

# IS102 RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

BA2 Core Course

Module: Renaissance Art and Thought

Fall 2025

Course Times:

Groups A (Geoff Lehman), C (Katalin Makkai), and E (Clio Nicastro):

Tuesday and Thursday, 10:45-12:15

Groups B (Giulia Clabassi) and D (Laura Scuriatti):

Tuesday and Thursday, 14:00-15:30

## 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.

## Course Books

You must have your own copy of the edition of Alberti's *On Painting* that we are using. The library has copies of the book 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

Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, translated by J. Spencer (Yale University Press, 1966), ISBN: 0300000014

Additional readings may be handed out as photocopies over the course of the semester.

## 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.

## Visual Resources

(1) Drive Ic60 on the Bard College Berlin network (accessible only from on-campus computers) (2) The Web Gallery of Art: <https://www.wga.hu>

## Museum Visits

There are four museum visits on the syllabus. Since it is not possible to go to a museum during our regular 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.

## 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](mailto: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](mailto:j.harker@berlin.bard.edu)) or Maria Anderson-Long ([m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu](mailto: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 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.

## 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: 1) a midterm exam and 2) a final essay of 3000-3500 words, due at the end of the term, OR a final exam. Whether you have an essay or an exam for the final assignment will depend on your seminar. Students writing a final essay will also have the option of giving a presentation to accompany their essay 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 exam: 30%

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

OR Final exam: 40%

## Schedule

### WHY RENAISSANCE?

Tuesday, September 2: Introduction to the Renaissance (lecture: Laura Scuriatti)  
Images TBD: Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, Raphael, *Triumph of Galatea* (Villa Farnesina); Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of the Virgin* (Cappella Tornabuoni, Santa Maria Novella), *Adoration of the Magi* (Ospedale degli Innocenti); Benozzo Gozzoli, *Chapel of the Magi* (Palazzo Medici Riccardi)

Thursday, September 4: Florence, the Medici Family, Art and Early Capitalism  
Images TBD

Reading: selections from Brian Brege, *Tuscany in the Age of Empire*; Gene A. Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*; Jill Burke, *Changing Patrons: Social Identity and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Florence*; Thomas B. F. Cummins (ed.), *Global Gold: Aesthetics, Material Desires, Economies in the Late Medieval and Early Modern World*; Michael Wyatt (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Italian Renaissance*; J.R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: The Pattern of Control*

Tuesday, September 9: Self-reflexivity, Framing  
Images: Donatello, Bronze Pulpits, Church of San Lorenzo, Florence; Donatello, *David* (marble and bronze versions)

Thursday, September 11: Mediterranean Circulation and Scientific Dialogues; Optics and Color Theory  
Images TBD

Reading: selections from Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science*; Jack Goody, *Renaissance: The one or the many?*; Robert G. Morrison, *Merchants of Knowledge: Intellectual Exchange in the Ottoman Empire and Renaissance Europe*

### PERSPECTIVE I

Tuesday, September 16: Alberti and Perspective (lecture: Geoff Lehman)  
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Prologue and Book I

Thursday, September 18: Masaccio, Uccello  
Visual assignment: group presentations  
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Book II

Tuesday, September 23: Guest lecture by Justin Randolph Thompson on the curatorial project *On Being Present*, Uffizi Galleries, Florence

Thursday, September 25: No class

Sunday, September 28: Museum visit 1: Gemäldegalerie  
11:00: Laura's group (seminar group D)  
12:00: Katalin's group (seminar group C)  
13:00: Clio's group (seminar group E)  
14:00: Geoff's group (seminar group A)  
15:00: Giulia's group (seminar group B)  
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Book III

## PERSPECTIVE II

Tuesday, November 30: 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 (nos. 126-129)

V. Tales and Allegories: VI. Imaginative Descriptions of Nature: 1. The Whale

Thursday, October 2: No class

Tuesday, October 7: 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 9: (Self-)Portraiture: Carrie Mae Weems, Maïmouna Guerresi

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 12: Museum visit 2: Gemäldegalerie

11:00: Laura's group (seminar group D)

12:00: Katalin's group (seminar group C)

13:00: Clio's group (seminar group E)

14:00: Geoff's group (seminar group A)

15:00: Giulia's group (seminar group B)

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

Tuesday, October 14: Machiavelli, *The Prince*

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

**Thursday, October 16: midterm exam**

FALL BREAK (October 20-26)

Tuesday, October 28: Film discussion: Portrait of a Lady on Fire

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

Images: Artemisia Gentileschi, Sofonisba Anguissola, Paris Bordone

## HARMONY AND GRACE

Thursday, October 30: Brunelleschi

Visual assignment: group presentations

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

Tuesday, November 4: Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (lecture: Katalin Makkai)

Reading: Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Dedicatory Letter, Book I, sections 1-28 (pp. 3-35)

Thursday, November 6: Raphael I: The Vatican Stanze

Visual assignment: group presentation

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

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

Images: Stanze of Raphael in the Vatican

Tuesday, November 11: Raphael II: The Villa Farnesina in Rome

Reading: selections from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Images: frescoes by Raphael, Giulio Romano, Baldassare Peruzzi, and Sebastiano Del Piombo

Thursday, November 13: No class

Sunday, November 16: Museum visit 3: Gemäldegalerie

11:00: Laura's group (seminar group D)

12:00: Katalin's group (seminar group C)

13:00: Clio's group (seminar group E)

14:00: Geoff's group (seminar group A)

15:00: Giulia's group (seminar group B)

## HUMANISM / PANTHEISM

Tuesday, November 18: 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 20: Lecture: "A Dialogue on the Traces of Pantheism" by Clio Nicastro and Giulia Clabassi

Tuesday, November 25: Michelangelo, I

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading: Michelangelo, Poems nos. 46, 61-62, 151-152, 164-167, and 239-43

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

Thursday, November 27: No class

Sunday, November 30: Museum visit 4: Bode Museum

11:00: Laura's group (seminar group D)

12:00: Katalin's group (seminar group C)

13:00: Clio's group (seminar group E)

14:00: Geoff's group (seminar group A)

15:00: Giulia's group (seminar group B)

Tuesday, December 2: Michelangelo, II (lecture: Geoff Lehman)

Reading: Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Book IV, sections 61-73 (pp. 250-260)

Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Life of Michelangelo, pp. 414-415

Thursday, December 4: Perspective in the Baroque

Images: Sant'Ignazio (Rome), Santa Maria Presso San Satiro (Milan); Hyperrealism

Assignment: students bring examples of later/contemporary uses of perspective

## FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Tuesday, December 9

Thursday, December 11

**Final essay due: 23:59 on Sunday, December 14**

**OR Final exam (time to be determined by your seminar teacher)**