

# AH314 *Las Meninas* and the Pictorial Encounter

Art and Aesthetics  
Module: Artists, Genres, Movements  
Fall 2023

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman  
Course Times: Monday, 15:45-19:00

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 13:00-15:00

## Course Description

In this course, Diego Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* will serve as a focal point and framework for the exploration of a number of key issues related to the theory and practice of painting, looking at a diverse range of artworks. Major topics for the course include: portraiture and the gaze; perspective as pictorial structure and as depiction of (room) space; the intersection of *chronos* (the representation of narrative or historical time) and *kairos* (the plenitude of the depicted moment); self-reflexivity: the way pictures explicitly raise questions about artistic practice, the artist, and art itself; the phenomenology of the encounter with paintings; psychoanalytic interpretations of pictures; and "the anxiety of influence:" considering the vast range of artworks that have been created in response to *Las Meninas*, especially since Picasso's *Las Meninas* series in the 1950s. Discussing these different aspects of the encounter with painting and its interpretation, we will engage Velázquez's complex painting in depth through close reading, sustained attention, and open-ended interpretation. Beyond this, we will have a chance to explore the topics above through consideration of selected artworks from the Renaissance up to the contemporary moment. Artists whose works we study will include Van Eyck, Mantegna, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Goya, Picasso, Sargent, Dalí, Witkin, Weems, and Sussman. Readings will be from Steinberg, Foucault, Calderón, Jung, Freud, Lispector, Woolf, Riegl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard, and others. Visits to museums to encounter works of art in person will be an integral part of the course.

## Course Books

Course Reader

## 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.

## 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

Three 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 be on the weekends and each museum class will replace a regular Monday class.

### 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, 2000-2500 words in length, and a final presentation accompanied by an essay, 3000-3500 words in length, due at the end of the term.

### Policy on Late Submission of Papers

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 presentation: 10%

Final essay: 30%

## Schedule

September 4

LAS MENINAS

Reading:

Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, Part One, Section 43  
Wallace Stevens, "So-and-So Reclining on Her Couch"  
Clarice Lispector, "The Egg and the Chicken"

September 11

LAS HILANDERAS AND THE ARTIST'S WORKSHOP

Reading:

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, ll. 382-400 (pp. 144-145)  
Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," selections  
David Rosand, *The Meaning of the Mark*, "The Stroke of the Brush"

September 18

No class

Saturday, September 23, 14:00-17:00

Visit to the Gemäldegalerie

Reading:

Rainer Maria Rilke, "Archaic Torso of Apollo"  
Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, selections  
Svetlana Alpers, "Describe or Narrate? A Problem of Realistic Representation"

September 25

THE GAZE

Reading:

Antonio Tabucchi, "The Backwards Game"  
Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Chapter 1: "Las Meninas"

October 2

(SELF-)PORTRAITURE

Reading:

Shakespeare, *Richard II*, Act II, Scene 2, lines 1-40  
Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, selections  
Alois Riegl, "Excerpts from *The Dutch Group Portrait*," pp.3-20, 25 (middle) – 31 (middle)

October 9

ROOM SPACE AND LIMINALITY

Reading:

Peter Handke, "Song of Childhood"  
Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Chapter 6 ("Corners") and Chapter 9 ("The Dialectics of Outside and Inside")

Saturday, October 14, 14:00-17:00

Visit to the Hamburger Bahnhof

Reading:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind"

October 16

No class

*Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Friday, October 20*

FALL BREAK (October 23-29)

October 30 MIRRORS AND REFLECTIONS

Reading:

Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream*, selections

Leo Steinberg, "Velázquez' 'Las Meninas'"

Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"

November 6 PICASSO'S *LAS MENINAS*

Reading:

Carl Jung, *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, selections

Saturday, November 11, 14:00-17:00 Visit to the Neue Nationalgalerie

Reading:

Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, "The School of Giorgione" and "Conclusion"

Clement Greenberg, "The Role of Nature in Modern Painting"

Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, pp. 244-260

November 13 No class

November 20 POSTMODERN LIGHT ON *LAS MENINAS*

Visual assignment (films):

Selection of short films (TBD)

November 27 LOVE AND THE TRUTH IN PAINTING

Reading:

Poems submitted by students

## FINAL PRESENTATIONS

December 4

December 11

*Final essay due: 23:59 on Monday, December 18*