

IS102 RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

BA2 Core Course

Module: Renaissance Art and Thought

Fall 2026

Seminar Leaders: Giulia Clabassi, Geoff Lehman (course coordinator), Katalin Makkai, Clio Nicastro, Laura Scuriatti, Sasha Shapiro

Course Times:

Groups B (Clio Nicastro), D (Laura Scuriatti), and F (Sasha Shapiro)

Tuesday and Thursday, 10:45-12:15

Groups A (Geoff Lehman), C (Giulia Clabassi), and E (Katalin Makkai)

Tuesday and Thursday, 14:00-15:30

Office Hours:

Giulia Clabassi: by appointment

Geoff Lehman: Tuesdays, 16:00-18:00, or by appointment

Katalin Makkai: by appointment

Clio Nicastro: by appointment

Laura Scuriatti: by appointment

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

The only required text is the course reader. The library has copies of the books included in the reader available for loan, but not enough for everyone. Thus, for those of you who would like to have a copy of one or more of these books, they will be lent to students on a first come first served basis. Additional readings may be handed out as photocopies over the course of the semester.

Library and book purchase policies

The college book policy for 2026-2027 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.

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 semester.

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.

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: 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.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. 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.

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.

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.

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 1: 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 3: 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 8: Self-reflexivity, Framing
Images: Donatello, Bronze Pulpits, Church of San Lorenzo, Florence; Donatello, *David* (marble and bronze versions)

Thursday, September 10: 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 15: Alberti and Perspective (lecture: Geoff Lehman)
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Prologue and Book I

Thursday, September 17: Masaccio, Uccello
Visual assignment: group presentations
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Book II

Sunday, September 20: Museum visit 1: Gemäldegalerie
11:00: Laura's group (seminar group D)
12:00: Katalin's group (seminar group E)
13:00: Clio's group (seminar group B)
14:00: Geoff's group (seminar group A)
15:00: Giulia's group (seminar group C)
16:00: Sasha's group (seminar group F)
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*, Book III

Tuesday, September 22: No class

Thursday, September 24: Romare Bearden
Reading TBA

PERSPECTIVE II

Tuesday, September 29: 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 1: 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)

Tuesday, October 6: (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)

Thursday, October 8: 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

Sunday, October 11: Museum visit 2: Gemäldegalerie

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

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

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

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

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

16:00: Sasha's group (seminar group F)

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

Tuesday, October 13: midterm exam

Thursday, October 15: No class

FALL BREAK (October 19-25)

Tuesday, October 27: Machiavelli, *The Prince*

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

HARMONY AND GRACE

Thursday, October 29: Brunelleschi

Visual assignment: group presentations

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

Tuesday, November 3: 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 5: 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

Tuesday, November 10: Raphael II: The Villa Farnesina in Rome

Reading: selections from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Thursday, November 12: No class

Sunday, November 15: Museum visit 3: Gemäldegalerie

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

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

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

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

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

16:00: Sasha's group (seminar group F)

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

HUMANISM / PANTHEISM

Tuesday, November 17: Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*

Reading: Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*

Thursday, November 19, 19:15-20:45: A Dialogue on the Traces of Pantheism (lecture: Giulia Clabassi and Clio Nicastro)

Reading: Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, selections; Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle, and Unity*, selections; Nicholas of Cusa, *De Docta Ignorantia (On Learned Ignorance)*, selections

Tuesday, November 24: 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 26: No class

Sunday, November 29: Museum visit 4: Bode Museum

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

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

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

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

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

16:00: Sasha's group (seminar group F)

Tuesday, December 1: 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 3: 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 8

Thursday, December 10

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

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