Art and Ecology

Offered by James Nisbet
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Getty Research Institute
Fridays, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
January 10, 17, 24, 31, February 7, 21, 28, March 6, 2020

Since the term was coined in the late nineteenth century, ecology has challenged scientists to think critically about the interrelation of the current physical world and its formation over time. While ecology is a relatively new branch of the natural sciences and, at a fundamental level, seeks to account for the connectedness of living and non-living beings, it nonetheless describes histories of environmental dependency and change that far exceed the moment of ecology’s own articulation. A similar dynamic informs the more recent appearance of ecological concerns in the history of art.

Motivated by ever-pressing fears about the current and future stability of our environment, the rise of an ecologically conscious art history over the past decade has generated methodological questions comparable to those within the field of ecology. What does it mean, for instance, to write art history from an ecological perspective? Need the artist(s), commentator(s), and subject(s) in question be especially “environmental” in outlook? What of the ecological relationships subsuming the production of such artwork? What of the ecological conditions that extend their existence in the world across the years, decades, and even centuries since being created? And what, in this approach as a whole, is the role of ethics? Such crucial methodological questions motivate the study of intersections between “Art and Ecology” that we will pursue in this seminar. Reading broadly across the recent and burgeoning literature on ecological approaches to the visual arts, we will consider a wide range of studies over time periods and geographical locations, as well as incorporate influential arguments from other disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

Rather than developing a specialized approach to one field of study, the aim of this seminar will be to evaluate the variety of ways that art and ecology have been joined into conversation by art historians and humanists. Drawing on the expertise of scholars at the Getty Research Institute and its rich collections, the seminar will provide students with an opportunity to challenge their preconceptions and advance their investigations.

To apply to participate in this seminar, please submit the following:

1) Personal information
Name, home address and phone number, campus address and phone number, e-mail address

2) Graduate transcript
(not required for students in their first term)

3) Statement of interest
No longer than one page (double-spaced) about your reasons for wanting to participate in this seminar

4) Reference
A brief recommendation (a paragraph is sufficient) from a faculty member who is familiar with your work, sent by e-mail to the address below

All application materials should be sent to the Getty Research Institute by October 25, 2019.

E-mail materials to: Thisbe Gensler (togensler@getty.edu)

Questions about course content may be directed to James Nisbet (jnisbet@uci.edu)