

Bowdoin College Art History

Course Offerings Spring 2021

ARTH 1021 Faked, Forged, Stolen, and Repatriated: Crimes Against Art (FYWS)

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 1300/LAS 1300 Introduction to the Arts of Ancient Mexico and Peru

Course Description

A chronological survey of the arts created by major cultures of ancient Mexico and Peru. Mesoamerican cultures studied include the Olmec, Teotihuacan, the Maya, and the Aztec up through the arrival of the Europeans. South American cultures such as Chavín, Nasca, and Inca are examined. Painting, sculpture, and architecture are considered in the context of religion and society. Readings in translation include Mayan myth and chronicles of the conquest.

ARTH 1500/AFRS 2660 African Americans and Art

Course Description

Investigates the intersection of African American life and art. Topics include the changing definitions of “African American Art,” the embrace of African cultural production, race and representation in slavery and freedom, art as source of inspiration for social movements, and the politics of exhibition. Our mission is to develop art-historical knowledge about this critical aspect of American art history, while facilitating ways of seeing and writing about art.

ARTH 2135 Sacred: The Art of Devotion in the Middle Ages

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 BCMA. 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.

ARTH 2145 Gold, Paint, and Stone: The Arts of the High Middle Ages

Course Description

The High Middle Ages, or Romanesque period (c. 1000-c.1200), was a moment of enormous cultural and technological development, as people, goods, and ideas moved throughout Europe and the Mediterranean Basin. This course introduces students to the visual arts and architecture produced in western Europe with some comparative material from further afield. Topics will include the pilgrimage and the cult of saints, the development of narrative art, Islamic Spain, and the balance between conceptual art and naturalism that marks the style of this period.

ARTH 2210/ASNS 2201 From Mao to Now: Contemporary Chinese Art

Course Description

Examines the history of contemporary Chinese art and cultural production from Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) until today. Traces experiments in oil, ink, performance, installation, video, and photography and considers these media and formats as artistic responses to globalization, capitalist reform, urbanization, and commercialization. Tracks themes such as art and consumerism, national identity, global hierarchies, and political critique. Readings include primary sources such as artists' statements, manifestoes, art criticism, and curatorial essays.

ARTH 2320 Art in the Age of Velazquez, Rembrandt and Caravaggio

Course Description

The art of seventeenth-century Europe. Topics include the revolution in painting carried out by Caravaggio, Annibale Carracci, and their followers in Rome; the development of these trends in the works of Rubens, Bernini, Georges de la Tour, Poussin, and others; and the rise of an independent school of painting in Holland. Connections between art, religious ideas, and political conditions are stressed.

ARTH 2540 Contemporary Art

Course Description

Art of Europe and the Americas since World War II, with emphasis on the New York school. Introductory overview of modernism. Detailed examination of abstract expressionism and minimalist developments; pop, conceptual, and environmental art; and European abstraction. Concludes with an examination of the international consequences of modernist and contemporary developments, the impact of new electronic and technological media, and the critical debate surrounding the subject of postmodernism.

ARTH 3200/ASNS 3070 Historizing Contemporary Chinese Art

Course Description

Identifies and explores key topics in recent publications of contemporary Chinese art. Alongside of subject matter, students analyze usages of socio-political context and methodologies for framing different narratives of contemporary Chinese art. Through studies of individual artists and larger contemporary art trends, students unpack current art histories while also proposing alternative approaches. Readings include monographs, exhibition catalogs, interviews, and systematic reviews of journals. Questions include: What are the challenges of historicizing the present? How does the global art world reconcile the existence of multiple art worlds? How have artists intervened in narratives of contemporary Chinese art?

ARTH 3500 Transatlantic Modernisms: New York/London

Course Description

At the turn of the twentieth century, artists in New York and London grappled with the changes of modernity experienced in two of the largest industrialized cities in the Western world. Exploring new artistic styles and subjects, the artists of the Ashcan School and the Camden Town Group engaged new technologies and communication networks; new relationships between the rural, the urban, and the emerging suburban; the changing population of cities; and fights for social justice around questions of class, ethnicity, race, and gender. This course puts these two national stories into conversation, bringing together works produced on both sides of the Atlantic at a moment of artistic and social revolution. The seminar is part of ongoing planning for an exhibition at the BCMA. Students will help generate an intellectual framework for such an exhibition, including exploring the collection and potential themes and comparisons, and learn some of the skills involved in mounting a loan exhibition.