The division between high- and lowbrow art is pervasive, even if we don’t always use such outmoded terms. In this talk, I’ll present a couple of worries about the distinction, one historical and one political. I’ll argue that the distinction has transformed in recent times, possibly in part due to implicit recognition of worries like the ones I present. Today, instead of an object-oriented distinction (i.e., based on some inherent qualities or characteristics of the artworks themselves), we have moved toward an experience-oriented distinction (i.e., based on the nature of the audience’s aesthetic appreciation). Furthermore, if I’m right that we now typically understand this distinction in the latter way, it turns out to be more obviously flawed than it was before. In discussing these issues, I’ll also touch on the middlebrow and the recent popularity of so-called ironic appreciation. In the end, I’ll suggest that these seemingly innocuous issues of aesthetic appreciation are deeply connected to our sense of ourselves; and that our desire to hold onto high/low distinction is not only unjustified, but reflects pretty poorly on us.

Biography

Alex King is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at SUNY Buffalo and currently visiting ANU as a Research Associate in the School of Philosophy. She works on issues in ethics, metaethics, and aesthetics – both as self-standing topics, and as topics that have important parallels and interrelationships.

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School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics
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This lecture is free and all are welcome. Lecture is followed by light refreshments

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