

# Identity, Politics, & War in 20th-Century Catalan Art

## Course Details

**Course Designator & Number: BCLA 3041**

**Number of Credits: 3**

**Language of Instruction: English**

**Contact Hours: 45**

**Instructor: xxx**

## Course Description

Catalonia has long been a center of radical thought and culture, especially during the Spanish Civil War, when Barcelona became the heart of the Republican cause. Throughout the 20th Century, the region played a key role in shaping avant-garde artistic movements while serving as a battleground for opposing political visions. This course examines the intersection of art and politics in Catalonia, focusing on how artistic production functioned as a vehicle for national identity and propaganda, as well as a tool for anti-Fascist resistance and left-wing transformation. Spanning from the turn of the century through the Spanish Civil War and well into Franco's dictatorship, students will explore key cultural moments—from the rise of bourgeois Modernisme in the early 1900s to the radical politics of the avant-garde in the 1930s and the cultural opposition to Franco in the 1960s. Special attention is given to Civil War propaganda and the role of the three leading figures of the Catalan avant-garde: Picasso, Miró, and Dalí.

Through multiple site visits, critical analysis, and close examination of architectural landmarks, paintings, artworks, posters, and films, students will explore how visual culture and artistic discourse shaped and responded to Catalan national identity, revolutionary politics, and anti-Francoist resistance. With a focus on close reading and direct engagement with artwork,

students are encouraged to interpret and analyze these pieces within their historical and political contexts.

## Course Objectives

Through their participation in this course, students will:

- Examine how art functioned as a political tool in 20th-Century Catalonia, exploring its role in national identity formation, propaganda, and anti-fascist resistance.
- Analyze avant-garde artistic movements in Catalonia, tracing their evolution from early Modernisme to the politically charged aesthetics of the Spanish Civil War and Francoist repression.
- Develop close reading skills by interpreting paintings, architecture, graphic design, and film, assessing how Catalan artists responded to political upheaval.
- Gain a deeper understanding of Barcelona's historical landscape through on-site engagement with artworks, architectural landmarks, and museum collections, connecting artistic production to historical and political contexts.
- Compare different political uses of art and culture, distinguishing between propaganda, resistance, and state-sponsored cultural production.
- Explore the role of historically disenfranchised groups, such as working-class movements, anti-Francoist artists, and LGBTQ+ artists, in shaping Catalan cultural identity and artistic resistance.
- Strengthen visual analysis skills through written and oral interpretations of individual artworks, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of how visual culture reflects and shapes historical memory in Catalonia.

## Experiential Learning & Field Visits

Field study and experiential learning components may include:

- Colònia Güell (Unit 1)
- Montjuïc and the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition (Units 2 & 3)
- Raval tour (Units 3 & 8)
- MNAC Civil War Collection (Units 2 & 4)
- Republican Pavilion (Units 3, 4, 5)
- Museu Picasso (Unit 5)
- Fundació Miró (Unit 6)
- Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, in Figueres (Unit 7)

## Course Prerequisites

None

## Required Reading / Materials

### Books

- Bou, Enric, and Jaume Subirana, eds. *The Barcelona Reader: Cultural Readings of a City*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017.
- Casanovas, Pompeu, Montserrat Corretger, and Vicent Salvador. *The Rise of Catalan Identity: Social Commitment and Political Engagement in the Twentieth Century*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019.
- Daniel, Marko. "Spain: Culture at War." In *Art and Power: Europe Under the Dictators 1930–45*, edited by Dawn Ades, Tim Benton, David Elliott, and Iain Boyd Whyte, 63–68. London: Hayward Gallery, 1995.
- Graham, Helen, and Jo Labanyi, eds. *Teaching Representations of the Spanish Civil War*. New York: Modern Language Association, 2007.
- Labanyi, Jo, and Peter Anderson, eds. *The Spanish Civil War: A Cultural and Historical Reader*. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Orwell, George. *Homage to Catalonia*. London: Penguin Books, 2025.

### Films

- Buñuel, Luis, dir. *Las Hurdes: Tierra Sin Pan*. 1933. France: Ramón Acín, 1933.
- Ivens, Joris, dir. *The Spanish Earth*. 1937. Spain/Netherlands: Contemporary Historians.
- Loach, Ken, dir. *Land and Freedom*. 1995. United Kingdom: PolyGram Filmed Entertainment.

# Grading

## Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

## Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Participation in class	15%
Quizzes (8 at 2.5%)	20%
Fieldwork reflections (3 at 5%)	15%
Midterm project (project 10%, presentation 10%)	20%
Final paper	30%
<b>Overall grade</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Assessment Details

Active participation is essential in this course. Students are expected to attend each class and all field study course components as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy. Attendance alone is not sufficient—students are expected to engage actively in discussions, demonstrate critical inquiry, and contribute thoughtfully to class dialogue. Moreover, students are also expected to read all assigned materials, which are generally 25-30 pages per week, and students should come prepared to analyze and discuss the material. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Graded assignments include:

- **Participation:** Students must attend all class sessions and field study components and actively participate in discussions. Engagement will be assessed based on the quality of contributions, critical inquiry, and interaction with course materials and site visits.
- **Quizzes:** Short multiple-option quizzes at the end of each topic (see Content below).
- **Fieldwork reflections:** Short response papers (1-2 pages) to 3 site visits of the student's choice.

- **Midterm project:** Submission of a close reading project (audiovisual or otherwise) based on an artwork of the student's choice (painting, photograph, poster, film, or architectural site), and a 10-minute presentation.
  
- **Final paper:** An 8–10 page analysis of an artwork of the student's choice (different from the one analyzed for the midterm project), chosen in consultation with the faculty member.

# Course Content

## Unit 1

### Turn of the Century: Industrialization of Catalunya & Modernisme

- Industrialization and class tensions: the rise of a new bourgeoisie parallel to the formation of labor movements
- Modernisme and its ideological foundations
- Colònia Güell as a case study of industrial paternalism and worker control
- Key figures: Antoni Gaudí, Lluís Domènech i Montaner, Josep Puig i Cadafalch

## Unit 2

### Noucentisme, Catalan Nationalism, & the Conservative Reaction

- Noucentisme as a state-backed cultural movement designed to suppress revolutionary radicalism
- Tensions between bourgeois Catalan nationalism and anarcho-syndicalist labor movements
- The 1929 Barcelona International Exposition as a case study of classicism, the elevation of order and clarity, and the aesthetics of civility
- Key sites: Teatre Grec, MNAC, Poble Espanyol
- The divide between Catalan intellectuals, conservative elites, and militant workers

## Unit 3

### The Avant-Garde: Architecture & Urbanism

- Clarification of terminology: Modernisme refers to Art Nouveau, while modernist architecture aligns with the International Style

- The avant-garde as a break from nationalist and historicist architectural traditions, both politically and aesthetically radical
- The Mies van der Rohe Pavilion as a counterpoint to the rest of the 1929 architecture in Montjuïc
- GATCPAC as a politically engaged architectural collective, influenced by Le Corbusier, advocating for functionalist urban planning in El Raval as a response to poverty and inequality
- Josep Lluís Sert and his role in connecting Catalonia to the international modernist movement, previewing the Spanish Pavilion in Paris (1937)

## Unit 4

### The Spanish Civil War: Art as a Political Weapon

- The historical context and ideological struggles of the war
- The 1937 International Exhibition in Paris as a visual representation of a divided Spain: two Spains, two pavilions
- The Republican Pavilion as a cultural and political statement, featuring works by Josep Lluís Sert, Pablo Picasso, and Joan Miró
- Renau, Monleón, Fontserè: Political posters as tools of propaganda and resistance
- Buñuel & Joris Ivens: The role of documentary filmmaking in shaping the war's narrative

## Unit 5

### Picasso

- A life in exile: Málaga, Barcelona, and Paris
- The avant-garde and political engagement: Cubism, Surrealism, and the Communist movement
- *Guernica* in Paris (context and meaning): Art as an antifascist statement
- Picasso's relationship with Barcelona, Catalan identity, and Francoism

## Unit 6

### Miró

- Joan Miró: life and Catalan identity
- Paris, Surrealism, and political engagement
- *Aidez l'Espagne* (context and meaning): monetizing art for political purposes
- Exile and return: Miró in Mallorca

## Unit 7

### Dalí

- Salvador Dalí's life and Catalan identity until the Civil War: dream-like landscapes and political indifference
- Dalí's expulsion from Surrealism in 1939 during the Civil War
- Case study: *The Enigma of Hitler* (1939)
- Dalí goes solo: the cultivation of myth and artistic persona
- Dalí's embrace of Franco's dictatorship

## Unit 8

### Art Under Franco: Dau al Set, Tàpies, Brossa, & Queering the Raval

- The Dau al Set group and the role of avant-garde art in resisting Francoist cultural repression
- Antoni Tàpies and Joan Brossa: abstraction, visual poetry, and censorship
- Ocaña and LGBTQ+ artistic resistance in the 1970s Raval

# Policies

## Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

## University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

### Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

### Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).