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Course title: History of American Art

Level of studies: This class is for non-art history students. Students major in American studies, British studies or Linguistics.

Course format: In-person elective class for 15-20 undergraduate students  
One semester (15 weeks), 90 minutes per week

Course description: This course presents a chronological and thematic survey of American visual art in the historical and socio-cultural contexts. The course will discuss the formation and the subsequent negotiations of the American cultural identity as it manifested itself in visual art, increasingly independent from the European influence and inclusive of non-Eurocentric traditions. American art is viewed in direct correlation to historical and cultural changes, as well as the North American geographical context. The course will examine (1) the late colonial times, including European and Indigenous perspectives; (2) the beginnings of the state: Classicism and Romanticism; (3) landscape painting and the imperial ideology, (4) industrialization, realism and naturalism; (4) Impressionism and Post-Impressionism at the turn of the 19th and 20th century; (5) American Modernism: avant-garde, Harlem Renaissance, (6) contemporary art, including feminist, Indigenous, Black, and Latinx art.

Course materials: Scans of all obligatory reading materials and pre-entry quizzes will be available on the Moodle platform or they are available online (the links are provided in the course schedule below).

Goals & objectives: The aim of the course is to enable students to identify American artists, art works, facts and ideas related to particular artistic movements/schools, assess their relevance for the development of American art and locate them in connection to the more broadly understood American culture and history. Students will be able to apply their knowledge in extra-artistic contexts to demonstrate affinities between artistic concepts and practices and the larger developments in the American context.

Grading policy: 10% class participation  
20% weekly pre-entry quizzes

30 % archival projects  
40 % final test

Class participation: Students are encouraged to actively participate in class discussions. They are expected to complete their reading assignments weekly, as the course covers broad material and each class is dedicated to a different topic.

Pre-entry quizzes: The weekly pre-entry quizzes will be available on Moodle and are solely based on the reading materials assigned for the particular class. Each quiz will open for one week and will close at midnight before the class takes place. Failing to complete a quiz results in losing 5% of the final mark.

Archival projects: Some of the topics on the syllabus have been marked with an asterisk for each student to choose three they would like to research in a more detailed way. For each, students will research the Archives of American Art, as well as other data bases of the Smithsonian Institution, to complete a case study of the ideas discussed in class. The analyzed material must correspond – by aligning to, transgressing or interrogating – to the historical-intellectual context discussed in class and to the assigned reading material. The case study is to be presented in the form of a written assignment of 2-3 pages, TNR 12, 1.5 spaced. Students are encouraged to use the readings provided on the syllabus, in the course bibliography and other material available in scholarly databases and libraries. Students are encouraged to consult the course instructor regarding their topics and reading material.

PLEASE NOTE: 1. Students must decide on the topics of their archival projects by week three by submitting the information on Moodle. 2. Each assignment has to be uploaded on Moodle within two weeks following the class that discusses the topic.

The final test: The final test takes place at the end of the course. It is based on the material taught in class and on the reading assignments, both primary and secondary. The test will comprise of various tasks, including an object recognition assignment, multiple choice questions, questions in chronology and terminology related to American art, semi-open questions (e.g., characterization of art movements and artists), and open questions based primarily on the reading assignments. PLEASE NOTE: For the object recognition assignments, a study list of 50 objects will be available on Moodle two weeks before the final test.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### CLASS ONE. Introduction to the class

Course requirements and an overview of American art.

An American art slideshow & Introduction to AAA.

Dig Deep: a three-minute film about the Archives of American Art:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lZSoaw-Fiw>

### CLASS TWO. Colonial art

Indigenous art and architecture, America and the Indigenous people in the European imaginary, colonial architecture and painting

**reading:** "America and the European Imagination" In: David Bjelajac, *American Art: Cultural History*.

Christopher Columbus. *Letters*. (excerpts)

an indigenous account of the European arrival:

<https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/contact/text6/text6read.htm>

### CLASS THREE. The early Republic \*

Art and the shaping of the American national identity: Benjamin West, John Singleton Copley, Charles Willson Peale, John Trumbull

**reading:** David Bjelajac, *American Art: Cultural History*. 115-133.

"The Declaration of Independence."

*Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife, Abigail Adams, During the Revolution* (excerpts)

Frederick E. Hoxie et al. (eds.) *Native Americans and the Early Republic* (excerpts)

African Americans in the Early Republic. *Khan Academy*.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/the-early-republic/culture-and-reform/a/african-americans-in-the-early-republic>

### CLASS FOUR. Imperial expansion West \*

19<sup>th</sup>c. landscape painting: Thomas Cole, Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Edwin Church

**reading:** John Louis O'Sullivan, "The Great Nation of Futurity."

Henry Nash Smith, "The Frontier Hypothesis and the Myth of the West."

Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," in: Paul Wood (ed.). *Art in Theory 1800-1899*.

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (excerpts)

### CLASS FIVE. American Impressionism \*

James McNeill Whistler, Mary Cassatt, Thomas Sargent

**reading:** Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference*.

"Women Artists" and "Women's Petition to the Academy," Oscar Wilde, "On Art for Art's Sake," in: Paul Wood (ed.). *Art in Theory 1800-1899*.

### **CLASS SIX. Industry and masculinity \***

Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, John Frederick Peto

**reading:** David Bjelajac, *American Art: Cultural History*. 250-264.

selection of Walt Whitman poetry.

Walt Whitman, "On the American Artist," Winslow Homer, "Statement on *plein-air* Painting," Thomas Eakins, "On the Teaching of Art," in: Paul Wood (ed.). *Art in Theory 1800-1899*.

### **CLASS SEVEN. NY avant-garde & Harlem Renaissance \***

Alfred Stieglitz, Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler, Georgia O'Keeffe, Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence, Augusta Savage

**reading:** Alfred Stieglitz, "Pictorial Photography," in: Paul Wood (ed.). *Art in Theory 1800-1899*.

Alain Locke. "The New Negro." (excerpts)

<https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/22-the-new-era/alain-locke-on-the-new-negro-1925/>

### **CLASS EIGHT. American Scene, Social Realism, Ashcan School**

Grant Wood, Thomas Benton, Ben Shahn, George Bellows, John Sloan, George Luks, Edward Hopper, Lewis Hine

**reading:** David Bjelajac, *American Art: Cultural History*. 285-293.

Grant Wood, "Revolt against the City," in: Paul Wood (ed.). *Art in Theory 1800-1899*.

### **CLASS NINE. Abstract Expressionism \***

Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Norman Newman, Lee Krasner, Helen Frankenthaler, Ad Reinhardt

**reading:** Erika Doss, "Abstract Expressionism." *Twentieth-Century American Art*. 118-38.

Mark Rothko et al. "Letter to *New York Times*," Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now," Harold Rosenberg, "The Fall of Paris," in: Paul Wood (ed.). *Art in Theory 1800-1899*.

### **CLASS TEN. Art in the 1960s and 1970s \***

Pop-Art, the happening, performance & politically engaged art, Black Art Movement

**reading:** Jerome Klinkowitz, "The Sixties Aesthetic," in: *The American 1960s*.

Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp.'"

Richard Hamilton, "For the Finest Art, Try Pop," Claes Oldenburg, "I am for an Art..." in: Paul Wood (ed.). *Art in Theory 1800-1899*.

### **CLASS ELEVEN. Feminist and women's art \***

Woman's Building & women-artists in the Black Arts Movement  
Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly, Yoko Ono, Faith Ringgold,  
Carrie Mae Weems

**reading:** Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been no Great Women Artists?"  
[https://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Nochlin-Linda\\_Why-Have-There-Been-No-Great-Women-Artists.pdf](https://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Nochlin-Linda_Why-Have-There-Been-No-Great-Women-Artists.pdf)  
"Art & Activism with Faith Ringgold." Interview with the artist. CUNY  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4e\\_IyToFEs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4e_IyToFEs)

### **CLASS TWELVE. Conceptual art, Land art and Minimal art**

Donald Judd, Maya Lin, Richard Serra, Walter de Maria, Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt,  
Jennie Holzer

**reading:** Erika Doss. "Minimalism and Conceptual Art." *Twentieth-Century American Art*. 161-180.  
Selected interviews with the artists.

### **CLASS THIRTEEN. Critical art I**

Renee Cox, Kara Walker, Nick Cave

**reading:** Erika Doss. "Feminist Art and Black Art." *Twentieth-Century American Art*. 181-202.  
Selection of articles and interviews with the artists.

### **CLASS FOURTEEN. Critical art II**

Rebecca Belmore, Latinx art, Krzysztof Wodiczko

**reading:** Erika Doss. "Contemporary Art." *Twentieth-Century American Art*. 227-248.  
<https://www.rebeccabelmore.com/> (look through Artworks and Performances)  
*Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art*. Episode 1. The Smithsonian American Art Museum. <https://americanart.si.edu/art/highlights/latinx>  
K. Wodiczko, "Public Projection."  
<https://www.krzysztofwodiczko.com/about> (look through Projections and Installations)

### **CLASS FIFTEEN.**

Final test.

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