



Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts

KONA30, The Autonomy of Art: Examining Arts Role in a Democratic Society , 15 credits

Konstens autonomi: Utforska konstens roll i ett demokratiskt samhälle, 15 högskolepoäng
First Cycle / Grundnivå

Details of approval

The syllabus was approved by Department Board of Malmö Art Academy on 2024-11-26. The syllabus comes into effect 2025-01-01 and is valid from the spring semester 2025.

General information

Optional course for the BFA programme (KGFKO)

Language of instruction: English

Main field of study *Specialisation*

Fine Arts G1N, First cycle, has only upper-secondary level entry requirements

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes:

Understand the core arguments for and against the autonomy of art, as presented by 18th-century philosophers and later critiques.

Explore how the concept of the autonomy of art informs and limits your own artistic practice. Compare how different historical critiques align or conflict with the decisions you make as an artist.

Develop a personal stance on the relevance of the autonomy of art in your own practice. Reflect on how this concept influences your approach to artistic production, in what ways you support or critique it, and how you relate to societal, political, institutional or economic factors in your art making.

Course content

In 2021 the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis (Kulturanalys) published a study on artistic freedom and the arm's length principle criticizing concluding that parts of state grant-allocation is governed and implemented with detrimental effect on artistic freedom as well as that there is lack of understanding and application of the arm's length principle at regional and municipal levels. The report sparked a resent discussion in Sweden about artistic freedom and autonomy both within media and in academic circles most notably the "counter report" written by three researchers at Södertörns Högskola.

The concept of the autonomy of art has been debated ever since it was formulated by Immanuel Kant in "Critique of the Power of Judgment" (1790) and elaborated by the romantic philosopher Friedrich Schiller in the "Kallias Letters"(1793).

The debate surrounding the autonomy of art has significantly evolved since the 18th century. Thinkers such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels critiqued the idea, emphasizing that art cannot be detached from the material and social conditions in which it is created. In contrast, the *l'art pour l'art* ("art for art's sake") movement, championed by figures like Oscar Wilde, asserted the independence of art from moral, political, or utilitarian functions. Later, the Frankfurt School, with thinkers like Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, offered critical reflections on art's autonomy, highlighting its complex relationship with culture and capitalism. More recently, the concept has been further scrutinized through feminist, post-colonial, and institutional critiques, each challenging art's supposed independence in favor of examining its embeddedness in power structures and societal dynamics.

In the course we will read texts to trace this history from the 18th century until today and explore limitations and possibilities to see if there is something that is not exhausted through these critiques of the once, and maybe still, radical concept of an autonomous art, and how it could be redefined today. We will also discuss the report and difference between artists and arts autonomy as well as the history of public funding for art.

Course design

We will meet in seminars to engage in close readings and discussions of the texts. Each text should be read individually before the meeting. Additionally, students are expected to prepare by highlighting or marking paragraphs they wish to discuss and/or formulating questions to pose to the group.

Assessment

Assessment of the course consists of active participation in class.

The examiner, in consultation with Disability Support Services, may deviate from the regular form of examination in order to provide a permanently disabled student with a form of examination equivalent to that of a student without a disability.

Grades

Grading scale includes the grades: Fail, Pass

For the grade pass the student needs to be at least 80% present at lectures, seminars and workshops and the grade pass on tasks, if any.

Entry requirements

General requirements