This course will be oriented by questions about the relationships between sensation, thought, judgment, and criticism, as well as image, sound, and concept. We will consider traditional aesthetic questions such as the nature of beauty, the meaning of aesthetic judgment, and the definition of art. We will also consider whether there is a boundary between art and design, asking, for example, whether practical items like chairs, teapots, or even typographical layout can be understood aesthetically. But we will also engage more recent critiques or complications of traditional philosophy of art: problems associated with the cultural specificity of aesthetic traditions and definitions of art; the fraught relationship between art and money; the explosion of possibilities for aesthetic communication offered by new media technologies and platforms; and problems of originality and copying, or evocation and repetition.

The texts and works of art to be studied will be both historical and contemporary. Our aesthetic phenomena will extend to a variety of media, including image, sound, mixed media, site-specific installation, and performance. In addition to engaging texts and classroom-projectable or playable art, students will be asked to visit and write about works in local museums, galleries, theaters, performance venues, and similar spaces.

Authors to be addressed will include some of the following: Plato and Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Franz Fanon, Arthur Danto, Nelson Goodman, Michel Foucault, Angela Davis, Lucy Lippard, Noël Carroll, Rosalind Krauss, Stuart Hall, Annelies Monsérel, Jean-Luc Nancy, Laura Mulvey, Paul Gilroy, James Elkins, Okwui Enwezor, Yuriko Saito, Boris Groys, and Robin James.

Students will write two papers: first, a theoretical engagement with a major topic in classical aesthetics; second, a scaffolded writing project using the theoretical tools developed in the class to critically engage a work (or a cluster of works) located in a Pittsburgh-area art space.

The only philosophical background necessary for the course is successful completion of Basic Philosophical Questions (UCOR 132) or its equivalents.