Renaissance Florence

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman
Times: Tuesday 9:00 – 10:30; 10:45 – 12:15
Thursday 13:30 – 15:00; 15:15 – 16:45
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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 be characterized as a historical period in which the visual arts played the leading role within intellectual culture. 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: naturalism and realism; perspective; harmony and grace; humanism. The direct experience, evaluation, and interpretation of individual works of art are a crucial part of the course, and with this in mind there will be frequent visits to Berlin’s museums, particularly the Gemäldegalerie and the Bode Museum, with their extensive Renaissance collections, to encounter works of art firsthand.

Course Requirements
For this class attendance is mandatory, and active participation in discussions will be an essential part of the course. Absences can only be excused if a medical note is submitted to the registrar’s office. Readings should be done in advance of the class for which they are assigned. There will be four major assignments over the course of the term: a visual analysis essay 3 pages (1000 words) in length, two term essays of 5-6 pages (1800-2000 words), and a final presentation that will also require an accompanying essay of 8-10 pages (2700-3300 words), due at the end of the term. Please refer to the Student Handbook for the policy on late submission of essays.

Evaluation
Class participation: 30%
Visual analysis essay: 10%
Two term essays: 30% (2 x 15%)
Final presentation and essay: 30% (presentation: 10%; essay: 20%)

Museum Visits
Six of our scheduled classes will be museum or gallery visits (or, in one case, a city walk). Whenever possible these are planned to correspond with our regular class meeting time. The visual analysis essay assignment will also require you to spend time in one of the museums independently to study a work of art in person.

Schedule of Classes

Week 1: Introduction
Visual assignment: group presentations
Tuesday, September 3          Leonardo, Last Supper
Thursday, September 5          Gemäldegalerie visit

NATURALISM AND REALISM

Week 2: Dante I / Giotto
Reading: Dante, Inferno
Tuesday, September 10          Dante, Inferno
Thursday, September 12         Giotto, Scrovegni Chapel

Week 3: Dante II / Donatello
Reading: Dante, Purgatorio, I-III, X-XII
Visual assignment: group presentations
Tuesday, September 17          Donatello / Dante
Thursday, September 19         Bode Museum visit

Visual analysis essay due: 23:59 on Saturday, September 21

Week 4: Leonardo
Reading: Leonardo da Vinci, selections from the notebooks
Tuesday, September 24          Leonardo, I
Thursday, September 26         Leonardo, II

PERSPECTIVE
**Week 5: The Origins of Perspective**  
Reading: Panofsky, Perspective as Symbolic Form

Tuesday, October 1  
Bode Museum visit

Thursday, October 3  
No class

**FALL BREAK**

**Week 6: Alberti**  
Reading: Alberti, *On Painting*  
Visual assignment: group presentations

Tuesday, October 15  
Alberti I / Masaccio

Thursday, October 17  
Alberti II / Piero della Francesca

**Second essay due: 23:59 on Saturday, October 19**

**Week 7: Machiavelli**  
Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Tuesday, October 22  
Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Thursday, October 24  
Gemäldegalerie visit

**Week 8: Perspective, Epistemology, Cosmology**  
Reading: Nicholas Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, selections

Tuesday, October 29  
Nicholas Cusanus

Thursday, October 31  
Pieter Bruegel, *Via Crucis*

**HARMONY AND GRACE**

**Week 9: Brunelleschi**  
Reading: Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, selections; Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, Chapter 1

Visual assignment: group presentations

Tuesday, November 5  
Brunelleschi

Thursday, November 7  
Architectural excursion in Berlin

**Week 10: Castiglione**  
Reading: Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Book 1

Tuesday, November 12  
Castiglione / Giorgione

Thursday, November 14  
*Sprezzatura* and Renaissance music
Third essay due: 23:59 on Saturday, November 16

Week 11: Raphael
Visual assignment: group presentations

Tuesday, November 19 No class
Thursday, November 21 Raphael
Sunday, November 24 Dresden trip (visit to the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden)

HUMANISM

Week 12: Christian and Pagan
Reading: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, selections

Tuesday, November 26 Ovid and Renaissance art, I
Thursday, November 28 Ovid and Renaissance art, II

Week 13: Michelangelo
Reading: Michelangelo, selected poems; Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Book 4, selections

Tuesday, December 3 Michelangelo, I
Thursday, December 5 Michelangelo, II

Week 14: Student Presentations
Tuesday, December 10
Thursday, December 12

Final essay, based on presentation, due: 23:59 on Friday, December 20