

Department of Visual Arts 2023/24
Course Outline

VISA 3P98 – Special Studies in Visual Culture: Picturing Animals
Autumn 2023 (D2, Section 1), Tuesdays noon-3



Thomas Doughty, *Landscape With Dog* (oil on board, 1832)
Image Source: Art Institute of Chicago (Public Domain)

Professor: Dr. Keri Cronin (keri.cronin@brocku.ca), office hours by appointment

Course Format: blended (online and in-person)

Prerequisite(s): VISA 1Q98 (minimum 60 percent), 1Q99 (minimum 60 percent) and one History of Art and Visual Culture credit or permission of the instructor.

Course Description

In 1980 John Berger famously asked “Why Look at Animals?” Berger’s question serves as a launching point for this special studies seminar. In this course we will consider representation of animals in various forms of visual culture.

Animals are everywhere in art and visual culture! From Albrecht Dürer’s *The Rhinoceros* (1515) to Damien Hirst’s *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1992), nonhuman species have been a consistent component of Western art. Further, the animal body has been at the forefront of many technical innovations in visual culture. For example, Edweard Muybridge’s photographs for his 1887 publication *Animal Locomotion* have been celebrated as both expanding the boundaries of photography and an important foundation for cinematography. Likewise, Eduardo Kac’s creation of Alba, the “GFP bunny” in 2000 raised numerous questions about the practice, ethics, and materiality of making art.

The relationship between animals and visual culture goes beyond that of mere representation and has important implications for inter-species relationships. For instance, in recent years artists like Olly and Suzi have begun to “collaborate” with nonhuman animals in their art-making endeavours, and organisations like the “Elephant Art Gallery” showcase works purportedly created by pachyderm painters.

This course will engage with such questions as: Why do animals figure so prominently in the history of art? What are the ethical implications of picturing animals? What does it mean when artists collaborate with animals? What can we learn from images of animals and what can these representations tell us about ourselves?

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Articulate why it is important to think critically about how other species are represented.
- Describe and discuss a range of examples of representations of other animals from previous eras.
- Formulate an argument about the presence (or absence) of creativity in other animals.
- Plan and carry out an in-depth, multi-stage research project.

Course Communication

Students in VISA 3P98 should regularly check their Brock email account and the course Brightspace page for announcements and updates.

If you have a question or are unsure about something, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me. If you had a research breakthrough or are excited about an aspect of your project you can let me know that too!

Please use my Brock email (keri.cronin@brocku.ca) to contact me.

Course Resources

- Brightspace: Brightspace is the Learning Management System (or LMS) for Brock. If your courses have a Brightspace page (most of them do), you will be able to access them through this link: <https://brightspace.brocku.ca/d2l/home> You will find course resources and important information about VISA 3P98 in our course Brightspace page and it is important that you check it regularly.
- Course Textbook: there is no textbook for this course. All readings will be linked through the course outline.
- Library Resources: the [Brock University Library](#) will be an important resource for you as you work on your projects for this course. Many of our readings for this course are drawn from the library's collection, but you will also need to access library resources for your project research.

Course Format

This course is a blended course which means it is a mixture of in-person and online learning activities. We will gather together at noon on Tuesdays in person. For the first part of the class we will be together in the classroom. The second half of the class is reserved for online activities—including time to complete and respond to the assigned readings—and/or individual meetings with your professor.

An online booking schedule will be set up for individual meetings with your professor. These meetings are designed to provide you with individualised mentorship and guidance on your project. It is expected that you will meet with your professor at least 3 times throughout the semester as your project develops.

Schedule

*the following is a guideline for this course and is subject to change. Any changes will be posted on Brightspace.

*we will start each class with a discussion of the visual journals for the previous week's readings.

*The second half of each class meeting will be for individual student conferences and time to work on project research and readings/visual journal for the following week.

Week 1 (September 12th)

Assigned Reading Jessica Dallow, "Introduction: But The Horse is Much, Much More," in [Race, Gender, and Identity in American Equine art : 1832 to the Present](#) (New York: Routledge, 2022), p. 1-15.

Week 2 (September 19th)

Assigned Reading: Thomas Balfe, "[With a Hem, Call Him In': Human Authority and the Animal Gaze in the Flemish Trophy Piece](#)," *Oxford Art Journal* 44 no. 1 (March 2021): 1-21.

*please bring in 6 examples of visual representations of animals to class today. 3 should be from before 2013, the remaining 3 should be from the last 10 years.

Week 3 (September 26th)

J. Keri Cronin, "[And has not art promoted our work also?': Visual Culture in Animal-Human History](#)," in *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History*, ed. Hilda Kean and Philip Howell, eds. (London: Routledge, 2018): 251-272.

Week 4 (October 3rd)

Assigned Reading: Yolandi M. Coetser, "[Cruel Art: Intersections between Art, Animals, and Morality](#)," *de arte* 55 no. 1 (January 2022): 57-75.

Oct 9-13: Reading Week Break (no classes this week)

Week 5 (October 17th)

Assigned Reading: Deirdre Madeleine Smith, "[The Origins of Animal Art](#)," *Configurations* 32 no. 1 (Winter 2023): 61-90.

Project Proposal due by 11:59 p.m. on October 20th

Week 6 (October 24th)

Assigned Reading: Alison E. Wright, "[Listening to Landseer's Polar Bears Man Proposes, God Disposes \(1864\) as a Case Study in Animal Biography and Art History](#)," *Interventions* (digital preprint)

Week 7 (October 31st)

Assigned Reading: Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, "[Death, Decay, and the Daguerreotype's Influence on 'The Black Cat'](#)," *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 19 no. 2 (Autumn 2018): 206-232.

Additional supplementary resources:

- [Aubrey Beardsley's *The Black Cat*, for Edgar Allan Poe's "Tales of Mystery and the Imagination," 1895-96](#)
- [Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Black Cat" \(1843\)](#)

*note: this Halloween-themed reading looks at the link between a horror story written by American author Edgar Allan Poe called "The Black Cat" (1843) and the daguerreotype, an early photographic process. The supplementary resources listed include a link to the Poe story. It is a horror story and contains violence. You are not required to read the story itself, but I have included the link should you wish to view it as it provides more context for the Sweeny article.

Week 8 (November 7th)

Assigned Reading: Barrett Anthony Klein and Tierney Brosius, "[Insects in Art during an Age of Environmental Turmoil](#)," *Insects* 13 no.5 (May 2022)

Week 9 (November 14th)

Assigned Reading: Simon Coghlan and Lucy Sparrow, "[The "Digital Animal Intuition:" The Ethics of Violence Against Animals in Video Games](#)," *Ethics and Information Technology* 23 no. 3 (September 2021): 215-224.

Week 10 (November 21st)

Assigned Reading: Jessica Maddox, "Introduction," in [The Internet Is for Cats: How Animal Images Shape Our Digital Lives](#) (Rutgers University Press, 2023), 1-27.

Week 11 (November 28th)

Assigned Reading: Madelene Blaer, "[Interactive Webcam Travel: Supporting Wildlife Tourism and Conservation During COVID-19 Lockdowns](#)," *Information Technology & Tourism* 25 no. 1 (March 2023): 47-69.

Week 12 (December 5th)

****Project Showcase**** (yay!)

Assignments and Course Requirements

Visual Journal (25%)

Major Project

- Project Proposal (20%)
- Unessay (35%)
- Final Reflection (20%)

There are no exams in this course.

Visual Journal: in this class students will be keeping a visual journal as a way to record their responses, thoughts, reactions, questions, and insights related to assigned course readings.

“The focus of visual journaling is not to create art or even an artful page. Rather, the visual journal is a reflective space that authors may use to engage in active meaning-making.”

Theresa Redmond, “The Art of Audiencing: Visual Journaling as a Media Education Practice,” *Journal of Media Literacy Education* 14 no.1 (2022): p139.

A visual journal is essentially a scrapbook or a robust sketchbook—essentially you jot down notes, ideas, key points, etc. from the assigned reading while also adding in additional elements to help you make connections to other ideas, images, concepts, readings and experiences. Students are encouraged to doodle, sketch, paint, add stickers/washi tape, collage, and otherwise decorate and annotate the pages of their visual journal. The blend of writing notes and creative work required for a visual journal is a low-stakes, reflective practice that allows new patterns of thinking to emerge.

The pages of your visual journal should:

- note things you found interesting or want to know more about
- use creative elements to link reading content to other ideas, sources, etc.

This is not a studio class. It doesn't matter what the pages of your visual journal look like! Artistic ability/experience is not relevant or important here. Instead, through the process of free association, doodling, collaging, annotation, etc., you are giving yourself new opportunities to think about and explore the topic. Plus, it is just a fun way to learn and explore connections across topics.

Each of our class meetings will start by students presenting their visual journaling from the previous week. This is not a formal presentation (no slides please!). Instead, we will just take turns talking about what came up for us and how we responded to the readings through visual journaling.

Major Project

This is a senior-level special topics class which means each student has the opportunity to develop an in-depth project of their choosing related to the theme of the course, the visual representation of animals.

The major project for VISA 3P98 has three related components:

1) Proposal: Your project proposal should be a minimum of 500 words (plus working bibliography) and explain the topic you wish to pursue for the major project in this course. Your proposal should include a specific topic (not just a broad theme), and preliminary ideas about what form your unessay will take.

A well-crafted proposal addresses the following questions:

- What is the specific topic you want to focus on?
- What is your research question?
- Why have you selected this topic?/What interests you about this topic?
- What do you hope to learn through this project?
- Which images/artists/authors will be important for your research? Be specific!
- How will you conduct your research? Be specific! Which keywords will you use? Which databases will you use? Which books and articles will you read?
- What will your unessay project be? Be specific—list materials, etc.

Your proposal must be accompanied by a working bibliography of sources you have consulted or plan to consult for this project. This bibliography is considered to be “working” because it should change and grow throughout the course of this project.

Due: October 20th, 11:59 p.m. (submit via Brightspace)

2) Unessay

An unessay is a non-traditional way of sharing your research findings. It is defined by what it isn't: a standard academic paper. Anything else is fair game!

Examples of unessay projects include:

- cartoons/graphic novels/zines
- videos/paintings/drawings/photographs, etc.
- podcasts
- textiles
- board game
- creative writing (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, script of a play)

Unessay projects will be evaluated on the following criteria

- effectiveness of chosen medium for the topic
- clarity of meaning
- relationship to course themes
- demonstration of research appropriate for a senior-level undergraduate course

As you think about your unessay for this class, consider the following questions:

- What have you discovered through your research for this project?
- What would you like to share with others about your discoveries on this topic?
- What is the most interesting and engaging way to convey this information?

Unessay projects will be presented to the class in a project showcase which will take place on the 5th of December, our final class meeting.

Unessay projects should be designed to be workable within the parameters of the course/classroom. If in doubt, please contact me!

Students are responsible for any costs associated with the unessay project.

Due: December 5th at the beginning of class (submit in person)

3) Final Reflection

Your final assignment in this class will be a written reflection piece, responding to specific prompts and questions relating to the projects your classmates presented in the

project showcase on the 5th of December. Further details will be provided later in the semester.

Due date: December 19th, 11:59 p.m. (submit via Brightspace)

Ungrading

The principle of “ungrading” will be used in this course. Simply put, I have made a choice to not use standardised assessment rubrics. Instead I will be helping each student navigate a path through the course content that best matches their learning goals.

Traditional grading systems can create an environment where the emphasis is on grades, not on learning. In this course I want you to have the freedom and flexibility to pursue projects and topics that are of interest to you without having to worry about “getting it exactly right.”

You will still receive grades for your work, but those grades will be determined through conversations with you where we discuss your work, your goals, and your progress through the course. I am far more interested in your learning journey than rigidly assessing a final “product.”

Brock University requires grades to be entered for each student, so I am unable to do away with grades altogether. However, your grade will be determined in consultation with you. You will be asked to provide evidence to support the grade you believe you deserve for each of the course components. Your professor reserves the right to change the grade you give yourself where appropriate.

Teaching and Learning During a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned our world upside down in many ways. It continues to be a stressful and uncertain time, and I understand this. We will have different things we may need to negotiate with respect to COVID-19—some of us may fall ill, some may be immunocompromised and are concerned about their health, some may be caring for loved ones who are ill.

As we have learned, the situation with COVID-19 can change rapidly. To stay up to date with Brock University’s COVID-19 policies and responses, please see the [Coronavirus Information Page](#).

It is important to take care of yourself. If you are feeling unwell, please rest and, if necessary, seek medical attention. If you are feeling stressed out, it is ok to take breaks. If you are sick, please do not come to class. Take care of yourself, and let me know if you need to be absent. I will help you come up with a plan for catching up once you have recovered.

Contingency Plans in the Event of Instructor Illness

If I fall ill during the semester, course activities may be moved online or rescheduled. Should this happen, any updated information will be posted to Brightspace and sent to your Brock email account.

Course Policies

Use of AI In Course Assignments

Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing tools are not banned in this class. If you are curious about these tools, you may use them in VISA 3P98 but do be aware that other courses/professors might have different policies!

We will also be dedicating some class time to collectively thinking through the pros/cons, pitfalls, ethics, and benefits of these kinds of tools.

If you plan to use these kinds of tools in this class, you are required to disclose this to me. As long as you do this, you will not be in violation of the Academic Integrity Policy (see below).

Academic Integrity

Academic misconduct is a serious offence. The principle of academic integrity, particularly of doing one's own work, documenting properly (including use of quotation marks, appropriate paraphrasing and referencing/citation), collaborating appropriately, and avoiding misrepresentation, is a core principle in university study. Students should consult [Section VII, "Academic Misconduct"](#), in the "Academic Regulations and University Policies" entry in the [Undergraduate Calendar](http://brocku.ca/webcal) (<http://brocku.ca/webcal>) to view a fuller description of prohibited actions, and the procedures and penalties. Information on what constitutes academic integrity is available at <https://brocku.ca/academic-integrity/>

Accommodations

The University is committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all students and will adhere to the Human Rights principles that ensure respect for dignity, individualised accommodation, inclusion and full participation. The University provides a wide range of resources to assist students, as follows:

a) If you require academic accommodation because of a disability or an ongoing health or mental health condition, please contact [Student Accessibility Services](mailto:askSAS@brocku.ca) at askSAS@brocku.ca or 905 688 5550 ext. 3240.

b) Medical Self-Declaration Forms (short term)

In the case of a short-term medical circumstance, if a student wishes to seek an academic consideration, please use the [Medical Self-Declaration Form](#). The request is to be made in good faith by the student requesting the academic consideration due to a short-term condition that impacts their academic activities (e.g., participation in academic classes, delay in assignments, etc.).

The period of this short-term medical condition for academic consideration must fall within a 72-hour (3 day) period. The form needs to be submitted to the instructor either during your brief absence or in cases where you are too unwell, within 24 hours of the end of your 3 day brief absence.

The medical self-declaration form may only be used once per course per term. In the case of a request for a deferred exam, the Brock University Medical Verification Form must be submitted.

[Medical Verification Form \(extended duration\)](#)

In cases where a student requests academic consideration due to a medical circumstance that exceeds 72 hours (three days) and will impact their academic activities (e.g., participation in academic classes, delay in assignments, etc.), or in the case of a final exam deferral, the medical verification form must be signed by the student and the health professional as per process set out in the Faculty Handbook III:9.4.1.

Further details can be found at: <https://brocku.ca/health-wellness-accessibility/student-health-services/>

c) If you are experiencing mental health concerns, contact the [Student Wellness and Accessibility Centre](#). [Good2Talk](#) is a service specifically for post-secondary students, available 24/7, 365 days a year, and provides anonymous assistance: <http://www.good2talk.ca/> or call 1-866-925-5454. For information on wellness, coping and resiliency, visit: <https://brocku.ca/mental-health/>

d) If you require academic accommodation on religious grounds, you should make a formal, written request to your instructor(s) for alternative dates and/or means of satisfying requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of any given academic term, or as soon as possible after a need for accommodation is known to exist.

e) If you have been affected by sexual violence, the [Human Rights & Equity Office](https://brocku.ca/human-rights/) (<https://brocku.ca/human-rights/>) offers support, information, reasonable accommodations, and resources through the Sexual Violence Support & Education Coordinator. For information on sexual violence, visit Brock's Sexual Assault and Harassment Policy or contact the Sexual Violence Support & Response Coordinator at humanrights@brocku.ca or 905 688 5550 ext. 4387.

f) If you feel you have experienced discrimination or harassment on any of the above grounds, including racial, gender or other forms of discrimination, contact the Human Rights and Equity Office at humanrights@brocku.ca.

Common Courtesy and Respect

We all have a responsibility to do our part to build a safe and effective community of learning in this course.

Common courtesy is expected in this course, and disruptive and disrespectful behaviour will not be tolerated. Due to the nature of the subjects covered in VISA 3P98 different points of view will arise. While we encourage exploration of different points of view, it is absolutely essential that these discussions unfold in a professional, kind, and courteous manner. Debating different points of view is the basis of academic inquiry, but under no circumstances will personal attacks or insults be tolerated.

Code of Conduct

Brock students should familiarise themselves with the [Brock University Code of Conduct](https://brocku.ca/student-life-success/student-affairs/#student-code-of-conduct). For more information, see: <https://brocku.ca/student-life-success/student-affairs/#student-code-of-conduct>

Late Penalties and Extensions

Any assignment not submitted by the due date will receive a late penalty of 5% per day unless prior arrangements have been made.

In the event of unexpected and extenuating circumstances, extensions may be granted. Please consult your professor to make these arrangements if required.

Sensitive Material

Due to the nature of the themes explored in this course, there will occasionally be inclusion of potentially sensitive material presented/discussed. I do not go out of my way to find “shocking” or difficult content to cover in this class, however due to the fact that we all have different backgrounds and life experiences we all experience things in different ways – in sum, what counts as “sensitive” material varies from person to person. Due to this, it is important that we explore these topics in compassionate and respectful ways, and I ask each and every person in this classroom to help create an atmosphere where these conversations can safely unfold. Having said that, if, at any time, you feel uncomfortable with a topic being discussed you may excuse yourself and leave the room. In the event this happens, I encourage you to follow up with me about this.

Important Dates

- Reading Week (no classes): October 9 - 13
- VISA 3P98 Project Proposal due October 20th
- The last day to withdraw from a D2 course without academic penalty is Nov. 7th
- VISA 3P98 unessay due December 5th
- VISA 3P98 Final Reflection due December 19th
- Last day of the semester: December 5th
- Snow/Reading Days: December 6th and 7th
- Final Exam period: December 8 - 20
 - Note: there is no final exam in VISA 3P98. The exam period dates are provided for information only.

Grades

While VISA 3P98 uses “ungrading” as a model of assessment, Brock University still requires grades to be submitted for each student. As explained elsewhere in this course outline, those grades will be established through a process of consultation. The grade standards used by Brock University are listed below.

These grade standards will guide our conversations about grading in VISA 3P98 as we will use the descriptors below. In other words, if you feel you deserve a grade between 90% and 100% on your assignment, you will need to provide evidence of how the work is “of outstanding quality that provides clear evidence of a rare talent for the subject.”

A - 90 to 100

Reserved for students where work is of outstanding quality that provides clear evidence of a rare talent for the subject and of an original and/or incisive mind.

A - 80 to 89

Awarded for excellent, accurate work in which evidence of a certain flair for and comprehension of the subject is clearly perceptible.

B - 70 to 79

Indicates competent work that shows a sound grasp of the course goals without being distinguished.

C - 60 to 69

Represents work of adequate quality which suffers from incompleteness or inaccuracy.

D - 50 to 59

Given where the minimum requirements of a course are barely satisfied.

F - 49 or lower

Means that minimum requirements have not been met and no credit has been given for the course.