

# IS102 RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

BA2 Core Course, Fall 2023

Module: Renaissance Art and Thought

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

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

Email and Office Hours:

Geoff Lehman	<a href="mailto:g.lehman@berlin.bard.edu">g.lehman@berlin.bard.edu</a>	TBD
Katalin Makkai	<a href="mailto:k.makkai@berlin.bard.edu">k.makkai@berlin.bard.edu</a>	TBD
Clio Nicastro	<a href="mailto:c.nicastro@berlin.bard.edu">c.nicastro@berlin.bard.edu</a>	TBD
Laura Scuriatti	<a href="mailto:l.scuriatti@berlin.bard.edu">l.scuriatti@berlin.bard.edu</a>	TBD

## 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 central part of the course. With this in mind, there will be visits to the Gemäldegalerie, and the Bode Museum, with their extensive Renaissance collections, 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 copies of each book that are available for loan, but not enough for everyone. They will be lent to students on the basis of need, and thereafter on a first come first served basis:

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)

These books are already included in the reader, but the library also 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 2023-2024 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.

### Use of Electronics

To facilitate a focused and engaging seminar discussion the use of electronic devices during class time is not allowed, unless for disability accommodation. If you have a disability accommodation, please inform your instructor at the beginning of the rotation.

### Museum Visits

Four 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.

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.

### Writing Assignments

There will be two principal assignments over the course of the term: a midterm essay of 2000-2300 words and a final essay of 3000-3500 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

The instructors of this course have agreed on the following policy. Extensions may be granted by the individual seminar leaders, but the request must be made at least 24 hours before the essay deadline. Late essays will be marked down one-third of a letter grade (e.g., from A- to B+) for every 24 hours they are late, down to a maximum grade of a C.

## Grade Breakdown

Class participation: 30%

Midterm essay: 30%

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

## Schedule

### SELF-REFLEXIVITY

Tuesday, September 5

Introduction to the Renaissance (lecture: Laura Scuriatti)

Reading: Boccaccio, *The Decameron*: Prologue; First Day: Introduction and Story 1 (pp. 1-37)

Thursday, September 7

Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, I

Reading: Boccaccio, *The Decameron*: First Day: Stories 2 and 3, Conclusion; Third Day: Introduction, Stories 1 and 10, Conclusion; Fourth Day: Introduction (pp. 37-44, 66-69, 189-199, and 274-291)

Tuesday, September 12

Donatello

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading: Boccaccio, *The Decameron*: Fourth Day: Story 2; Fifth Day: Story 9; Sixth Day: Story 5 (pp. 301-312, 425-432, and 457-459)

Thursday, September 14                      Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, II (lecture: Laura Scuriatti)  
Reading: Boccaccio, *The Decameron*: Eighth Day: Story 3; Tenth Day: Story 10 and Conclusion; Epilogue  
(pp. 560-569 and 783-802)

Tuesday September 19                      No class

## PERSPECTIVE, I

Thursday, September 21                      Alberti and Perspective (lecture: Geoff Lehman)  
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Prologue and Book I

Sunday, September 24                      **Visit to the Gemäldegalerie**  
(11:00, 12:30, 14:00, 15:30)  
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Book II, pp. 63-76 (top)

Tuesday, September 26                      Masaccio, Uccello  
Visual assignment: group presentations  
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Book II, pp. 76-85

Thursday, September 28                      Romare Bearden  
Visual assignment: group presentation  
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Book III

Tuesday, October 3                          No class: federal holiday

## PERSPECTIVE, II

Thursday, October 5                          Leonardo, I (lecture: Geoff Lehman)  
10:45-12:15: Seminar Groups A and B  
19:30-21:00: Seminar groups C, D, and E  
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 (nos. 126-129)  
V. Tales and Allegories: VI. Imaginative Descriptions of Nature: 1. The Whale

Tuesday, October 10                          Leonardo, II  
Visual assignment: group presentation  
Reading: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, edited by I. Richter:  
II. The Universe: III. Mechanics  
IV. The Arts: I. The Artist's Course of Study: 2.a. The Geometric Foundation, 2.b. Light and  
Shade and Color (nos. 46-55 and 78-90), 3.i. Botany, 5. Composition (nos. 192-193)

Thursday, October 12

Carrie Mae Weems

Visual assignment: group presentation

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. 181-191); II. Comparison of the Arts: 1. Painting, Music, and Poetry, 4. Painting and Sculpture  
VI. Reflections on Life: I. Life Passes (nos. 20-22), II. Life of the Body (no. 23)

Sunday, October 15

**Visit to the Gemäldegalerie**

(11:00, 12:30, 14:00, 15:30)

Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Dedicatory Letter, I, V-IX, XIII

Tuesday, October 17

Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XV-XVIII and XXI-XXVI

Thursday, October 19

Film discussion: *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*

Film assignment: *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (Céline Sciamma, 2019)

No reading assignment

**Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Sunday, October 22**

End of first rotation; second rotation begins on Tuesday, October 31

**FALL BREAK (October 23-29)**

## HARMONY AND GRACE

Tuesday, October 31

Brunelleschi

Visual assignment: group presentations

Reading: Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, VI.1-3 and IX.5

Thursday, November 2

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 7

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 9

Raphael, II

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading: Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Prefaces to Books I, II, and III

Sunday, November 12

**Visit to the Gemäldegalerie**

(11:00, 12:30, 14:00, 15:30)

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading: Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, Canto XIV, 50-79; Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Life of Raphael, pp. 330(bottom)-338 and Life of Titian, pp. 500-504

Thursday, November 14 No class

Thursday, November 16 William Kentridge  
Film assignment: William Kentridge, *9 Drawings for Projection*  
No reading assignment

## HUMANISM

Tuesday, November 21 Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*  
Reading: Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, paragraphs 1-29 (pp. 223-245)

Thursday, November 23 Mantegna and Renaissance Multiculturalism  
Visual assignment: group presentation  
Reading: Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, paragraphs 30-38 (pp. 245-254)

Tuesday, November 28 Michelangelo, I  
Visual assignment: group presentation  
Reading: Michelangelo, Poems nos. 46, 61-62, 151-152, 164-167, and 239-43

Thursday, November 30 Michelangelo, II (lecture: Geoff Lehman)  
10:45-12:15: Seminar Groups A and B  
19:30-21:00: Seminar groups C, D, and E  
Reading: Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Book IV, sections 49-73 (pp. 242-260); Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Life of Michelangelo, pp. 414-415

Sunday, December 3 **Visit to the Bode Museum**  
(11:30, 12:30, 13:30, 14:30, 15:30)  
Visual assignment: group presentation  
No reading assignment

Tuesday, December 5 No class

Thursday, December 7 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 12

Thursday, December 14

*Final essay due: 23:59 on Friday, December 22*