FYSE 1146 A: The World of the Italian Renaissance Artist
Fall, 2005

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Office Hours: M-F, 11-12


Class website: http://segue.middlebury.edu/sites/fyse1146a-f05

Resource Team: Judy Watts, Librarian (x5798, watts@middlebury.edu)
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Course Objectives:
In this course, we will explore the relationship between Renaissance artists and the world that they inhabited. Even as a complex guild system, wealthy patrons, and the church directed the fates of many fifteenth-century artists, the artists themselves shaped the visual language of countless citizens of Florence, Rome, and Venice. To take just one (very) famous example, the Sistine Ceiling proved an exercise in enormous frustration for Michelangelo. He resisted the commission from the outset, arguing with Pope Julius II that he was a sculptor, not a painter, and trying with every ounce of his limited diplomacy to rekindle the Pope’s interest in his own tomb project. In the end, Michelangelo was essentially forced into the Sistine project, one that drove him to the depths of depression. In a desperate and very negative sense, this commission, and the artist’s relationship to his patron, had a profound impact on the artist. At the same time, it would be hard to find anyone who does not view the Sistine Ceiling as one of the great monuments of Western art. Before it was even completed, artists such as Raphael were quoting the figures on the ceiling, finding ways to work Michelangelo’s heroic vision of the human form into their own work, and Michelangelo himself went on to re-work figures from the Ceiling into three-dimensional figures for future sculptural commissions. Our discussions in this course will center on understanding the nature of these kinds of relationships—what shaped the lives of Renaissance artists, and how did they in turn shape the world of their contemporaries? We will study closely such concerns as workshop training, specific painting and sculptural techniques, patronage, and the concept of artistic rivalry. Our readings will include primary documents as well as more recent accounts of life in Renaissance Italy.

Writing: This course is writing intensive, and it is essential that you pay close attention to the guidelines and due dates for each writing assignment. Throughout the course of the semester, you will be assigned a wide range of writing assignments—from free writing to visual analysis, short response papers, and a formal research paper. You should always feel encouraged to discuss your writing with me, during office hours or special appointments. Periodically, we will conduct writing workshop in class, when you and members of your peer editing group will grapple with specific challenges and help to fine-tune each other’s papers. In addition, Jonathan Ellis, a senior major in the History of Art, is serving as peer writing tutor for this class, and he will be available for individual conferences throughout the course of the semester. I do not expect you to be polished writers at the outset of the semester. I do have the strong expectation that you will work consistently and diligently to improve the clarity and effectiveness of your writing. Both process and content will be factored into the grades you receive on written work.
**Support:** In this seminar, we are fortunate to have ample assistance in the fields of writing, research, study skills, and technology. The team of individuals listed at the top of this syllabus will be available throughout the semester to assist in a variety of ways. We will meet as a group with our library consultant, Judy Watts, and our technology consultant, Shel Sax, as well as with the senior students who are assisting, Jonathan Ellis, peer writing tutor, and Kim Hansen, Academic Consultant for Excellence. You are also encouraged to make appointments to meet in small groups or one-on-one with these individuals. Each of them has been appointed because of their unique qualifications and for their experience with and enthusiasm for working with first-year students.

**Grading Scale:**
Active participation: 20%  (includes class discussion, writing workshops, painting workshop, museum trip/discussion)
- Papers 1-2 20%
- Paper 3 15%
- Paper 4 20%
- Presentation 20%
- Studio 5%

**Semester Schedule**

**September**

8: First Class Meeting. Schedule advising sessions, talk through your questions regarding Week #1. Discuss: When did the Renaissance begin?

12: **Read:** Cole, Introduction; Vasari, 7-44; Petrarch, The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux. **Due:** One-page discussion of one theme that seems to emerge from these readings. **Class:** What did it mean to be a citizen/artist in pre-Renaissance Italy?

14: **Read:** Goffen, Imitatio and Renovatio; Vasari, 83-100; 110-146; Cole, 178-197; Walker hand-out. **Class:** What characterized the Renaissance in Italy? What is the Renaissance anyway? Why is Orsanmichele so important?


19: **Read:** Cennini, 1-20; Cole, 13-56; 95-135; Vasari, 47-58; 210-223; Goffen, Chapter 2, _Agon_. How did artists learn? Role of drawing. Discussion of Renaissance apprenticeships/workshop practice. Can you think of any modern equivalents to this system? How do we reconcile the apprenticeship with the burgeoning sense of rivalry that we find in the early Renaissance?

21: **Writing workshop. Read:** Barnet, pp.156-166. Work in pairs with your writing partner on 2 pages of the draft you will hand in on Wednesday. What is the central argument of your paper? What makes an effective argument?

23: **Due:** Draft of Paper #1. Research-supported comparison of the competition panels. **Read:** Cole, 57-71; Cennini 20-42; 86-96. Tempera painting technique and patronage.
26: Drafts handed back. **Meet** in the library with Shel Sax: designing power point presentations, adding case studies to course website. 5:30 p.m.: **Dinner** at Blinn Lane (Professor Smith Abbott’s house), with a video about Florence in the Renaissance.

28: **Read**: Cole, 76-95 and 168-177; Cennini,42-57; Vasari, 101-109. Fresco painting technique. 1 Case Study.

30: Read: Vasari, 74-83 **Due**: Final Draft of Paper #1 Paper #2. Assignments handed out (one artist, two patrons). Fresco painting patronage. 1 Case Study. Discussion.

**October**

2: Trip to Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA. Class in the galleries lead by Jason Vrooman, ’03, graduate student in Art History at Williams College. 2 p.m. lecture by Kathleen Morris: "The Power Beneath Michelangelo's Dome: Bernini and the Popes"

3: **Read**: Cennini, 57-60; Cole, 71-76; 137-167; Vasari 185-190; 242-249. Oil Painting Technique: its origins and impact. 1 case study.

5: **Discussion**. Oil painting: the challenge to tradition. 1 Case study.


10: **Read**: Barnet, 120-134. **Writing Workshop**: Writing a comparison. Work with writing partner, receive feedback, as well as my copy of your outline with comments.

12: **Read**: Vasari, 169-177 + handouts on patronage. What is a cycle or program of paintings? What was their function in the Renaissance? Which cycles are the most successful and why? 1 Case Study.

14: **No class** at 10. Schedule individual conferences to discuss Paper #2. Bring a copy of your complete draft with you to this conference.

17: **Read**: Vasari, 299-304; 489-508. The special case of Venice. Presentations by HARC 401 students.

19: **Due: Paper #2** Practicing Patronage. Putting what you’ve learned into practice!

21: Fall Break.

24: Vasari and his Legacy. **Read**: Vasari’s Life of Michelangelo, pp.414-488. Discuss the strategies employed by Vasari to ensure Michelangelo’s triumph.

26: Read: Goffen, pp. 70-139. Michelangelo’s early career.

28: **Writing Workshop**: Writing a visual analysis. **Read** Barnet, pp. 41-119

31: **Due**: Drafts of Paper #3. **Read**: Handout on Sistine Ceiling. Case study and discussion: the Sistine Chapel
November

2: Writing Workshop

4: Class with Shel Sax to learn how to put Case Studies on class web page.

7: Due: Paper #3  Read: Handout. Discussion re: the model of the modern artist established by Michelangelo.

9: Read: Vasari’s Life of Leonardo da Vinci, pp. 284-298, handout (excerpts from Leonardo’s notebooks). Who was Leonardo for his own period, what does he represent in the contemporary moment?

11: Read: Goffen on Leonardo (pp. 143-170). Discussion of the rivalry between Leonardo and Michelangelo. What do they represent to the Paragone?

13: Apprenticeship with Kate Gridley!! This is an all-morning workshop, in which local painter Kate Gridley will train us in the methods of Renaissance artists. We will draw on prepared papers with silver point, charcoal, and ink, we will learn how to grind pigments and suspend them in oil, and we will paint small oil paintings on panels prepared with a gesso base. At the conclusion of our studio time, we will walk to Kate’s studio in town, to see some of her paintings and to talk more with her about her own training and approach.


16: Read: Goffen on Raphael, pp. 171-264.

18: Raphael discussion.

21: Due: Outlines and opening argument for Paper #4. Discussion: How is Goffen’s premise holding up? What is missing?

23: No Class. Thanksgiving Break!

25: No Class. Happy Thanksgiving!

28: Read: Ridolfi on Titian (handout).

30: Writing Workshop. How do you distinguish your voice from those scholars whose work you have consulted?

December


Week of Dec. 5: Research presentations.