

The Politics of Art and Poetry

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Professor Paul Blaney, SAS - English, SASHP

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W 2:50-5:50P

Brett Hall Seminar Room

College Ave Campus

Can art or poetry really change the world? If so, how might they do so? Perhaps poetry/art can only change the way we look at our world. Does the fact that an artwork or poem carries a political 'message' make it less 'artistic' or 'literary'? Is poetry, and even art, really relevant in the 21st-century? Ought they to be relevant? Isn't Art (and poetry) just for Art's sake?

In order to examine these questions we'll begin by looking at some theories of Art—from Plato and Karl Popper to more modern authors, such as John Berger. A fundamental text for our inquiry will be Rosmarie Waldrop's experimental essay, "Alarms & Excursions", in which she considers the possible social functions of poetry-writing. Can her work as a poet be reconciled with her desire to change the world, to make it a better place?

Having laid a foundation for thinking about Art and poetry, the Seminar will move on to study a series of ground-breaking works and artists/writers from the 20th and 21st centuries. In each case, we'll examine the historical and political context in which the works were created, how they were received at the time, and their contemporary legacy. Did the impact of these works really change the world/society?

PAUL BLANEY is Writer in Residence in the SAS Honors Program at Rutgers University. He also teaches courses in Creative Writing and Creative Non Fiction in the English Department. In 2011 he led Rutgers' first Creative Writing Study Abroad Program to Lewes, England. Publications include poems, short fiction and the novellas, *Handover*, *The Anchoress* and *Mister Spoonface*. When not at his desk or in the classroom, he's happiest out of doors, walking or pottering in the garden.

DEAN JULIO coordinates Honors Colloquia, outreach, co-curricular programs and assessment for the SAS Honors Program. He also has a strong interest in philosophy and has read widely in the field and earned his B.A. in Philosophy from Queens College (CUNY). He is an affiliated faculty member in the Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies Department where he teaches Caribbean Cinema. He is famous on campus for being the only dean with the distinction of having an MFA in the Visual Arts (from Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers). He is a practicing artist and exhibit prints and photography all over the country. He also served in Vietnam, and says that art can be an enlightening experience, because it makes us really look at the world, and teaches us something important about being human.