HART 311 (511)

**RENAISSANCE ART**

Credits: 3.00

Fall 2020

Instructor

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Teaching assistant

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**Description and syllabus outline**

This course is an introduction to the art of the Italian Renaissance. It starts with a comparative overview of the European art scene in the late Gothic period -- including the Trecento and the International Style -- and ends with Mannerism. Giotto, who attained unparalleled fame in his lifetime, was praised by his contemporaries for having revived painting after many centuries of ‘darkness’. His achievement was indeed groundbreaking: the natural point of view and sense of inner logic in Giotto’s art were major breakthroughs in medieval perceptions of painted space. These innovations represent a definitive break with the anti-classical mentality of Gothic culture in Northern Europe and the hieratic Byzantine art that had dominated the Italian artistic scene. While Giotto may not have exactly revived the art of painting, he established a new visual standard that paved the way for the outburst of creativity one century later in Florence. Invention of perspective and enthusiasm for the rediscovered antiquity introduced entirely new modes of representation which led to increasingly bold experiments. The Renaissance produced extremely individualistic artists whose fame sometimes reached almost mythical proportions. The most prominent, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarotti, are generally considered to represent the high point of Western culture and the paragon of artistic achievement. Leonardo’s extrovert nature and extensive interests in the natural world, including his work as engineer and inventor, position him as the ‘Renaissance man’ par excellence. On the other extreme is the introvert Michelangelo, whose Sistine Chapel ceiling is an elaborate reinterpretation of the history of humanity by an artist of imposing stature and powerful inner vision. Renaissance art was very much the product of a new inquisitive mindset and a new outlook.  This introduction to Renaissance art, aesthetics and representational practice, will entail a study of the humanistic discourse and its implications on the visual arts, of the intellectual and cultural contexts in which art was produced, ranging from popular literature, patronage, social and political life, to cultural myths and religious practice.

**Course requirements**

This course consists of a lecture followed by a discussion. Students are expected to attend all lectures and discussions. Students will also take a midterm and a final examination as well as a take-home essay.

**Class rules**

All students are expected to attend lectures and participate in discussions. Attendance points are earned not just by being present online but by taking notes, actively participating in the class discussions, asking questions, making comments, etc.

**Class attendance**

Due to the visual nature of the course, attendance rules are rigorous and strictly implemented. Each absence from class will entail a loss of 3 points. Absence from more than a total of 2 classes will automatically entail an N/A grade (medical reports notwithstanding). Students are kindly asked to keep their cameras turned on during class.

**Grading**

30% Attendance and participation  
20% Midterm examination  
30% Essay (take-home) examination  
20% Final examination  
5% Bonus (film review or quiz)

**SYLLABUS**

PART I  
DUECENTO AND TRECENTO

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Week 1

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**From Byzantine to Gothic**  
In the first week art trends in Siena and Florence before the Renaissance are surveyed: the development from the Byzantine-inspired art of the Maniera Greca to the introduction of realism under Gothic influence. Also discussed is humanism and the continuity of the classical ideal. The principal artists considered in the first week are Duccio, Simone Martini, the Lorenzetti brothers and Giotto.

PART II  
QUATTROCENTO: THE EARLY RENAISSANCE

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Week 2

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**The Beginnings: Classicism and Realism**  
In the second week, the beginnings of the Renaissance are examined. Brunelleschi’s invention of linear perspective is discussed in relation to the work of Masaccio, the first truly Renaissance painter. Linear perspective is just the beginning of the conquest of realism. Careful observation of nature and the desire to compete with antiquity motivated Masaccio as well as the first sculptors of the Renaissance, Nanni di Banco and Donatello. Strict classicist ideals formed the underpinning of the Renaissance. But there existed in these early years of the Quattrocento a more conservative trend toward the decorative and colorful known as the International Gothic style. Both trends are examined in considerable detail. The principal artists discussed are Masaccio, Nanni di Banco, Filippo Brunelleschi, Donatello, Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi and Luca della Robbia.

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Week 3

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**Art, Politics and Taste: Artists and Patrons**  
In week three the class examines the role of patrons in the creation of a work of art. It focuses on the Medici family and examines their way of life and their motivations for art patronage: how art was used for self-promotion including art galleries as private viewing areas for the elites. Also examined is the revival of public monuments as an expression of Renaissance humanism and celebration of the individual and the rising social standing of artists, their self-awareness and consequently the changing definition of art.

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Week 4

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**Experiments in Style**  
Week four looks at the artists who came after Masaccio and who developed original ways of depicting rational space to achieve their own creative vision. Also examined are the experiments in architecture that led to increasingly original reinterpretations of the classical canon. Included in this week is the development of the Renaissance outside of Florence, specifically in Urbino and Mantova. The local aristocratic elites who controlled these cities sponsored some of the greatest names of Early Renaissance art who created outstanding works that easily compare to the best works done in Florence for the Medici family. Artists discussed are Andrea del Castagno, Paolo Uccello, Domenico Veneziano and Leon Battista Alberti and outside of Florence, Piero della Francesca and Andrea Mantegna.

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Week 5

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**Reality and Fantasy**  
Week six focuses first on Andrea del Verrocchio and Antonio Pollaiuolo, two versatile artists who have dominated the Florentine scene in the second half of the century as both sculptors and painters. The second part of the class examines the art of Sandro Botticelli and his role in the art scene of Florence during the patronage of Lorenzo de’ Medici. The class will look at Botticelli’s extraordinary vision that redefined Renaissance art and his unusual relation with Classical Antiquity. The class will learn also how this trend that brought artistic freedom to new heights was reversed under pressure from the radical conservative Girolamo Savonarola.

PART III  
CINQUECENTO: THE HIGH RENAISSANCE

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Week 6

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**The Renaissance Man: Leonardo da Vinci**  
In Week six the course enters the High Renaissance. The focus is on Leonardo da Vinci, mainly his paintings but also some of his scientific and technical drawings. The class will discuss Leonardo’s personal style -- that transcendent atmosphere that seems to envelope like a veil his mysterious figures and submerges them into a unity with the surrounding nature. The class will evaluate Leonardo’s contribution to the development of the style of the High Renaissance. The objective is to examine the ideals of the High Renaissance and understand how they are different from the ideals that guided artists of the Early Renaissance.

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Week 7

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**The Passionate Genius: Michelangelo**  
Week eight looks at Michelangelo from his beginnings in Florence and his subsequent work in Rome. The class will evaluate Michelangelo’s overall contribution and the different aspects of his art. Looking at some of his earlier sculptures, we immediately recognize Michelangelo’s desire to animate the hard stone, to express a fusion of motion and emotion that would convey his idealistic philosophy and attitude toward Antiquity. Particular attention will be on the development of his distinctive style as a sculptor and how this compares with his style in painting.

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Week 8

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**Michelangelo and Raffaello: The Competition**  
This class explores Michelangelo’s work after the Sistine Chapel ceiling: his work on the tomb of Pope Julius II and his return to Florence to work on the Medici tombs. Some of his greatest achievements belong in this mature period of his life. Most famous is the spectacular rendition of the Last Judgment, a work whose bold departure from traditional models has redefined Renaissance art. This week is also concerned with Michelangelo’s competitor in Rome, the young Raffaello, the protégé of the architect Bramante. Both were towering figures of the High Renaissance. The charming beauty of Raffaello’s Madonnas and the gravity of the frescoes that he painted in the pope’s chambers, are among the most extraordinary accomplishments of Italian art. They will be examined with particular attention and compared to the work of Leonardo and Michelangelo. Bramante’s work as the pope’s architect, his design for San Pietro in Montorio and plans for the new St. Peter’s place him alongside Brunelleschi and Alberti as one of the greatest architects of all time.

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Week 9

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**Tiziano and the Venetian Scene**  
This week the class will move to Venice to explore High Renaissance art as it developed after Giovanni Bellini. His successors Giorgione and Tiziano have left a lasting impression with their soft poetic images of deep intensive color and feeling. The class will also examine how the unique position of Venice has influenced its history and cultural specificity and how this was left an imprint on its art. Also discussed is the relationship between Michelangelo and Tiziano. Particular focus will be on Neo-Platonism, a philosophical system that deeply pervaded Michelangelo’s spiritual life and his art.

PART IV  
CINQUECENTO: MANNERISM AND OTHER TRENDS

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Week 10

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**From Michelangelo to the Florentine Mannerists**  
This week the class will explore the art of Florence during the reign of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici and his principal artists. Mannerism, the new style that these artists promoted was a radical change to the Renaissance canon. They each pursued personal visions that were usually not in line with artistic canons of the time. This was a time of experiment and artistic freedom. Also discussed are the late years of Michelangelo when he was working on such personal statements as the Florentine and Rondanini Pietàs. Some of these works can be compared with Tiziano’s late works. The class will also learn of Michelangelo’s architectural works including the dome of St. Peter’s and the Campidoglio. Artists discussed are Bronzino, Pontormo, and Rosso, Michelangelo, Tiziano.

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Week 11

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**Renaissance and Mannerism North of the Alps**  
The last week is concerned with the artistic developments in the north of Italy and beyond. The focus will be on the varieties of Mannerism and related styles that appear in the works of such brilliant individualists as the Venetian Tintoretto and the Greek El Greco working in Spain both of whom challenge established norms with extraordinary power of invention. Apart from these two great figures, the class will examine lesser artistic trends including Paolo Veronese’s grand realism in Venice. This week is concerned with the developments in the north characterized by diverse artistic tendencies such as the almost private and personal but highly inventive painting of Sofonisba Anguissola and the bizarre work of Giuseppe Arcimboldo. We shall then cross the Alps to look at the Italian Mannerists working on the construction and decoration of the French King’s palace at Fontainebleau. Also, the class will examine the work of several native French artists who learn from the Italians and establish an indigenous artistic ‘school’ that produced if not great then quite original works. Also briefly discussed is Netherlandish, French, German and English painting starting from Hieronymus Bosch, best known for his fabulous imagination and folkloric subjects, more properly Renaissance artists such as Pieter Bruegel the Elder whose rustic visions of countryside and extraordinary perceptiveness of humanity presents almost live images and atmosphere of the Netherlandish village, and finally Matthias Grünewald, Albrecht Dürer, and Hans Holbein the Younger whose work ranged from altarpieces and engravings to historical scenes and portraits. The class will study this ‘German’ manner to understand how and why it differs from its Italian counterparts.

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Weeks 12 and 13

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Class review

**RECOMMENDED READINGS**

- Excerpts from primary sources (posted in SUCourse)

- Vasari, Giorgio.  Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects. New York: Knopf, 1996.  2 volumes. (selections)

- Welch, Evelyn. Art in Renaissance Italy: 1350-1500 (Oxford History of Art). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. (selections)

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**FURTHER READINGS**

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Barolsky, Paul. The Faun in the Garden: Michelangelo and the Poetic Origins of Italian Renaissance Art.  University Park:  Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

Barolsky, Paul. Why Mona Lisa Smiles and Other Tales by Vasari. University Park:  Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991.

Baxandall, Michael. Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy. Oxford University Press, 1988.

Blunt, Anthony. Artistic Theory in Italy: 1450-1600. Oxford University Press, 1994.

Chastel, Andre. French Art:  The Renaissance, 1430-1620. Paris: Flammarion, 1994.

Cole, Bruce.  Piero della Francesca:  Tradition and Innovation in Renaissance Art.  New York:  Icon,  1991.

Dempsey, Charles. The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent.  Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Edgerton, Jr., Samuel Y.  The Heritage of Giotto’s Geometry: Art and Science on the Eve of the Scientific Revolution.  Ithaca:  Cornell University Press, 1991.

Freedberg, S. J. Painting in Italy: 1500-1600.  3rd ed.  New Haven:  Yale University Press, 1993.

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Kempers, Bram. Painting, Power and Patronage.  London:  Penguin, 1994.

Land, Norman E. The Viewer as Poet: The Renaissance Response to Art.  University Park:  Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

Lawrence, Cynthia. Women and Art in Early Modern Europe:  Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs.  University Park:  Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

Lemaitre, Alain J. and Erich Lessing.  Florence and the Renaissance:  The Quattrocento.  Paris:  Terrail, 1993.

Munman, Robert. Sienese Renaissance Tomb Monuments. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1993.

Nash, Susie. Northern Renaissance Art (Oxford History of Art), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Paoletti; John T. and Gary M. Radke.  Art in Renaissance Italy.  New York:  Abrams, 1997.

Partridge, Loren. The Art of Renaissance Rome, 1400-1600.  New York:  Abrams, 1996.

Shearman, John and Marcia B. Hall, eds. The Princeton Raphael Symposium: Science in the Service of Art History. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Turner, A. Richard.  Renaissance Florence:  The Invention of a New Art.  New York:  Abrams, 1997.

Turner, James Grantham, ed.  Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe:  Institutions, Texts, Images.  Cambridge:  Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Woodal, Joanna, ed. Portraiture: Facing the Subject. Manchester IP, 1997.