**Syllabus**

This course will re-examine art history taught and practiced in academic communities. It will concentrate on theoretical developments that barely reached scholars from CEE/fSU during the Cold War and thereafter. We will ponder on relevance of these issues for teaching and writing art history in the region. We will focus on the move toward Visual Studies/Visual Culture that insists that there is nothing "natural" or "universal" about claims to aesthetic value and connects images to the social and political contexts in which they were produced.

Week I: "Art History - Aesthetics - Visual Culture"

In the United States, the nature of art history as a discipline has been challenged in recent years by the introduction of identity based forms of interpretation. Tried and true methodologies such as stylistic analysis, iconography, social history, and psychoanalysis, have been joined by feminism, queer theory, postcolonial, and postnational studies. In this context, the discipline's traditional attachment to a canon of "great" works of art has also been questioned. The diversity of values that currently informs the historical interpretation of art means that it is impossible to arrive at a concensus as to what counts as aesthetic quality. As a consequence, art historians increasingly turn thir attention to forms of visual culture that have not previously been thought worthy of attention.

Discussion Points: How do the intellectual traditions of different nation states affect the disciplinary status and cultural work of art history? How do these traditions react to issues of identity such as gender and ethnicity? What political agendas might promote or prevent their assimilation?

Week II: "Implications - Applications - Arts and Humanities Curricula"

In East Central Europe and the former Soviet Union, art historical studies have been corrupted and a simplified social history of art was practiced in the second half of the twentieth century. Art was turned into an obedient servant of propaganda. Eleven years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, a new reading of the history of art after 1945 in the region is still rare. Instead, a new grand narrative, which locates unofficial art production in the center, took root. There are two concurrent versions of the history of art in which myth of the artist (communist hero/ avant-garde martyr) and notions of "progress" resemble one another. The course will address the importance of the re-examination of traditional boundaries of an art historical discourse in CEE/fSU.

It is believed that that prevailing paradigm of vulgar sociological explanation of art can be overcome by the turn toward culture. We will explore the pedagogy of Visual Culture/Visual Studies and will learn about scope, objectives, methods and curricula developments of the three existing programs in the universities of the USA (the University of Rochester, State University of New York at Stony Brook, and University of Chicago).

Discussion Points: Questioning of so-called one universal/general/objective history of art, re-considering research methods, addressing the question of the author's function. The consequences of the Cultural Turn as displacement of the social in favor of culture viewed as linguistic and representational in humanities and social sciences. A realignment of the disciplines (including raise of cultural analysis) in contemporary university. An exploration of the possibility of educational transfer and the use of international experience for the teaching of humanities in CEE/fSU.

Week III: "Preposterous History. History, Memory, Trauma"

The focus on history of art as a practice in an interdisciplinary framework that places art emphatically within the network of other cultural practices ("after the cultural turn") solicits reflection on the historical (as in "art *history"*). Three propositions: 1) the importance of "close reading" as a methodological starting point and practice, 2) the fundamental interdisciplinarity of art, and 3) "preposterous history"--together constitute a revisionist methodological position for art historical practice after the turn to visual culture. We will make a case for "preposterous history," a concept that involves a reversal of past and present. This reversal, which puts what came chronologically first ("pre-") as an aftereffect behind ("post") its later recycling, is a way of "doing history" that carries productive uncertainties and illuminates highlights.

We will compare and contrast poststructuralist reflections on representation and history with the more recent interest in trauma and memory. Poststructuralists argued that our versions of historical reality are determined by conventional mechanisms of textual construction; this critique was taken up as a denial of the very existence of a historical reality. However, as we begin speaking about the past, we immediately attribute the meaning and establish relations between the events that have preceded and followed them.

Reflections on trauma have challenged our notion of history in a different way: although traumatic events are over and belong to the past, the experience of those events continues; traumatic history is at once in the past and in the present, which means that conventional, chronological notions of history no longer apply.

Discussion points: Close reading as a (re)turn to the art work itself as a methodological guideline. A concept of mise en scene that stands for the preposterous practice. Poststructuralist critique vs. writings on memory and trauma.

**Teaching methods**

The course will be structured thematically. Daily seminars and workshops will be supplemented by lectures and a film screening followed by discussion. Each day will address a set of assigned readings dealing with a particular topic. Participants will be expected to be familiar with the readings and to be prepared to discuss them. Critiques and discussions would act as major participants' motivators as opposed to the traditional lecture-format. Participants will be asked to submit a short paper (approx. 5 pages) on their experience of being exposed to the course materials by the end of the third week (they may submit it in form of diary or they may want to test particular approach to interpretation we happen to be considering).