

University of Lethbridge, Calgary Campus
Art 3255y "Visual Commercial Culture" Summer I 2008

Instructor: David Coman
Email: david.coman@uleth.ca

Fridays 6:00 – 8:50pm, Saturdays 9:00 – 11:50am
Room: N 906
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course is an investigation of the visual aspects of our modern-day commercial culture. A range of diverse topics will be covered which will allow us to explore the dynamic relationship that exists today between art and commerce. Theoretical strategies for interpreting and understanding contemporary culture will be integrated with detailed study of advertising, graphic design, commercial architecture and product design. The examples discussed in class will be diverse – posters, logos, magazine ads, shopping malls, museums, web design, and so on. The intention is to gain as wide a perspective as possible in order to gain the most insight on the broader issues introduced in the lectures and readings. An important note: we will be studying both contemporary **and** historical issues. One of the goals of this course will be to integrate our understanding of 21st century trends with ongoing attention to the history of art and design in the 20th century.

Readings

There is no textbook for this course, but a course reader will be available for purchase. You will also be assigned selected readings on the web as we go. A course web page will be maintained where the images from each week's lecture will be made available several days ahead of time. The address is:
<http://classes.uleth.ca/200802/art3255y>

Course Evaluation

There will be an in-class mid-term exam and a take-home final exam. There will be a 5-page written assignment due by the final class session. The assignment is fully described on page 3 of this syllabus. **Late assignments** will be accepted up to five calendar days after the due date, with a deduction of 20% per day late.

Students who fail to write final exams must provide satisfactory evidence of illness or extenuating circumstances AND must have the approval of the Dean for a makeup exam. For missed exams, a grade of F (0 marks) will be given. Plagiarism, cheating or other forms of misconduct will result in failure of part or all of the course components and will be reported. See the University of Lethbridge Calendar (p. 74 of the 2008 – 2009 Calendar) for details of the University's policies with respect to student conduct.

Breakdown of marks

First Test (May 30)	30%
Written assignment (due June 14)	40%
Final Exam (take home, due Friday June 20, 6pm)	30%

Grading scheme:

A+ 95-100	B+ 82-85	C+ 70-73	D+ 58-61
A 90-94	B 78-81	C 66-69	D 50-57
A- 86-89	B- 74-77	C- 62-65	F 0-49

Itinerary

May 9	Introduction to Issues of Visual Culture
May 10	The Origins of Consumerism – 19th Century World’s Fairs and the rise of Department Stores Reading: Rosalind Williams, “The Dream World of Mass Consumption” Reading: Max Hollein, “Wonderland: Spectacles of Display...”
May 16	Evolution of Industrial Design, Commercial Architecture (part 1: the “Aesthetic” Movement, Arts & Crafts, Art Nouveau) Reading: See links page
May 17	Evolution of Industrial Design, Commercial Architecture (part 2: The rise of “Modernism” through “Post-Modernism”) Reading: See links page
May 23	The Origins and Evolution of Advertising in the 20th century Reading: Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image” (second half of class session – 1 hour review for midterm)
May 24	Theories and Strategies of Contemporary Advertising Reading: Susan Josephson, “Advertising”
May 30	- Mid-term Exam -
May 31	Contemporary Advertising (continued) Reading: Jib Fowles, “The Dynamics Behind the Advertisement” Reading: Robin Anderson, “The Road to Ruin...”
June 6	International Design Today (part 1) Reading: See links page
June 7	International Design Today (part 2) Reading: See links page
June 13	The Commercial Culture of the Web Reading: See links page
June 14	- Main written assignment due - The Imagery of Counter-Culture: Anti-Corporatism and Anti-Advertising (second half of class session) 1 hour review for Final Exam Reading: See links page
June 20	Take home final exam is due

Topic for written assignment:

Due June 14, 2008. **Late assignments** will be accepted up to one week after the due date, with a deduction of 20% per day late.

Your written assignment will be a study of the dynamics of commercial imagery. There are many strategies that are used within commercial imagery to draw the viewer into a dynamic engagement with the fictitious world within the advertisement. Often, the promotion will have little to do with the product or service being advertised.

For example, in our first class session we examine an ad for Mercedes in which numerous visual devices function to engage the *eye and mind* of the viewer, all in a single static image. The viewer is offered only an obscure glimpse of the product itself. Much more prominent is the story line and cast of characters. The organization of the formal elements of the image (composition) is also very careful, in order to drive the message home most effectively.

Your task is to find at least THREE examples of advertising imagery and discuss them according to the following criteria:

1) Narrative

How does the ad tell a “story”?

What moment(s) in the story are shown and why?

Where is the story set, and how does this setting contribute to the story?

2) Composition and Design

Analyze the use of colour, light, form, balance, contrast, emphasis and rhythm

How do these contribute to the overall “vision” of the advertisement?

Your search should be confined to magazine ads. Choose your examples carefully. Cast a wide net as you get started, then refine your selections down to those which are most interesting, complex and effective.

You should *analyze* and *evaluate* each example carefully. I use the word *evaluate* for a reason – try to sharpen your *critical eye*. Don’t be afraid to scrutinize your examples and think carefully about the successfulness of each promotional campaign. How *innovative* is the imagery? Does it borrow from imagery used in other ads? How does this ad increase the appeal of the product? Don’t be afraid to give your own thoughtful speculations on the hidden reasons behind each promotional strategy.

Be careful! Avoid subjective responses such as “I don’t like this ad.” You should NOT go into detailed discussion of why a product or service is a good idea or how much you enjoy using it. You must NOT discuss the viability or success of any product or marketing campaign in any way that is not directly relevant to the *imagery* used. Remember, this is an art assignment, not a marketing or economics assignment!

You may draw upon ideas in your course readings, class notes, books, articles etc. if you like, but it is NOT required. Nor is any library research required. The main point is to *really* look at your examples and to choose them carefully. As always, please don’t hesitate to be in frequent contact with me by e-mail as your work progresses.

Please follow these physical criteria: 5-6 pages text, approx. 300 words per page, double-spaced, 12-point “Arial” or “Times” font families. You must include a title page and a single staple in the upper left corner – no binders or duo-tangs please. Include illustrations of your examples at the back of your essay (originals preferred if possible).