PHIL 421.01: Philosophy and the Arts
MWF, 1:10-12, NESM 119

University of New Hampshire, Fall 2016
Professor William Seeley
* This course fulfills FPA INQ WI GN6

What is Art? What makes a photograph on the wall at the Museum of Modern Art different from the one on the front page of the Daily News? What makes a landscape painting more (or less!) interesting than a snapshot? Our commonsense understanding of art tells us that artworks are in some way special. Art is often beautiful. It is sometimes provocative and controversial. But it is notoriously difficult to identify just what it is that makes artworks unique. In fact, it is sometimes difficult to understand why particular artworks are considered special at all. Philosophy of Art is a branch of philosophy concerned with answers to just these types of questions.

In the first half of this course we will examine four broad issues that have defined philosophical aesthetics: What is the relationship between art and representation? What does it mean to say that an artwork expresses an emotion? What role does the formal structure of artworks play in explanations of art? What is an aesthetic experience, and what role, if any, does our knowledge of a culture play in shaping these experiences? In the second half of the course we will consider a range of contemporary philosophical puzzles associated with the following particular art forms: painting, installation art, conceptual art, dance, and music.

Finally, despite disagreements about the nature of art most would agree that art must be experienced to be understood. Therefore, we will look at as many artworks as we can as illustrations of the views discussed and, time and circumstances permitting, engage collaboratively in making some art on our own.