Pictures are part and parcel of modern life, and due to the advance of technology, technically reproduced images become ubiquitous. The proposed course is designed on an interdisciplinary basis to give an overview of the role images play in human culture.

The image has accompanied humans from the birth of civilization and can be traced even farther back into the evolution of man. All life is based on communication, and images are part of the overall communication process that living beings maintain among themselves and with their environment. To understand images as they are today, one must go back to their origin in the animal kingdom. Why so many species acquired vision almost simultaneously, and how the emergence of vision affected the variety of life? Starting with some premises from evolutionary biology, the course will further address the physiology of human vision. We will thus establish a connection between the biological foundations of the image and the emergence of culture, e.g., pictures in Neolithic caves and the use of imagery in tribal art. From an analysis of findings in biology and anthropology, we will move to the use of images in ancient cultures, and finally into high art, the domain that emerged in Europe during the Renaissance. Special attention will be given to the evolution of specific genres in the fine arts, such as the portrait and the landscape. Still another emphasis will be made on art history and aesthetic value throughout centuries, culminating in the crises that these latter underwent in the 20th century.

We will discuss social aspects in the development of artistic media and in the increasing dissemination of images with the introduction of photography, cinema, television, and the internet. We will read and discuss seminal texts by Boas, Warburg, Panofsky, Foucault, Simmel, Benjamin, McLuhan, Kittler, Kracauer, Cavell, Eisenstein, Debord, Baudrillard, and others. Readings are selected and arranged so as to raise critical issues and encourage reflection. The purpose of this course is for the student to learn critical thinking and engage in an informed debate on the matters in visual culture that are relevant in the present-day intellectual discussion. We are going to achieve this goal by learning the practice of close and careful reading, open-ended inquiry and discovery, to improve the students’ ability of independent thinking and expression in writing and discussions.

Week 1: Life, Information, Vision
Lecture 1.
Lecture 2.
Week 2: The emergence of vision in the animal world. The evolution of eyes. **Animal Appearance and Self-expression.**

**Lecture 1.**

**Lecture 2.**

Week 3:
**Specificity of Human Vision**

**Lecture 1.**

**Lecture 2.**

Week 4:
**Anthropology of the Image**

**Lecture 1.**

**Lecture 2.**

Week 5:
**The Beginning of Human Art**

**Lecture 1.**

**Lecture 2.**

Week 6:
**Toward Modern Art. From craft to modernity via Platonicism**

**Lecture 1.**
Plato. The Republic, book X.

**Lecture 2.**
Michel Foucault. Las Meninas. In: The Order of Things. Routledge, 2002, pp. 3-18

Week 7:
**Changing Patterns of Vision in Western Art. Portrait**
Lecture 1.

Lecture 2.

**Week 8.**
**Changing Patterns of Vision in Western Art. Landscape.**
**Lecture 1**

**Lecture 2**

**Week 9.**
**Image and Mechanical Reproduction. Media**
**Lecture 1**

**Lecture 2.**


**Week 10.**
**Photography. Body as Archive**
**Lecture 1.**

**Lecture 2.**

**Week 11.**
**The universe of images -- museums, collections.**
**Lecture 1.**

**Lecture 2.**


**Week 12**

**The End of Arts? Iconoclasm**

**Lecture 1.**


**Lecture 2.**


**Week 13.**

**Media**

**Lecture 1.**


**Lecture 2**


**Week 14.**

**Networks and Digital image**

**Lecture 1**

*Stanley Cavell*. The Fact of Television. -- Daedalus, Vol. 111, No. 4, Print Culture and Video Culture (Fall, 1982), pp. 75-96.

**Lecture 2**


**Writing assignments & exams**

**Longer Essays** (20% of total grade) Two essays (4-5pp double spaced). These essays have to show students' ability to construct an interpretive argument that engages with the assigned texts. Another goal is to improve students’ writing skills.

**Short writing exercises** (20% of total grade; no more than 1 page each) These short papers will allow for more freely developed, ponderous reflections on certain topics, following from a specific writing prompt. Your writing should fit on one page, typed (single or double spaced, front and back). You may write in whatever style, format, voice, perspective you want, so long as you fully address the questions.
Midterm & Final Exam (50% of total grade) Both the midterm and final are in-class exams. The exams will test your understanding of the assigned texts (key arguments), course knowledge (core issues, lecture discussions, etc.), and reflective/critical engagement (ability to identify issues across texts, ability to relate specific concepts to broader ideas, etc.).

Grading Summary
Longer Essays -- 20%
Short Writing Exercises -- 20%
Midterm Exam -- 25%
Final Exam -- 25%
Seminar Work & Participation -- 10%

Attendance
You are expected to attend every lecture and seminar meeting. If you cannot make a meeting, please let us know as soon as possible in advance. Attendance will be taken and participation noted. If you miss two meetings, you will need to meet to discuss where you stand in the course. If you miss three or more meetings, your final standing in the course will automatically drop one letter grade, and continue to drop per additional class missed.