Course description

This lecture course surveys art of the United States, from the American Revolution to the Armory Show of 1913. Our approach will be to situate the images, visual practices, and artistic styles of this period within their social, historical, and cultural contexts. Among the topics we will consider are art and nationalism, portraiture and the self, picturing war, art and popular culture, race and representation, the idea of the modern artist, and European influences on American art. In exploring these topics we will pay particular attention to the role that artistic production and consumption played in constructing American social identities and culture across the long nineteenth century. In addition to attending lectures, students will make several visits to area museums to view original artworks. These visits will serve as the basis for the three writing assignments in the course.

Course materials


Other required readings and course materials, including the syllabus, writing assignments, and the PowerPoint presentations used in class, will be posted on Sakai, the Rutgers course webpage system: http://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal.

Learning goals

Upon completion of this course students will be able to:

1) Understand the development of US art across time and place
2) Analyze artworks in themselves and in relation to specific histories, values, languages, cultures, and technologies
3) Write critical essays about visual representation

These learning goals will be assessed as follows:

10% Class participation; assessment based on attendance, contributions to class discussion, demonstrated effort and commitment to course goals
50% (2) writing assignments based on objects at the Zimmerli Art Museum (including online plagiarism tutorial)
40% (1) writing assignment based on the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Class policies

Students are expected to attend all classes; if you must miss a class, please use the university’s online absence reporting system to indicate the date of and reason for your absence: https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/. An email is automatically sent to me. Three or more absences will seriously impact your final grade.

All assigned readings are required and should be completed before class to enable your full participation.

All writing assignments must be submitted in two forms: 1) as a printed copy in class; and 2) as an MS Word document uploaded to the “Assignments” folder on Sakai. Note that written work will receive a 5% grade reduction per day late; if two classes pass after the due date, your work will receive a failing grade. Exceptions will be made in documented cases of illness, family emergencies, religious holidays, etc. Please make sure to keep me informed of any circumstances that may prevent you from passing in your best work on time.

Open communication between students and instructor is very important to me; it also directly contributes to your success in this (as in any other) course. I encourage you to meet with me in office hours or schedule an appointment to discuss any aspect of your performance in the course and/or specific course materials/content. Note that I will also comment on drafts of your written work in person, but not by email. Finally, please be aware that Rutgers provides appropriate academic accommodations for students with disabilities; you should inform me within the first two weeks of class of any special accommodations you will require.

Plagiarism and academic honesty

Please familiarize yourself with the definition of plagiarism in the Rutgers Policy on Academic Integrity: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/policy-on-academic-integrity. As a student in this course, you are responsible for understanding and adhering to this policy. Any student who violates academic integrity in this course will receive no credit for the given assignment and, in some cases, a failing grade for the semester. All such violations are reported to the Office of Student Conduct and will seriously impact your academic career.

IMPORTANT: All students enrolled in this course must complete an online tutorial on plagiarism before submission of the first writing assignment, as noted on the class schedule below. To complete this tutorial, please go to http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/plagiarismtutorial. You must register using your Rutgers email address. Then read everything in “Student Resources” and complete the following TWO exercises:
“Acknowledging Sources” (under “Knowing Which Sources to Acknowledge”) and “Recognizing Plagiarism” (under “Avoiding Plagiarism”). Your responses will be recorded and delivered to me electronically. This is a course requirement that will be graded (pass/fail).

Writing guidelines

All of your writing assignments must be typed and should adhere to the following style: 12-point, Times New Roman font; double spacing; single-sided pages; and 1-inch margins on all sides (you will need to set these in MS Word). Please include internal citations when necessary – e.g., (Sheehan, 5) – as well as a bibliography, both of which should adhere to either MLA or Chicago style. MLA and Chicago style guides are available in libraries throughout campus. All papers must be carefully proofread for typographical errors as well as spelling and grammatical mistakes. Students who do not follow these guidelines will be asked to revise and resubmit their essays, which will then be subject to the penalties for lateness defined above. As already noted, writing assignments will only be accepted through the “Assignments” folder in Sakai.

Library resources

The Art Library has designed an online research guide for students enrolled in art history courses: http://libguides.rutgers.edu/artlibrary. This guide will help you locate books, articles, images, websites, and other resources available at Rutgers.

Class schedule

TU, Jan 22     Introduction

Complete the online plagiarism assignment described above:

TH, Jan 24     American history painting

Guest lecture by Dr. Barbara Mitnick, independent scholar and Rutgers alumna


Pohl, 79-101

TU, Jan 29     Antebellum portraiture and the construction of social identity

David Jaffee, “‘A Correct Likeness’: Culture and Commerce in Nineteenth-Century Rural America,” in Reading American Art, 109-127

Paul Staiti, “Character and Class: The Portraits of John Singleton Copley,” in Reading American Art, 12-37

Pohl, 126-135
TH, Jan 31  Class visit to the American Galleries at the Zimmerli Museum

TU, Feb 5  The art of observation and deception: the Peale family

Roger B. Stein, “Charles Willson Peale’s Expressive Design: The Artist in His Museum,” in *Reading American Art*, 38-78

Pohl, 185-189

TH, Feb 7  The idea of the American artist: Morse


Pohl, 121-126

TU, Feb 12  Nature and nation I: Cole and the rise of American landscape painting


Pohl, 137-153

TH, Feb 14  NO CLASS (Prof. Sheehan at CAA Conference)

Paper #1 must be submitted to Prof. Sheehan’s mailbox in the Art History Dept. AND to Sakai by 3pm. The plagiarism tutorial must be completed online by this date.

TU, Feb 19  Picturing Native Americans: King and Catlin

Kathryn S. Hight, “Doomed to Perish: George Catlin's Depictions of the Mandan,” in *Reading American Art*, 150-162


Pohl, 113-121, 165-173

TH, Feb 21  Comic genre painting: Mount and Spencer

Pohl, 176-184, 277-281

TU, Feb 26  Studio portrait photography and the American middle class

**Object lesson: early studio portraits**

Bodies on the battlefield: Photography and the Civil War


Nature and nation II: The romantic landscape tradition


Class visit to the Morse Center (On view: prints by Winslow Homer)


NO CLASS (Spring Recess)

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NO CLASS (in lieu of field trips)

Slavery to freedom II: Sculpture


Art and science in the circle of Eakins

Elizabeth Johns, “The Gross Clinic, or Portrait of Professor Gross,” in Reading American Art, 232-63

TH, Apr 4  (En)gendering the modern artist I: Eakins and Cassatt

Paper #2 must be submitted in class AND to Sakai

Martin Berger, “Manly Associations,” in Man Made: Thomas Eakins and the Construction of Gilded Age Manhood, 7-46

Griselda Pollock, “Mary Cassatt: Painter of Women and Children,” in Reading American Art, 280-301

Pohl, 267-272, 306-315

TU, Apr 9  International style I: American Impressionism


TH, Apr 11  International style II: Aestheticism

Guest lecture: Justin McCann, PhD candidate, Art History Dept, Rutgers

James McNeill Whistler, “Ten O’Clock” lecture, 1885

Pohl, 283-289

TU, Apr 16  (En)gendering the modern artist II: Sargent and Beaux


Pohl, 289-294

TH, Apr 18  African American art in the late-19th century: Tanner


Pohl, 315-318

TU, Apr 23  Urban vision I: The Ashcan School

Urban vision II: Early documentary photography

Alan Trachtenberg, “Camera Work/Social Work,” in *Reading American Photographs*, 164-230

Fashioning an American avant-garde: The Armory Show


Class visit to the Newark Museum: American Galleries (10am-12pm)

Field trip details TBA

Paper #3 must be submitted to Prof. Sheehan’s mailbox in the Art History Dept. AND to Sakai by 3pm