

IS102 RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

BA2 Core Course, Fall 2021

Module: Renaissance Art and Thought

Course Times: Tuesday, 10:45-12:15 and Thursday, 10:45-12:15

Seminar Leaders: Geoff Lehman (coordinator), Katalin Makkai, Laura Scuriatti

Email and Office Hours:

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Course Description

In this course we examine the visual and intellectual culture of Renaissance Florence. A sustained engagement with a number of principal monuments in Florentine painting, sculpture, and architecture provides the basis for a consideration of key values within the development of Renaissance art that also shape, more broadly, the thought, cultural practices, and everyday experiences of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Renaissance could arguably be characterized as a historical period in which the visual arts played the leading role in the culture as a whole. Thus, the focus on works of visual art, in a sustained dialogue with literary, philosophical, and political texts of the period, opens upon a consideration of broad, trans-disciplinary problems such as the emergence of new models of subjectivity and objectivity, the relationship between religious and secular experiences, the framing of early modern political thought, and the origins of the scientific method. The course is structured around four principal topics, each a defining value for the visual arts between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries that is also central to the development of Renaissance thought: self-reflexivity, perspective, harmony and grace, humanism. The direct experience, evaluation, and interpretation of individual works of art are a crucial part of the course and, with this in mind, there will be visits to the Gemäldegalerie, with its extensive Renaissance collection, to encounter works of art firsthand.

Course Books

Required (you must have your own copy of the specific edition with this ISBN; the library has a number of copies of each book that are available for loan):

Course Reader

Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, translated by G. H. McWilliam (ISBN: 0140449302)

Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, translated by J. Spencer (ISBN: 0300000014)

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated by H. Mansfield (ISBN: 978-0226500447)

Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, translated by C. Singleton (ISBN: 978-0393976069)

Suggested (already included in the reader, but the library has copies available for loan):

Leonardo da Vinci, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, edited by I. Richter (ISBN: 0192838970)

Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, translated by J. and P. Bondanella (ISBN: 978-0192834102)

Library and book purchase policies

The college book policy for 2021-2022 is that reserve stocks of books will be lent to students on the basis of need, or (thereafter) on a first come first served basis. Books not yet owned by the college will be purchased only to create a small library reserve collection, and for students receiving more than 70% financial aid. Otherwise, students must purchase all course books.

Visual Resources

- (1) Drive **lc60** on the Bard College Berlin network (accessible only from on-campus computers)
- (2) The Web Gallery of Art: <https://www.wga.hu>

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2021: Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

Museum Visits

Five of our scheduled classes will be museum visits. Since it is not possible to go to a museum during our scheduled class time, museum classes will normally be on Sundays and each museum class will replace a regular Tuesday or Thursday class, usually from the preceding or following week.

Assessment

Participation

Students should arrive to each class on time and prepared. Being prepared means

- (1) having completed the assigned reading (in the specific editions indicated above),
- (2) bringing to class a non-electronic copy of the assigned reading, and
- (3) being ready to initiate and to contribute to discussion.

Engagement in class discussion should be regular as well as productive; quantity alone will not favorably affect the participation grade.

Writing Assignments

There will be two principal assignments over the course of the term: a midterm essay of 6-7 pages (2000-2300 words) and a final essay of 9-10 pages (3000-3300 words), due at the end of the term. Students will also have the option of giving a final presentation to accompany their final essay and as part of the final essay grade.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Class participation: 30%

Midterm essay: 30%

Final essay: 40% OR Final presentation: 10% and Final essay: 30%

Schedule

SELF-REFLEXIVITY

Tuesday, August 31 Introduction to the Renaissance (lecture: Laura Scuriatti)
Reading: Boccaccio, *The Decameron*: Prologue; First Day: Introduction and 1

Thursday, September 2 No class

Sunday, September 5 Visit to the Gemäldegalerie
(11:30, 13:30, 15:30)
Visual assignment: group presentation
Reading: Boccaccio, *The Decameron*: First Day: 2, 3, and Conclusion; Third Day: Introduction, 1, 10, and Conclusion

Tuesday, September 7 Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, I (lecture: Laura Scuriatti)
Reading: Boccaccio, *The Decameron*: Fourth Day: Introduction and 2; Fifth Day: 9; Sixth Day: 5

Thursday, September 9 Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, II
Reading: Boccaccio, *The Decameron*: Eighth Day: 3; Tenth Day: 10 and Conclusion; Epilogue

PERSPECTIVE, I

Tuesday, September 14 Alberti and Perspective (lecture: Geoff Lehman)
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Prologue and Book I

Thursday, September 16 Masaccio, Donatello
Visual assignment: group presentations
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Book II

Sunday, September 19 **Visit to the Gemäldegalerie**
(11:30, 13:30, 15:30)
Reading: Eaton, “‘A Lady on the Street but a Freak in the Bed’: On the Distinction between Erotic Art and Pornography”

Tuesday, September 21 No class

Thursday, September 23 Romare Bearden
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Book III

PERSPECTIVE, II

Tuesday, September 28 Leonardo, I (lecture: Geoff Lehman)
Reading: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, edited by I. Richter:
I. True Science: I. Experience, II. Reason and Nature’s Laws
II. The Universe: I. The Four Elements: 1. Water, 5. Microcosm and Macrocosm
III. Flight: I. Movement through Wind and Water
IV. The Arts: I. The Artist’s Course of Study: 1.b. The Eye (nos. 4-9), 1.c. Perspective, 3.a. Proportion (nos. 92-96), 3.b. The Anatomy and Movement of the Body (no. 103), 3.c. Physiology, 3.i. Botany
V. Tales and Allegories: VI. Imaginative Descriptions of Nature: 1. The Whale

Thursday, September 30 No class

Tuesday, October 5 Leonardo, II
Reading: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, edited by I. Richter:
IV. The Arts: I. The Artist’s Course of Study: 2.a. The Geometric Foundation, 2.b. Light and Shade and Color (nos. 46-54 and 78-90), 5. Composition (nos. 191-193)
VI. Reflections on Life: I. Life Passes (nos. 20-22), II. Life of the Body (no. 23)

Thursday, October 7 Film: *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (Céline Sciamma, 2019)
Reading: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, edited by I. Richter:
IV. The Arts: I. The Artist’s Course of Study: 5. Composition (nos. 181-190); II. Comparison of the Arts: 1. Painting, Music, and Poetry, 4. Painting and Sculpture

Sunday, October 10 **Visit to the Gemäldegalerie**
(11:30, 13:30, 15:30)
Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Dedicatory Letter, I, V-IX, and XIII

Tuesday, October 12 Machiavelli, *The Prince*
Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XV-XVIII

Thursday, October 14 Portraiture: Juan de Pareja, Carrie Mae Weems
Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XXI-XXVI

Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Saturday, October 16

FALL BREAK (October 18-24)

III. HARMONY AND GRACE

Tuesday, October 26 Brunelleschi
Visual assignment: group presentations
Reading: Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, VI.1-3 and IX.5

Thursday, October 28 Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (lecture: Katalin Makkai)
Reading: Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Dedicatory Letter and Book I, sections 1-28 (pp. 3-35)

Tuesday, November 2 Raphael, I
Reading: Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Book I, sections 29-31, 37, and 47-56 (pp. 35-38, 44-46, and 55-63)

Thursday, November 4 Raphael, II
Visual assignment: group presentation
Reading: Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Prefaces to Books I, II, and III

Sunday, November 7 **Visit to the Gemäldegalerie**
(11:30, 13:30, 15:30)
Visual assignment: group presentation
Reading: Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Life of Raphael, pp. 330(bottom)-338 and Life of Titian, pp. 500-504;
Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, Canto XIV, 50-79

Tuesday, November 9 No class

Thursday, November 11 William Kentridge
Reading: Krauss, *Perpetual Inventory*, "The Rock": William Kentridge's Drawings for Projection"

IV. HUMANISM

Tuesday, November 16 Colonialism in the Renaissance (guest lecture: TBD)
Reading: Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, paragraphs 1-29 (pp. 223-245)

Thursday, November 18 Pico della Mirandola, Mantegna, and Renaissance Multiculturalism
Reading: Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, paragraphs 30-38 (pp. 245-254);
Hypnerotomachia Poliphili [The Strife of Love in a Dream] (translated by Jocelyn Godwin), selections

Tuesday, November 23 Michelangelo, I
Visual assignment: group presentation
Reading: Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Life of Michelangelo, pp. 414-415; Michelangelo, Poems nos. 46, 61-62, 151-152, 164-167, and 239-43

Thursday, November 25 No class

Sunday, November 28 Visit to the Bode Museum
(11:30, 13:30, 15:30)
Visual assignment: group presentation
Reading: TBA

Tuesday, November 30 Michelangelo, II (lecture: Geoff Lehman)
Reading: Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Book IV, sections 49-73 (pp. 242-260)

Thursday, December 2 Vittoria Colonna
Reading: Vittoria Colonna, *Poems for Michelangelo*, nos. 1, 3, 9, 21, 30, 42, 45, 60, 72, 98, 102, and 103

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Tuesday, December 7

Thursday, December 9

Final essay due: 23:59 on Friday, December 17