

AH 40B Winter Quarter 2021

MWF 10-10:50

Intro to European Art: Medieval and Renaissance



Instructor: Lyle Massey

Teaching Assistants: Kathie Lyn Folie-Meyer, Molly Thrailkill,
Mallory Elizabeth Wells

Class Ground Rules:

1. You must enroll in a section as well as lecture to be fully enrolled in this course. You need to attend 4 out of the 7 sections that will be held from now until the end of the quarter. Section attendance constitutes one part of your participation grade. The part consists in contributing to 1 of 2 discussion boards that we will have during the quarter.
2. There are three essays required in this course. Modules on Canvas show you everything you need for that week (readings, study questions), and also list essay topics for that week's content. The questions for the required essay assignments will be chosen from those essay topics.
3. **There is no textbook for this class.** All required readings are posted on Canvas. For further background on the art and periods we cover, the syllabus has links to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline.
4. Please keep yourself muted during lectures, and ask questions through Zoom chat.

What is art and why study it?

“Art is the expression of what is beautiful.”

The idea that **art** represents an **aesthetic response to beauty** derives from the 18th c. German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. For Kant, humans have an innate faculty of judgment that enables them to experience beauty and grasp that experience as part of an ordered, natural world. For Kant, this **aesthetic judgment** (the recognition of what is beautiful or what is sublime) is universal and on par with moral judgment (the recognition of what is good), i.e. the human response to beauty = an ethical response to nature.

Another German philosopher who endorsed the idea that art, beauty and the moral good were intertwined was Friedrich Hegel. For Hegel, **art** expresses the **spirit of particular cultures**, as well as that of individual artists and humans in general. According to Hegel, as art develops over time, it also evolves, moving men toward greater moral truths.



“Art is what ever you want it to be.”

Marcel Duchamp,
Fountain, 1917



Art is a way of creating class distinctions and social hierarchies through the construction of codes of taste and discernment allied with expressions of surplus wealth.



Thomas Gainsborough, *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*, 1750

Does art matter?

Art has often been, and still is, at the center of deep religious, political and social divisions. While you might think that art history covers inconsequential “pretty” objects that have no meaning for the real world, you might change your mind when you are confronted with events in recent history:

Individual works of art can and have elicited strong, even violent responses for political, social and economic reasons.

In 1914, the suffragette, Mary Richardson, slashed the Venus Rokeby by Baroque painter, Diego Velazquez, to protest the treatment of women in jail.



In 1972, on Pentecost Sunday, Laszlo Toth, a mentally disturbed geologist, took a hammer to Michelangelo's *Pieta*, shouting "I am Jesus Christ and I have risen from the dead!"

Art and architecture are also often intended and accidental casualties of war and conflict. The ongoing war in Syria has not only killed an est. 450,000 people, while displacing millions of others, it has also destroyed some of the oldest, most pristine remnants of 2000 years of history.

Before and after photos of the 13th c. Umayyad Mosque in the ancient city of Aleppo



Art is important because, even if it doesn't mean much to you, somewhere else in the world, it probably really matters to someone else either positively or negatively for reasons you might not understand.



Destruction of ancient temples of Bel and of Baal Shamin (1st c. CE) in Palmyra by ISIS



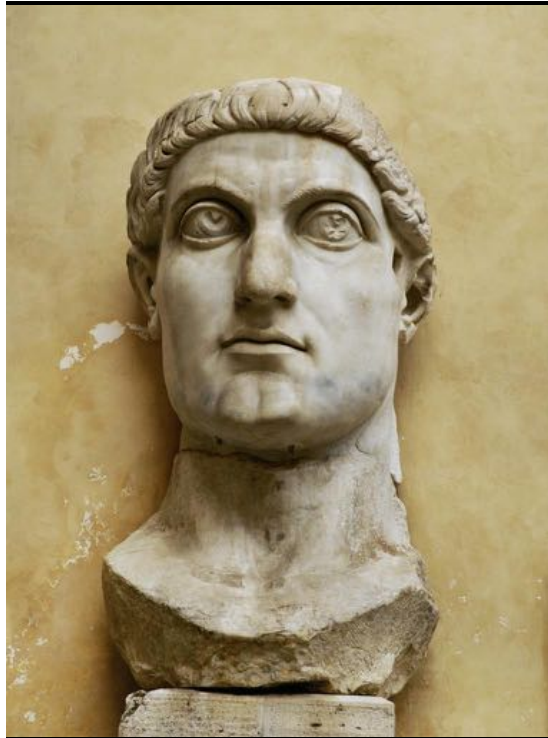
لحظة تفجير معبد (بعالشمين) الوثني في مدينة تدمر

So what do we do when we study art history?

We become the keepers of cultural memory in a time when the artifacts of human ingenuity—architecture, painting, sculpture—are fast disappearing.

Like elephants in Africa, which, at the current rate of poaching, may be extinct in a few years, ancient and historical sites all over the world are in danger of simply vanishing, taking with them the critical insight they provide into human civilizations and cultures.

What does all this have to do with this
class specifically?



EUROPEAN ART: Medieval and Renaissance
From (roughly) the reign of the first Christian Roman
Emperor, Constantine (4th c. CE), to the Protestant
Reformation (begun 1517) and the Sack of Rome
(1527) under Pope Clement the VII.



This period is characterized early by the spread of Christianity, and later by the dominance of Christian religion over Western Europe.

