I

Alex Potts, "Tactility: The Interrogation of Medium in the Art of the 1960s"

Hubert Damisch, "Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, 287-290

Antonia Lant, "Haptical Cinema"

Michel Serres, "Veils," in *The Five Senses*, 17-84

#### Further Reading:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception*, 159-190

Johann Gottfried Herder, "Zum Sinn des Gefühls" [not translated]

Idem, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*

Adolf von Hildebrand, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*

Michael Taussig, "Tactility and Distraction"

*Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, 1-15, 186-202

Mark Paterson, *The Sense of Touch: Haptics, Affects, and Technologies*

Presentations on Riegl, Serres

## 2/24 Making

Gottfried Semper, "Style as Conditioned by the Treatment of Materials," in *Style in the technical and tectonic arts*, 218-236

William Morris, "The Revival of Handicraft," in *Art and Society*, 127-136

Georges Didi-Hubermann, "The Order of Material," in *Sculpture and Psychoanalysis*, 195-208

Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," in Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, 71-93

Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 1-8, 38-67

Richard Sennett, "Material Consciousness," in *The Craftsman*, 119-146

### Further Reading:

Gottfried Semper, "On Raw Materials," in *Style in the technical and tectonic arts*, 170-217

*The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson

Josiah McElheny, "Invisible Hand"

Elissa Auther, *String Felt Thread*, 1-46

Frederic Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War*

Presentations on Semper, Sennett

## 3/3 Time, Conservation

Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments"

Briony Fer, "Work of Salvage," in *Eva Hesse*, 78-95

Roundtable, "Uncertain Mandate" in *Eva Hesse*, 290-311

Pamela Lee, "Study for an End of the World," in *Chronophobia*, 85-153

Ann Temkin, "Wear and Care"

Idem, "Strange Fruit," in *Mortality Immortality*, 45-50

American Institute for Conservation, "Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice," available at <http://www.conservation-us.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&pageID=858&nodeID=1>

### Further Reading:

Michael Baxandall, "The Period Eye," in *Painting and Experience in 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italy*, 29-108

Nicholas Price et al., *Historical and Philosophical Issues in Conservation of Cultural Heritage*

Miguel Angel Corzo et al., *Mortality Immortality*

Ijsbrand Hummelen and Dionne Sillé, *Modern Art, Who Cares?*

Harry Cooper and Ron Spronk, *Mondrian: The Transatlantic Paintings*

*Material Matters: The Conservation of Modern Sculpture*

Date TBD: Ira Wool Collection Visit

3/10 9am-1.30pm Presentations

**Final Paper Due 3/22**

**Collaborative Gallery Tour "After the Readymade" 4/10, Time TBD**

### Object Label Choices

Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-valise*, 1935-1941 (1963 edition)  
Marcel Duchamp, *Obligations pour la Roulette de Monte Carlo*, 1924

Andy Warhol, *Cow* [wallpaper], 1971  
Andy Warhol, *Campbell Soup Can on a Shopping Bag*, 1964  
[Richard Hamilton, *A Little Bit of Roy Lichtenstein for Lawrence + Sylvia*, 1964]

Dieter Roth, *Chocolate Wafer Picture*, 1969  
Dieter Roth, *bok 3b and 3d*, 1961 [1974 edition]  
[Arturo Herrera, *Untitled*, 1997-98]  
[Jonathan Latham, *Skoobs*, 1960]

Erwin Wurm, *Instruction Drawing and Urinal from Six Famous Objects*, 1991

Myron Kozman, *Untitled* [chemical drawing], 1938  
Man Ray, *Rayogram*, 1963

John Chamberlain, *Untitled*, 1963  
John Chamberlain, *Lithograph printed on both sides of mylar*, 1973

Robert Smithson, *Movie Treatment for a Spiral Jetty*, 1970  
Helen Mirra, *Railroad Ties (Runner)*, 2000, yarn and wood, 93 x 10 ½ x 2 inches  
[Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1973]  
[Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1973]

H. C. Westermann, *Korea*, 1965  
H.C. Westermann, *Dust Pan*, 1966-69  
[H.C. Westermann, *Hand Made Axe*, undated]  
[Lorna Simpson, *III*]

Richard Rezac, *Pine*, 2003  
Richard Rezac, *Study for Pine*, 2003

Donald Lipski, *Water Lilies No. 34*, 1990  
Dan Peterman, *Excerpts from the Universal Lab (Travel Pod #1, #2, and #3)*, 2005

Claire Zeisler, *Totem III*, 1978  
Yee Sookyong, *Translated Vases*, ceramic and gilding, 2007

### **Recommended Paper Topics**

John Chamberlain

Marcel Duchamp (some French preferred)

Fiber Art

Land Art

Photography

Richard Ranc

Dieter Roth (German strongly recommended)

Andy Warhol

H.C. Westermann

Erwin Wurm (German strongly recommended)

## **Further Reading**

Archaeologies of Materiality (2005)  
Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words," *American Historical Review* (October 2005)  
Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*  
Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (2009)  
*Book of Touch* (2005)  
Bill Brown, *Sense of Things* (2003)  
Martha Buskirk, "Medium and Materiality," in *Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (2003)  
Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (1995)  
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Meaning of Things* (1981)  
*The Definitively Unfinished Duchamp* (1991)  
*Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (2005)  
*The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (2005)  
Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood* (1998)  
Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency* (1998)  
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807)  
Idem, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*  
Suzanne Hudson, Robert Ryman: *Used Paint* (2009)  
Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's and the bureaucratization of the senses* (2005)  
Idem, *Sensorium: embodied experience, technology, and contemporary art* (2006)  
Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions* (2005)  
*Lexikon des künstlerischen Materials* (2002)  
Lydia Liu, "Robinson Crusoe's Earthenware Pot," *Critical Inquiry* (January 1999)  
*Materialästhetik, Quellentexte zu Kunst, Design und Architektur* (2005)  
*The Material Renaissance* (2007)  
*Materiality* (2005)  
*Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture* (2000)  
Christine Mehring, "Modernism by the Yard," in *Blinky Palermo* (2008)  
*Rethinking materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World* (2004)  
Jennifer Roberts, *Mirror Travels: Robert Smithson and History* (2004)  
Kaja Silvermann, "The Language of Things," in *Things we don't understand* (2000)  
Leo Steinberg, "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large," in *Other Criteria* (1972)  
Idem, "Other Criteria," in *ibid*  
Anne Wagner, *Mother Stone: The Vitality of Modern British Sculpture* (2005)  
Monika Wagner, *Das Material der Kunst* (2001)  
Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold* (2005)