

## SUMMER 2011: COMIC BOOKS AND “HIGH” ART IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

<b>ARTH389E</b>	<b>Dark Knight and Da Vinci: Comic Books and “High” Art in the 21st Century</b> Summer Session II (3 credits)	<b>Instructor:</b> <b>Abram Fox</b> Office: Art/Sociology 4212 Email: abramfox@gmail.com Phone: 301-405-1488 Office Hours: 1:00-2:00 p.m MTuWThF and by appointment
Class Meets:	2:00 p.m. – 3:20 p.m. MTuWThF Art/Sociology 3215	
Websites:	arth389e.ning.com elms.umd.edu	

### Course Goals:

This course introduces consideration of comic books, graphic novels, and other types of sequential art as aesthetic objects. Participants will explore the history of sequential art and the invention of the comic book, the relation of comics to the world of “high” art and their absence from the art historical canon. In-class discussion and online reflections will chart the course set by the participants and will lead into unexpected and interesting territory.

The successful student in this course will:

- Be able to recognize and understand key stylistic and aesthetic principles of art, and be able to apply those principles to comics.
- Be able to identify and understand the pictorial strategies utilized by comic book artists for narrative purposes.
- Have familiarity with the wide range of comics genres, including, but not limited to, superhero, underground/indie, memoir/biography, historical fiction, historical non-fiction, abstract, and humor comics.
- Be able to discuss comics in relation to the existing framework of art history and fine art.

Please note that success in this course requires regular visitation of course space on two separate websites, ELMS and Ning. Required readings, grade rubrics, and other course documents will be available at our course’s ELMS site. All content generation, including reflections, will occur at our Ning site.

### Required texts:

- Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1994. ISBN: 006097625X
- David Mazzucchelli, *Asterios Polyp*. New York: Pantheon, 2009. ISBN: 978-0307377326
- Daniel Clowes, *Wilson*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2010. ISBN: 1770460071
- Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*. New York: Pantheon, 2003. ISBN: 978-037571452

*\*All of these books are available online and at most bookstores and comic shops, including Big Planet Comics ([www.bigplanetcomics.com](http://www.bigplanetcomics.com)), 7315 Baltimore Avenue (Rte 1) in College Park, next to Bentley’s and across from College Park Shopping Center\**

Other readings will be required during the course of the semester, as indicated on the syllabus. Those available on ELMS ([elms.umd.edu](http://elms.umd.edu)) are noted on the syllabus and can be found by clicking on Course Documents on the left sidebar within our ELMS space.

Please be aware that several works on the syllabus contain graphic content that may offend some sensibilities, including explicit language and scenes of a sexual nature. If you anticipate such material may prevent you from completing required work, I suggest you reconsider your enrollment in ARTH389E.

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### Grading:

Your semester grade is broken into the following elements. Detailed descriptions of each assignment are provided at the end of this syllabus. Grading rubrics for each assignment are posted on ELMS.

*Project Track (50%):* 5% Project Proposal  
5% Meeting with Instructor  
10% Comics/Art Paper Assignment  
15% Final Project  
15% Final Project Presentation

*Reflective Track (50%):* 40% Reflection Posts  
10% In-Class Participation

### Policies:

**General Classroom Policy:** This course is an upper-level university seminar. All students enrolled in this course are adults, and the expectation is that all students act as such. This syllabus is not a comprehensive contract of all course rules. It is a basic outline of the course and of the relationship between instructor and student. You agree to do the work yourself, put forth the appropriate effort and hand it in on time, and I agree to grade it fairly, in accordance with my own expertise and judgment.

**Inclement Weather:** In the event of possible inclement weather, please check [http://www.umd.edu/emergencypreparedness/weather\\_emer/](http://www.umd.edu/emergencypreparedness/weather_emer/) for details on university closings. If campus is closed or the instructor is unable to make it to campus due to inclement weather, information on making up assignments and other class work will be announced via email and posted on ELMS.

**Academic Accommodations:** If a student has a documented disability and wishes to discuss academic accommodations, please contact the instructor as soon as possible. The rules for eligibility and the types of accommodations a student may request can be reviewed on the Disability Support Services (DSS) website: [http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/receiving\\_serv.html](http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/receiving_serv.html)

DSS requires that students request an Accommodation Form each semester. **It is the student's responsibility** to present the form to the instructor as proof of eligibility for accommodations.

**Academic Integrity:** The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity visit the Office of Student Conduct web site: [www.studentconduct.umd.edu/](http://www.studentconduct.umd.edu/)

To further exhibit your commitment to academic integrity, remember to sign the Honor Pledge on all examinations and assignments: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination (assignment)."

**Religious Observances:** The University System of Maryland policy states that students should not be penalized in any way for participation in religious observances. Students shall be allowed, whenever practicable, to make up academic assignments that are missed due to such absences. It is the student's responsibility to contact the instructor, and make arrangements for make-up work or examinations. The student is responsible for providing written notification to the professor within the first two weeks of the semester. The notification must identify the religious holiday(s) and date(s). For additional information, please visit the University of Maryland Policies and Procedures at <http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii510a.html>

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### **Course Outline:**

This is a very brief outline of the content for this class. A more detailed course calendar, which includes reflection dates, is posted on our course Ning and on ELMS. All content and schedule subject to change.

### **Week 1: Introduction**

*Note:* There is no class on Wednesday, July 13

Readings: ARTH389E Syllabus [ELMS]  
Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, Chapters 1-2, 6-7  
Charles Hatfield, “Defining Comics in the Classroom; or, The Pros and Cons of Unfixability” in *Teaching the Graphic Novel*, 19-27. [ELMS]

### **Week 2: The Many Looks of Daniel Clowes’s *Wilson***

Readings: Daniel Clowes, *Wilson*  
Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, Chapters 3-5  
Paul Lopes, “Culture and Stigma: Popular Culture and the Case of Comic Books,” *Sociological Forum* 21, no. 3 (Sept. 2006): 387-414. [ELMS]  
Henry John Pratt, “Narrative in Comics,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67, no. 1 (2009); 107-117. [ELMS]  
“‘I Could Relate Very Closely to Your Isolation’: A Conversation Between Daniel Clowes and Jonathan Lethem,” in *The Best American Comics Criticism*, 331-342. [ELMS]

Assignments: Project Proposal Due July 21

### **Week 3: Word and Text, and *Jimmy Corrigan***

Readings: Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*  
Joseph Witek, “The Arrow and the Grid,” in *A Comics Studies Reader*, 149-156. [ELMS]  
Chris Ware, “I Think...,” in *An Anthology of Graphic Fiction, Cartoons, and True Stories*, 364-369. [Course Reserves]  
Douglas Wolk, “Why Does Chris Ware Hate Fun?” in *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*, 347-358. [ELMS]  
Gene Kannenberg, Jr., “The Comics of Chris Ware,” in *A Comics Studies Reader*, 306-324. [ELMS]

Assignment: Meeting with instructor, scheduled at mutual convenience

### **Week 4: Pushing the Boundaries of Comics in *Asterios Polyp***

Readings: David Mazzucchelli, *Asterios Polyp*  
Ted Cohen, “High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 2 (Spring, 1999): 137-143. [ELMS]  
Charles Hatfield, “An Art of Tensions,” in *A Comics Studies Reader*, 132-148. [ELMS]

Assignments: Comics/Art Paper Due August 4

### **Week 5: Art in the Digital Era**

Readings: Selections from *An Anthology of Graphic Fiction...* [Course Reserves]  
David Carrier, “Posthistorical Art; or, Comics and the Realm of Absolute Knowledge,” in *The Aesthetics of Comics*, 107-123. [ELMS]

### **Week 6: Final Presentations**

Assignments: Final Projects Due August 16, Student Presentations August 16-18