

# Course Syllabus

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UCUG1500

3 Credits

Time	Room	Date
Tu 9:00 AM – 10:50 AM	Rm 201, E1	Jan 23, 2026 – May 11, 2026
Fr 09:00 – 09:50	Rm 202, E3	Jan 23, 2026 – Feb 21, 2026
Fr 09:00 – 09:50	E2-3F CMA Lab (HCI Lab)	Feb 22, 2026 – May 2, 2026
Fr 09:00 – 09:50	Rm 202, E3	May 3, 2026 – May 11, 2026

**Professor: Tengjia Zuo**

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**Office Hours:** Thursday, 3-5 PM by email appointment

**TAs:**

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## Course Description

An introductory course blending case studies, practice, and theory to engage students in exploring contemporary visual arts and their creative potential through a series of lectures, seminars, tutorials, and enrichment activities. Students will acquire fundamental skills to create artworks, develop processes that facilitate creativity, understand the delicate relationship between aesthetics in art and life, and learn reflective and interpretive methods to discuss art critically. Students will gain an understanding of the multiple pathways through which contemporary art and creativity have developed. Through tracing the evolution of artistic media and methods, the course invites students to experience a wide range of visual expression, from hand drawing and manual collage to computer-aided design, 3D rendering, and AI-assisted creative practices. The learning process emphasizes experiential and interactive approaches, including gamified activities, collaborative workshops, and extended creative projects. The visual communication strategies and creative thinking introduced in this course offer students new perspectives for both their academic work and everyday life.

## Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Identify the basic theories of aesthetics and creativity, and the creative process in the visual arts.
2. Demonstrate the competency at the fundamental level of practical creative skills commonly used in the visual arts, such as drawing, photography, collage, and digital imaging, and more.
3. Apply artistic skills to create original artworks, refine their work through digital technologies, and communicate visually.
4. Identify different types of artworks and their respective settings for creation, exhibition, and distribution.
5. Demonstrate reflective and interpretive ability in discussing artworks.

## Weekly Topics

Week Topics	Details
1 ● Defining the Undefined and Using the Useless ● Art from Modern to Contemporary	● Questions: What is art? What is aesthetics? What is creativity? What is the relationship between them? Is art useful? What can we do with art?
2 ● Mediating the Self and the World through Visual Art I	● Examples of visual art. Introduction to different media and approaches. Introduction of painting technique: perspective and proportion
3 ● Mediating the Self and the World through Visual Art II ● Cabinets of Curiosities: Browsing and Collecting for Inspiration	● Exploring art from a historical perspective. Explore free browsing and collecting as a tool for building a personal inspiration archive. Creating a mood board as a project reference. ● Assignment 1 (Art collage that reflects self)
4 ● Discussion of selected student works from the Assignment. Introduction to Contemporary Art	Giving examples of contemporary art Exploring methods of creating art using contemporary technologies.

Week Topics	Details
5 • Collage as A Creative Method: Free Association and Forced Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital collage exercise using Stable Diffusion. Methods of free association and forced connection to generate novel perspectives. Examples of contemporary painting, collage, and interactive work.</li> <li>• Assignment 2 given</li> </ul>
6 • Synthetic Image and Visual Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital image techniques. Image theory. Visual communication in the context of visual arts, including playful and interactive approaches.</li> </ul>
7 • Discussion of selected student works from Assignment 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assignment 2 (Digital Collage/Visual Art) due</li> <li>• Artist's statement/example reading handout</li> </ul>
8 • Seeing the Unseen and Drawing It Out • Writing the personal statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Method for unprejudiced seeing. Basic drawing exercise. Examples of contemporary drawing, painting, and playful interaction. Artist's statement example discussion. Divergent and convergent thinking.</li> </ul>
9 • Discussion of student works from Assignment 2 • How to be creative?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assignment 3 (the Group Project) given</li> </ul>
10 • Defying Categorization: The Many Faces of Contemporary Art • New Media: Art, Science, and Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More examples of contemporary art beyond traditional media and categories. Critical issues in art today. Relationship between art, science, technology, and play. Examples of new media art and playful interaction.</li> </ul>
11 Q&A for the Group Project	Q&A for the Group Project

Week Topics	Details
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Personal, the Communal, and the Social: Connecting Diversity in Concerns</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring the self and its relationship to history and society as a way for self-reflection, identity searching, and idea generation. Seeing the diversity in aesthetics and concerns in this context. Introduction to portfolio, album, or book forms as both a creative and presentation medium.</li> </ul>
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artist Presentation</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group presentation &amp; DemoDay.</li> </ul>

\* There will be a field trip TBD.

### Assignments and Assessments:

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Due date
Project 1: Digital Collage	20%	February 24, 2026
Project 2: Visual Art Project with Mixed Media	20%	March 17, 2026
Project 3: Playful Interaction (Interactive Art/Visual Play)	30%	May 11, 2026
Artist Presentation (3-person group, 10-minute each)	15%	May 11, 2026
Attendance and Participation (including Canvas and in-class discussions)	15%	NA

### Grading Rubrics

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing and grades will not be assigned using a curve.

Detailed rubrics for each assignment will be provided. These rubrics clearly outline the criteria used for evaluation. Students can refer to these rubrics to understand how their work will be assessed.

### Attendance Policy:

- 1 unexcused tardiness ( $\leq 10$  minutes) = OK
- every tardiness ( $\leq 10$  minutes) after the 1st one = -2% final grade
- every tardiness ( $10 < x \leq 30$  minutes) = -4% final grade
- every unexcused absence == tardiness  $> 30$  minutes = -8% final grade
- excused lateness or absences == getting approval from the session instructor before class
- acceptable reasons for excused absences == illness/emergency / other reasons the instructors deemed appropriate

### Final Grading Scheme:

$100\% \geq x \geq 97\%$	A+
$97\% > x \geq 93\%$	A
$93\% > x \geq 90\%$	A-
$90\% > x \geq 87\%$	B+
$87\% > x \geq 83\%$	B
$83\% > x \geq 80\%$	B-
$80\% > x \geq 77\%$	C+
$77\% > x \geq 73\%$	C
$73\% > x \geq 70\%$	C-
$70\% > x \geq 60\%$	D
$60\% > x \geq 0\%$	F

### Final Grade Band Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on the subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	<p>The student's work demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of subject matter, significant creativity in thinking.</p> <p>The student's work exhibits a high commitment to independent creative practice</p>

and critical thinking.

The student's work goes beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.

The work shows good knowledge and understanding of the main subject matter, the ability to think critically, and to complete assignments creatively.

B Good Performance

The student displays high motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively in meeting course requirements.

The work possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter, competence in finishing assignments, and some capacity for analysis and critical thinking.

C Satisfactory Performance

The student shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.

The student has threshold knowledge of core subject matter, potential to acquire key creative skills, and the ability to make basic judgments.

D Marginal Pass

The student benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline.

Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the subject matter and lacks the necessary practical skills. Shows limited ability to think critically or creatively. Exhibits minimal effort towards achieving learning goals. Does not meet the threshold requirements for further development in the discipline.

F Fail

### **Communication and Feedback**

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include strengths and suggested areas for

improvement. Students who have further questions about the feedback, including marks, should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

### Course AI Policy

Students are allowed to use generative AI in various ways. However, they are required to elaborate on the creative strategies employed in their AI application, clearly identify which portions of the work are their original creation, and explain how AI has facilitated their creative process. **Detailed documentation of this process is mandatory.**




### Electronics Policy

Students should bring their laptops to class for creative co-creation, collage collection, and visual creation activities. Meanwhile, the instructor will do her best to keep students' attention focused and minimize unnecessary use of electronic devices during lectures.

### Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST(GZ)'s Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance for academic misconduct. Please refer to the Regulations for Academic Integrity and Student Conduct for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

## Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due
Sun Mar 1, 2026	 <a href="https://hkust-gz.instructure.com/courses/2919/assignments/21375">Assignment 1: Mediating the Self and the World through Visual Art (https://hkust-gz.instructure.com/courses/2919/assignments/21375)</a>	due by 11:59pm
Fri Apr 10, 2026	 <a href="https://hkust-gz.instructure.com/courses/2919/assignments/22391">Assignment 2: Mediating the Self and the World through Digital Art across Time and Space (https://hkust-gz.instructure.com/courses/2919/assignments/22391)</a>	due by 10:30pm
Mon May 25, 2026	 <a href="https://hkust-gz.instructure.com/courses/2919/assignments/23298">Assignment 3: Interactive Concept Integration Project (https://hkust-gz.instructure.com/courses/2919/assignments/23298)</a>	due by 11:59pm