

AH314 *Las Meninas* and the Pictorial Encounter

Art and Aesthetics

Module: Artists, Genres, Movements

Fall 2025

Course Times: Thursdays, 14:00-17:15

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 13:00-15:00, or by appointment

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, in the context of sustained engagement with, and discussion of, a diverse range of artworks. Major topics for the course include: portraiture and the gaze; perspective as pictorial structure and as depiction of space; the intersection of *chronos* (the representation of narrative or historical time) and *kairos* (the fortuity and 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 in relation to active receptivity; 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 sustained attention, close reading, 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, Jung, Freud, Lispector, Woolf, Riegl, Heidegger, Adorno, 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 2025-2026 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.

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 weekend and each museum class will replace a regular Thursday class.

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.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

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 may 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.

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.

Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. 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 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 presentation: 10%

Final essay: 30%

Schedule

September 4

LAS MENINAS

Reading:

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

September 11

LAS HILANDERAS AND THE ART OF PAINTING

Reading: a

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book II, ll. 833-875; Book VI, ll. 382-400 (Penguin ed.: pp. 72-73, 144-145)
Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," Introduction (pp. 17-20), Truth and Art (pp. 57-78)
David Rosand, *The Meaning of the Mark*, "The Stroke of the Brush"

September 18

No class

Saturday, September 20, 14:00-17:00

Visit to the Gemäldegalerie

Reading:

Rainer Maria Rilke, "Archaic Torso of Apollo"
Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Section III: Exteriority and the Face,
B. Ethics and the Face, 1-3 (pp. 194-204)
Svetlana Alpers, "Describe or Narrate? A Problem of Realistic Representation"

September 25

THE GAZE

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

Shakespeare, *Richard II*, Act II, Scene 2, lines 1-40
Antonio Tabucchi, "The Backwards Game"
Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Chapter 1: "Las Meninas"

October 2

PORTRAITURE, PERFORMANCE, REPRESENTATION

Reading:

Wallace Stevens, "The Snow Man"
Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, pp. 73-83, 100-118
Alois Riegl, "Excerpts from *The Dutch Group Portrait*," pp.3-11, 25 (middle) – 31 (middle)

October 9

No class

Saturday, October 11, 14:00-17:00

Visit to the Hamburger Bahnhof

Reading:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind"

October 16

OUTSIDE / INSIDE: ROOM SPACE

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

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

Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Saturday, October 18

FALL BREAK (October 20-26)

October 30 MIRRORS AND REFLECTIONS

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

Leo Steinberg, "Velázquez' 'Las Meninas'"

Clarice Lispector, *Aqua Viva*, pp. 64-72

November 6 No class

Monday, November 10, 19:00-22:30 PICASSO'S *LAS MENINAS*

This class will meet at Dildile (address: Dieffenbachstrasse 62, Kreuzberg)

Reading:

Edgar Allan Poe, "A Dream Within a Dream"

Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"

Carl Jung, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry"

November 13 No class

Saturday, November 15, 14:00-17:00 Visit to the Scharf-Gerstenberg Collection

Visual assignment: group presentation

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*, Appendix: "The Accident: Material Radiance"

November 20 POSTMODERN LIGHT ON *LAS MENINAS*

Viewing assignment (films):

Selection of short films (directors: Sussman, Cociña & León, Deren, Trnka, Kunio Kato, Namuth, Gorlenko, Rosenfeldt, Man Ray, Wenders, The Brothers Quay, Marker)

November 27 LOVE AND THE TRUTH IN PAINTING

Reading:

Poems and/or artworks submitted by students

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

December 4

December 11

Final essay due: 23:59 on Thursday, December 18