Bowdoin College Art History

Course Offerings
Fall 2022

Courses without Prerequisites

ARTH 1014 Becoming a Modern Artist: Matisse, Picasso, Valadon (First Year Writing Seminar)
Professor Pamela Fletcher
Course Description:
Explores the early careers and art of Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Suzanne Valadon, artists who came of age at the dawn of the twentieth century. Matisse’s family wanted him to be a lawyer; Picasso was a child prodigy; Valadon began her career modeling for the Impressionists. Educated within a traditional model, all three would go on to create radically new art forms, against the backdrop of the artistic, political and philosophical upheavals of early twentieth century Europe. How did one become an artist at a moment when the very definition of art’s appearance and function was in flux? Topics covered include: the role of personal identity in art making, relationships between artists and models, European encounters with art from Africa, the emergence of abstraction, the art market, and the cultural meanings of art and the artist in the modern world. Makes regular use of the rich holdings of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

ARTH 1021 Faked, Forged, Stolen, and Repatriated: Crimes Against Art (First Year Writing Seminar)
Professor Dana Byrd
Course Description:
Examines crimes against art, including acts of theft, vandalism, and forgery representing challenges to our shared heritage. Students develop skills in art historical interpretation and ethical reasoning as they engage with historical examples including the history and controversies of such noted stolen cultural artifacts including the Elgin Marbles, the Benin bronze plaques, and Chugach burial masks. Examines the billion dollar “black market” for stolen art, and the legal tools for restoring plundered goods through repatriation.

ARTH 1120/ASNS 1865 Introduction to Art History: The Body in East Asian Art
Professor Peggy Wang
Course Description:
Explores theories, pictures, and practices of the human body in art. Studies depictions of the human form as well as arts that activate the body, including calligraphy, spatial design, performance, and ritual. Focuses primarily on East Asia, ranging from early traditions to contemporary examples. Deliberately sets out to challenge a Western-centric understanding of art and Art History by developing ideas about the body that don't make a recourse back to the idealized nude. Draws on cross-cultural comparisons to explore themes of difference and global connectivity in art. Topics to be studied include identity, self-representation, the fragmented body, participant art, collective action, and radical hospitality. Examples of formats and artists to be studied include: shrines, scrolls, paintings, and works by Yoko Ono, Lee Mingwei, and Polit-Sheer-Form-Office. No prerequisite.
ARTH 2090/ARCH 1101 Greek Archaeology
Professor Jim Higginbotham
Course Description:
Introduces the techniques and methods of classical archaeology as revealed through an examination of Greek material culture. Emphasis upon the major monuments and artifacts of the Greek world from prehistory to the Hellenistic age. Architecture, sculpture, fresco painting, and other “minor arts” are examined at such sites as Knossos, Mycenae, Athens, Delphi, and Olympia. Considers the nature of this archaeological evidence and the relationship of classical archaeology to other disciplines such as art history, history, and classics. Assigned reading supplements illustrated presentations of the major archaeological finds of the Greek world.
No prerequisite.

ARTH 2120 Emperors, Caliphs, and Kings: The Art of the Earlier Middle Ages
Professor Kate Gerry
Course Description:
Explores the art and architecture produced across Europe and the Mediterranean region in the late antique and early medieval periods (c.250-c.1050), with attention paid to how the artistic practices of a number of cultures grew out of the Roman imperial tradition. Students explore the visual characteristics of the art and architecture from this period, and the relationship between early medieval art and the social, religious, and political history of the earlier Middle Ages. Topics include Anglo-Saxon, Byzantine, Carolingian, early Islamic, and Viking art. Students from all majors are welcome.
No Prerequisite.

ARTH 2230 The Arts of Venice
Professor Susan Wegner
Course Description:
Venice is distinctive among Italian cities for its political structures, its geographical location, and its artistic production. Its resilience in the face of plague, flood and warfare shines forth in the brilliance of city's fabric and in the vibrantly colored art that ornaments it. This overview of Venetian art and architecture considers Venice’s relationships to Byzantium and the Turkish east, Venetian colorism in dialogue with Tuscan-Roman disegno (drawing and composition), and the role of women as artists, as patrons, and as subjects of art. Includes art by the Bellini family, Giorgione, Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto, Tiepolo, Canaletto, and Rosalba Carriera, and the architecture of Palladio. No previous work in art history required.
No prerequisite.

ARTH 2510 Industry and Imperialism: Nineteenth-Century British Art
Professor Pamela Fletcher
Course Description:
Examines art produced during Queen Victoria’s reign (1837-1901). The Industrial Revolution gave rise to mass culture and consumer society as well as unprecedented amounts of pollution and environmental damage; the twin engines of capitalism and imperialism spawned Britain’s vast Empire; and activism by the working classes, women, and the colonized peoples of Empire transformed the political and social landscape. Victorian artists took seriously the question of how art might engage their changing modern world, and their diverse responses illuminate both nineteenth-century modernity and its continuing legacies. Topics may include: the representation of modern urban life and its moral challenges; depictions of the environment in landscape and animal painting; the invention of photography and mass visual culture; the rise of the modern art market; and episodes in the imperialist history of artistic contact, conflict and extraction between Britain and other nations.
No prerequisite.
ARTH 2620 American Art I: Colonial Period to the Civil War
Professor Dana Byrd
Course Description:
An investigation of American architecture, sculpture, painting, and decorative arts from their contact-era origins until the Civil War. Emphasis is placed on American art as a distinct tradition shaped by the movement of people and things across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans to a continent populated by indigenous people. Explores how artists engaged and interpreted the world around them in material form, as well as the ways that this production served a host of ideological and aesthetic needs. Methods of art historical interpretation are analyzed and discussed using primary and secondary source readings. Studies original art and artifacts in the Bowdoin College Museum of Art and buildings on the Bowdoin campus and beyond.
No prerequisite.

ARTH 3490/ASNS 3802 Re-mapping Global Contemporary Art
Professor Peggy Wang
Course Description:
Studies competing claims over what it means for contemporary art to be called global. In particular, traces how the controversial category of “global contemporary art” has been used to both perpetuate and resist Western-centered views of the world. Focuses on artworks, exhibitions, and texts that specifically counter Western-centricism in gatekeeping tactics, exclusionary systems of evaluation, and hegemonic art historical narratives. Examples include the 1989 Havana Biennial, 1999 Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, post-colonial critiques, and recent artworks and exhibits that have sought to re-map global cartographies of contemporary art. Students taking this as an ASNS course will concentrate on examples relevant to their focus of study.
No prerequisite, but this is an advanced level seminar.

Courses with Prerequisites

ARTH 2135 Sacred: The Art of Devotion in the Middle Ages
Professor Kate Gerry
Course Description:
This course explores the rich visual tradition of religious art in medieval Europe, with particular attention to the Cult of Saints, a phenomenon that continues to inspire artists working around the globe today. Discussion and research center on College collections, including works from the Wyvern collection, currently on loan at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art. Through readings, discussions, and object-based research projects, students learn about the production and reception of reliquaries, the representations of saints in illuminated manuscripts, sculpture, stained glass, and other media, and the highly personal ways in which medieval people used the visual arts to interact with the sacred. The course focuses on Europe and the Mediterranean basin, with some attention to similar issues in other regions.
Prerequisite: This course is intended for students who will be sophomores or higher in the Fall 2022 Semester.

ARTH 3240 Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo: Science and Art through Drawing
Professor Susan Wegner
Course Description:
Both Leonardo and Michelangelo produced hundreds of drawings in the service of their imaginative processes in creating great architecture, sculpture, and painting. In addition, both studied the human body through anatomical drawings, while Leonardo expanded his investigations to the bodies of animals, the movement of water, the flight of birds, and countless other natural phenomena. Exploring the theory of disegno (drawing and composing) as a divinely granted power, considers biographies, letters, and notebooks in translation, as well as scholarly literature on the Sistine Chapel frescoes, “The Last Supper,” and other monuments now known to us only through drawings. Makes use of works from the collections of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art. Opportunities for hands-on learning of drawing techniques—chalk, pen and ink, wash, metal point—support investigations of these artists’ accomplishments.
Prerequisites: An Introductory Art History course or Placement above ARTH 1100.