Course Description: When and where is the time of the history of art? The comfortable evolutionary narratives upon which works of art are hung appear increasingly suspect when viewed from post-colonial perspectives. Mounting interest in the cultural production of those places whose times have traditionally been subordinated or occluded indicates that the temporal exclusions demanded by the dominant status of western time are becoming intellectually indefensible. The hierarchization of the world’s time zones based upon criteria of economic, military, and cultural power, all of which have so decisively shaped the narratives of art history, remain largely unrecognized. Can the discipline adjust to the idea of heterochrony, the realization that different forms of time may be jostling with each other in what each calls the “contemporary”? If heterochrony is acknowledged, on what basis can we relate non-synchronous contemporaneities to one another?

In this unique situation, students of the visual have also become more sensitive to the complex temporality of the work of art. There is a growing tendency to view visual art as a presentation as much as a representation, as much an object that has the power to create time--what might be called aesthetic time--as one that represents the time of a particular culture and historical moment. Art history’s tendency to sacrifice “art” in favor of “history” in the interest of making past objects “readable” cannot be its only agenda. What does it mean to approach the work as if it makes its own history? While we may ascribe a work a place within a historical continuum, we are also aware that the process of historicization would not even begin unless our response and interpretation were not called into being by the work itself. The complex interaction of object with subject and its implications for the project of historical writing are more critical than ever.

How does the discipline come to terms with these two relatively recent developments asking us to rethink fundamental tenets of its theoretical structure? Leading theorists argue that works of art have the uncanny ability to break time, and that having done so, their distinct reception in different moments depends on some preordained temporal unfolding, but on their translation—a translation not only from the customary “visual” into “textual” but also from one time into another. The readings collected here deal with the heterochronicity of both historical interpretation and the image itself. Temporality takes many forms, while works of art create time even as they provoke their own responses.

Requirements: 1. This is primarily a course dedicated to reading and discussing the assigned texts. Students will be expected to come to class well prepared to take part in discussion. Each week two members of the class will be asked to introduce the readings. These presentations should be no longer than five to ten minutes long. They should lay out the main arguments and comment on them. You can conclude with a couple of questions you think would be worth discussing by the class as a whole. Speakers can get together to work out how best to deal with
the assignment. Your comments (four or five pages long) should be turned in following the presentation.

2. You will be asked to write two short papers (ten pages long). A. Write a paper about a single work of art using an anachronic or heterochronic approach to understanding its historical time. B. How do the ideas discussed in this course affect your understanding of the concept of the “period” in the area in which you have chosen to specialize? The first is due at mid-term (October 18), the second at our last meeting (December 6).

Course Schedule:

**Sept 6 Introduction:** Who’s who and what’s what? Aims of the course and how it works.
Requirements.

**Sept 13 History’s Time:** Historicism and its criticism. To what other philosophies of history can we turn? What is the role of the image in accounts of the past?

**Sept 20 Time and the Other:** What is the relation of local to global time? What forms of power dictate that one be considered dominant and the other subaltern? Can one be reconciled with the other?

**Sept 27 Time and the Image:** How do we experience images? Does the image make its own time?
Oct 4  Time in Art History I:  What is the agency of the work of art? How does its potential “life” affect received notions of art historical time?

Oct 11 Time in Art History II:  What are the consequences of the recognition that images belong to more than one temporality? How might this affect the work of the art historian?

Oct 18 Modernism’s Time:  What was modernism? Is it still alive?

Oct 25 Postmodernism’s Time:  Why has it been so difficult to periodize the history of art since modernism?  What debates swirl around the idea of “postmodernism?”

Nov 1 Periodizing Time:  What is the role of the “period” in the history of art? Can we do without it?

Nov 8 NO CLASS (Election Day Holiday)

Nov 15 NO CLASS

Nov 22 Contemporary Time I: Can “the contemporary” be regarded as a period or have we come to the end of time? Is the nature of “our” artistic moment eternal?

Nov 29 Contemporary Time II: Is “the contemporary” a period?

Dec 6 Student Presentations: Brief summaries of your second paper. Questions and (possibly) answers.