

**MAP Expressive Cultures: Images
V55.0720, Fall 2008**

Prof. Dennis Geronimus
Department of Art History, 3rd floor, Silver Center, CAS
Lectures Tuesday & Thursday 4.55 – 6.10 pm (Silver, Rm. 300)

Recitation 1 (Jodi Roberts): Friday 9.30 – 10.45 (48 Cooper Sq. 103)
Recitation 2 (Jodi Roberts): Friday 11.00 – 12.15 (48 Cooper Sq. 108)
Recitation 3 (Jacquelyn Coutre): Friday 11.00 – 12.15 (Silver 504)
Recitation 4 (Jacquelyn Coutre): Friday 12.30 – 1.45 (Silver 507)

Prof. Geronimus's office hours (Silver 303): Friday, 11.30 – 1.30 (sign up for appt. with Dept. secretary)
E-mail (to be used *with discretion*): dvg2@nyu.edu

TAs: Ms. Jacquelyn Coutre (jacquelyn.coutre@nyu.edu), Institute of Fine Arts
Ms. Jodi Roberts (jodi.roberts@nyu.edu), Institute of Fine Arts

TA office hours: Ms. Coutre: Tuesday, 3.30 – 4.30 (Silver 306B)
Ms. Roberts: Thursday, 10 – 11 (Silver 306B)

Please do not hesitate to come and see any of us or to get in touch with us during the designated office hours or by private appointment.

* Anyone with registration difficulties should contact the MAP office, located at 903 Silver Center (tel.: 998.8119).

Principal texts

Helen Gardner, *Art Through the Ages* (Fort Worth, 2006) – vol. 2, 12th ed. ONLY
Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford, 1988) – 2nd ed.

Optional but recommended texts

James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (Boulder, 2008).
Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. J. and P. Bondanella (Oxford World's Classics, 1991).
Sylvan Barnet, *A Short Guide to Writing About Art* (New York, 2005) – 8th ed.

Everyone must obtain the two required texts. Copies are waiting for you at the NYU Bookstore. The texts should also be available from internet discounters (Amazon, Alibris, etc.) at comparable, if not better, prices. The optional texts also have been ordered for the NYU Bookstore, but in limited numbers. This may change, provided there is enough interest.

The weekly readings will provide important background information and overviews as a complement to the class lectures. Additional assigned texts, related specifically to six short critical synopses interspersed throughout the semester, will be available either as .pdf files on Blackboard or as xeroxed handouts.

Our goals in the context of MAP

“It is the onlooker who makes the pictures.” – Marcel Duchamp

It is my hope that everyone can find his or her roots in the visual material that we are to encounter together. In this class, you are to be your own researcher, traveler, narrator. At the heart of the MAP experience is an elasticity, a freedom of thought that extends not only to content but also to modes and methods of inquiry. You will be stretched to see and think in fresh ways, developing your creative faculties while at the same time honing your critical reading and writing skills. Although this course is intended for non-specialists, it will nonetheless challenge all of you, regardless of major, to tackle the rich discipline of art history with the same intellectual rigor that you would invariably bring to a course more in your “comfort zone.” Of course, this transition from the familiar to the unfamiliar will require work on your part – work to create meaning, and even to extract pleasure. It is *my* job to make this work provocative and rewarding.

Some of the free-ranging questions that will be addressed in this course are: What are the fundamental issues associated with the interpretation of visual art? What vocabulary do we deploy to best express these interpretations? How does one parse a critical text? What are the broader consequences of our inquiry? For example, how might one relate the ideas that emerge in class to other academic disciplines and to our perceptions of culture, high and low? In what ways might we begin to unsettle familiar hierarchies? How do museums and galleries construct meaning? By approaching all of these questions with a receptive mind, it is my hope that the journey we are now set to embark upon will be full of surprises and fascinating detours, ultimately leading to an understanding of art that is not limited by our own tastes and immediate experiences – that is, to liking *only* what we know.

The most unique feature of MAP is its recitations. Divided into four sections and led by your graduate TAs (Jacquelyn and Jodi), these weekly sessions will enhance your understanding of the material covered in lecture. The main objective of these more conversational meetings is to build confidence in a new field by familiarizing you with different approaches to interpreting visual language. These meetings may also include short writing exercises, aimed at sharpening your eye as well as your prose. There is no fixed formula to these informal meetings. No recitation will ever be quite the same. Brainstorming is always encouraged, in the hope of generating discussion in new, unforeseen directions. While some time may be spent on the clarification of material covered in lecture, discussions may also draw upon the preceptors’ own scholarly interests and negotiations. What projects are they engaged with at the moment? What are the interpretative strategies that they have brought to bear on their material? What are their most surprising findings? Their biggest obstacles?

The emphasis throughout is on active learning and innovative thinking rather than inherited concepts – in short, what brings all of us together here at the University, the life of the mind.

A more specific focus

Contemporary novelist Don DeLillo has written, “In our world we sleep and eat the image and pray to it and wear it too.” In this class, we will attempt to recapture what is at stake in our encounter with visual images when seen not as props or illustrations but as creations with meanings entirely their own. While we may engage with uncertainty and contingency in our rethinking of accepted ideas, we must, at the same time, acknowledge that every work of art was

done somewhere, some when, by someone. Works will be examined *on their native terms*: both as physical objects, with sensitivity to their material and formal qualities, and as works with specific intended functions, ranging from the ritual to the theatrical. As we shall see, images in the Renaissance, my own area of specialization, were received in very particular ways: not necessarily as we receive them, but gradually, through mediation and time. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the art of the Renaissance, like that of other periods, was also generally concerned with great and universal themes. The purpose of this course, therefore, is the recognition of various patterns, overlappings, associations and disconnections that we can draw from our visual analysis, whether the image in question is a medieval stained glass window or Pixar animation.

Our main focus will be the art of Europe and North America from the fourteenth century to the present. Our guiding principle, whatever the period, will be the study of images *as process* – the process of making, of interpretation and translation. To this end, we will study not only the effect – the final appearance of an art object – but also the means. In other words, the “how” and the “why” of image-making will often prove of greater interest to our enterprise than the “what,” yielding a history not only of artifacts but also the culture-specific ways in which images functioned within the social, intellectual, ceremonial or political contexts in which they were originally intended to perform their dramas, big and small.

Rather than studying the history of art as a linear progression of greatest hits, we will try to appreciate its complex web of relationships. The Renaissance, for instance, was not simply a period of noble equilibrium, as it is often reductively presented; rather, it is one harboring many different, often contradictory strains. In order to recognize the many trends and countertrends that will emerge, we will touch upon a variety of themes: artistic practice and technique, issues of style, iconography, patronage, economics and material culture, and the mutual encounter not only between individual artists but between Italy and northern Europe, as well as between East and West. Critical to understanding many of these issues are the fluid, shifting boundaries of creativity, originality, authenticity, derivation and imitation.

This kaleidoscope of topics demands an equally broad range of methodologies: formalist, typological, documentary, technical-material, cultural-historical, gender-based. Although we cannot possibly cover all of these interpretative strategies in class, students will be presented with a rich sampling of different types of art historical writing.

Requirements

Regular class attendance, punctuality and keeping current on reading assignments are expected. **Three unexcused absences (without a note from a doctor or Health Center professional) will result in a drop in a letter grade for the class** (from A to A- and so on). Leaving early twice will equal one absence.

Each lecture will cover a wide range of material and missed information will be difficult to regain. If you do miss a class or recitation, you are responsible for obtaining a classmate’s notes.

Reading should be coordinated with lectures and done before the meeting of the class and the introduction of new topics, in order to familiarize you with the issues to be discussed. Before each class, students are also encouraged to reread the class notes from the previous lecture. Do your best to study the material as it is presented to you; this way, you will rarely feel overwhelmed.

Please use a dictionary (or, better yet, an art historical dictionary) if you come across unfamiliar vocabulary. The Gardner textbook offers a useful glossary in the back. The Grove Dictionary Online provides another excellent resource.

As silly as it might sound, I also urge you to use the “Buddy System.” Exchange your number/email with another classmate with whom you can correspond regarding missed material, share ideas and clarify issues addressed in lecture or the readings.

Guidelines

* No make-up exams are given unless in the case of a serious illness or a family emergency. Again, a written note from a doctor or guardian is then required. Failure to contact the professor or preceptors about a missed exam – within 48 hrs. – will result in a failing grade for the exam. It goes without saying, do not make travel plans that will conflict with the examination schedule; you will not be excused because of an airline reservation or similar reason.

* Extensions for the writing assignments will not be granted, so please do not ask. Papers that are not handed in when due will not be accepted. If you are absent on the date the paper is due, the paper must still reach us, dropped off in the professor’s departmental mailbox by a friend or roommate.

* Papers are not to be accepted as email attachments. No exceptions.

* All writing assignments must be typed, either 1.5- or double-spaced. It is strongly recommended that you keep all of your written submissions after they are handed back; this is very helpful for me in case I am asked for a letter of recommendation in the future.

Other important reminders

* Leave the outside *outside*. Please keep all cell phones and pagers turned off. Texting is another punishable sin.

* Please come to class on time and stay until its every exciting finale. If you absolutely must leave early, please do so with minimal disruption.

* Papers are not to be accepted as email attachments. No exceptions.

* All writing assignments must be typed, either 1.5- or double-spaced. It is strongly recommended that you keep all of your written submissions after they are handed back; this is very helpful for me in case I am asked for a letter of recommendation in the future.

* No food or drink is allowed in the classroom, except water.

* Students may not tape-record lectures or recitation sections, unless given permission by the instructor in light of special circumstances.

Even after all these rules and bans, I hold out the hope that you won’t find me to be too scary an ogre. Just wait and see.

Grading

Your grade for the course will be based on the following (with some possible adjustments, at the professor's discretion):

Attendance and participation	20%
Six writing assignments	40 %
Midterm quiz	15 %
Final exam (only on material <i>since</i> midterm)	25 %

The variety of assignments will give you several different forums in which you may demonstrate your knowledge and understanding. As you can see, active participation in recitation and the bi-weekly critical responses – both fair measures of your commitment – go a long way, accounting for more than half of your final grade. Take full advantage!

The midterm and final exams will cover material presented in lecture (and Gardner) and will include some combination of the following:

1. terminology; 2. slide comparisons; 3. brief essay questions (final only); and 4. unknowns (including extra credit)

Slide images appearing on the midterm and final will be drawn *exclusively* from the illustrations in Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* – and must have been shown in class.

In the process of studying, students are urged to review the whole chapter(s), not just the brief passages that apply narrowly to the works you must know. To put it another way, there is knowing and then there is *understanding*. If you understand the period as a whole, rather than relying solely on shortcuts of memorization, you will be able to better situate and make sense of images you have never seen in lecture.

For each image appearing in the two exams, everyone is responsible for the object's

1. artist
2. title or subject / type of object (if without a title)
3. medium / media (e.g., tempera on panel, oil on canvas, wood, bronze, marble, etc.)
4. date (within 20 years)
5. original location, but only if the object remains in its original locaiton. If a painting or sculpture was originally installed in a church in Florence and is still there, you need to know that. You do *not* need to know the location if this work is now in London's National Gallery.

New York's museums provide the ideal setting for the study of art in the original, and students will be encouraged in various ways, through 6 different writing assignments, to take advantage of the benefits offered the city's permanent collections and temporary exhibitions. A selection of some of the most exciting upcoming shows is offered below.

Important dates to remember

Dates of 6 short written assignments (subject to slight changes):

- Tue., Sept. 16
- Tue., Sept. 30

Tue., Oct. 28

Tue., Nov. 11

Tue., Nov. 25

Tue., Dec. 9

* No paper is due the week of the midterm

Mon., Sept. 8 (5pm): Last day of active waitlists

Mon., Sept. 15: Last day for drop/add on Albert for all undergrads

No classes: Tue., Oct. 14 (Columbus Day)

Thur., Nov. 27 (Thanksgiving); no assignments due the following week

Last day of class: Thur., Dec. 11

Midterm quiz (also subject to slight change): Tue., Oct. 21 (precise mid-point of semester)

Final exam: Tue., December 16 (6-7.50 pm)

Fall-winter exhibitions, a dazzling menu

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in *Pietre Dure* from the Palaces of Europe

July 1–September 21, 2008 [Lectures (part of “Sunday at the Met”): 9/14, 2-4 pm]

J. M. W. Turner

July 1–September 21, 2008

Art and Love in Renaissance Italy

November 18, 2008–February 16, 2009

The Frick Collection

Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze

October 15, 2008–January 4, 2009

Masterpieces of European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum

October 28, 2008–January 18, 2009

The Pierpont Morgan Library

Three Gutenberg Bibles

May 20–September 28, 2008

MoBiA (Museum of Biblical Art)

Albrecht Dürer: Art in Transition

July 26–September 21, 2008

MoMA

Dalí: Painting and Film
June 29–September 15, 2008

Kirchner Street Scenes, 1913–1915
August 3–November 10, 2008

Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night
September 21, 2008–January 4, 2009

Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting 1927–1937
November 2, 2008–January 12, 2009

Guggenheim Museum

Louise Bourgeois
June 27–September 28, 2008

Research consultation at Bobst Library

Tom McNulty, the Librarian for Fine Arts at Bobst, has kindly offered to conduct one-on-one student-initiated consultations about various aspects of your written work. He is more than willing to answer any questions that you may have about electronic and print resources specific to art historical research. To make an appt., you may contact Mr. McNulty at tom.mcnulty@nyu.edu. Be sure to have specific questions ready when you meet.

College Learning Center

Some of you may find that you need or want extra help with class matters, whether this consists of reviewing for an exam, better understanding a particular concept or organizing a paper. Expert (and free) peer-on-peer tutoring is available at the College Learning Center, located at: Weinstein Residence Hall at 5-11 University Place, 1st floor. Director: Ms. Ivelys Figueroa (212.998.8720). General contact information: 212.998.8085 (tel.); cas.learning.center@nyu.edu. To find out more, visit: <http://www.nyu.edu/cas/clc/>

Internet Use and the Virtue of the Virtual

“Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” – T.S. Eliot, “The Rock”

Nothing can replace the experience of standing before Leonardo’s *Last Supper* in the refectory of S. Maria delle Grazie, Milan. The best print reproduction offers a less than satisfying substitute. The World Wide Web does present us with a readily accessible and often helpful resource to study art. Leonardo himself is proof enough that the creative and the technical mind are far from mutually exclusive and capable of producing extraordinary results. Nonetheless, the element of speed and convenience that makes the Web so tempting should be approached with caution, as it

can become all too easy to go adrift in an ocean of information that is inaccurate, misleading, and ultimately unreliable. The “WebMuseum,” put together by a computer technician, is the most notorious example of unfiltered information with dubious, undisclosed sources. Beware!

I strongly encourage everyone to read your handout titled “Guidelines for Evaluating Websites,” written by the Electronic Resources Librarian at the Metropolitan Museum and providing useful criteria for critically judging the legitimacy of any given site. The main question to be answered is whether the site was designed by a recognized authority in the field ... or someone who merely pursues art history as a hobby.

I ask that a student should consult with me prior to using any Web site as a research tool for a written assignment. **The following are a few of the trustworthy sites of which students can take full advantage:**

For images, available online:

1. ARTstor – one of the finest image data services available
(<http://library.artstor.org/library/welcome.html>)
2. Bridgeman Art Library – another excellent image data service
(www.bridgeman.co.uk/search/quick_search.asp)

* Museum web sites are traditionally very reliable. See, for example: the Metropolitan Museum (www.metmuseum.org), Frick Collection (www.frick.org), Louvre (www.louvre.fr), or the National Galleries in Washington (www.nga.gov) and London (www.nationalgallery.org.uk).

Artist-specific research resources (available through Bobst’s web site – go to “Find Resources” – “Articles via Databases” – “Database title”: [type in] “Art”):

1. Grove’s *Dictionary of Art Online* (www.groveart.com/shared/views/home.html).
For the original in hard copy, see J. Turner, ed., *The Dictionary of Art*, 34 vols. (NY, 1996).
2. Encyclopedia Britannica Online (www.britannica.com)

For finding specific articles via online indexes/databases (available through Bobst’s web site – go to “Find Resources” – “Articles via Databases” – “Database title”: [type in] “Art”):

1. JSTOR
2. Art Abstracts (indexes over 300 art journals; coverage is from 1929 to present and 1984 to present)
3. BHA, or Bibliography of the History of Art (indexes approximately 2,500 American and European art journals; coverage is from 1973 to the present).

The Metropolitan Museum web site in fact offers a useful, tried-and-true list of online resources, organized by curatorial departments, under the heading “Educational Resources” on the main page.

See: http://www.metmuseum.org/education/index.asp?HomePageLink=education_1

Plagiarism

NYU has a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism, as do I. If I find that you have plagiarized a paper – passing off the ideas or concepts of another as your own without giving due citation or credit – you will at best receive a zero on the paper. At worst, the punishment may include failure in the course and other disciplinary action on the part of the University. You must therefore use proper footnotes/endnotes and bibliography, if and when applicable (form to be discussed before your first writing deadline).