

Winter 2024
ART HISTORY 321
Visual Culture of the Dutch Republic

T/Th, 2:35 to 3:55 in Arts W-215

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Meetings by appointment

Course Description

As Svetlana Alpers wrote in her provocative book, *The Art of Describing*: “In Holland the visual culture was central to the life of the society. One might say that the eye was a central means of self-representation and visual experience a central mode of self-consciousness. If the theatre was the arena in which the England of Elizabeth most fully represented itself to itself, images played that role for the Dutch.” In this course, we explore how the 17th-century Dutch Republic represented itself to itself through the examination of a wide range of visual imagery, from Rembrandt and Vermeer to various forms of popular culture. Our focus will be on the central role played by visual culture in an early capitalist republic whose sudden rise to wealth and power was fueled by overseas trade, colonization, and the brutal exploitation of people and land, including the transatlantic slave trade. The functions of art will be examined in relation to key symbolic sites such as the home, the marketplace, the brothel, the town hall, the anatomy theatre, the gallows field, the curiosity cabinet, the church, the synagogue, the rural countryside, and the colonies. Our exploration of Dutch visual culture as a central mode of self-consciousness will thus open into a broader understanding of early global capitalism, republican politics, gender and sexuality, religious conflicts, medical and scientific developments, and colonial and racist violence.

Required Readings: Weekly readings are posted on MyCourses.

Method of Evaluation

Midterm Exam	20%	(take-home essays, due Feb. 15)
Research Essay	35%	(due March 21 or earlier)
Museum Assignment	10%	(due Feb. 5 or earlier)
Final Exam:	30%	(take-home during exam period)
Participation	5%	

Exams

The exams will focus on the issues and themes covered in the lectures, readings, and discussions. They will require students to write brief essay answers in response to specific questions and images. ***You must write both exams to pass the course.*** Please contact me as soon as possible with documentation if you miss the midterm exam: within 48 hours at the very most. Final exam conflicts should be reported to the Faculty of Arts Student Affairs Office. According to McGill regulations, “Instructors are not permitted to grant any special treatment regarding examinations to any student.” Student obligations regarding exams are outlined at the following site:

<https://www.mcgill.ca/exams/regulations>

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Assignment

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts / Musée des Beaux-Arts Montréal (MMFA/MBAM) has a significant collection of 17th-century Dutch art. This assignment prompts you visit the museum and look at this collection (3rd floor, Pavilion for Peace). Admission to the MMFA is free for those aged 20 and under, and free for everyone on the first Sunday of the month.

Choose a single work of Dutch art—preferably the one that most grabs your attention—and write a wall label text. These are very succinct texts (**70-100 words max**). Please consult and follow this useful guide on how to write effective labels:

https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/VA_Gallery-Text-Writing-Guidelines_online_Web.pdf.

Include artist, title of artwork, and date. No need to do a title page, just include the course number, your name, and student ID.

Due: The assignment can be uploaded at any time, but it must be received by **Feb. 5**.

Research essay

Can be uploaded at any point in the semester, with final due date: **March 21**. Paper topics will be discussed early in the semester. Length: 8 pages. Late papers will be graded down 2% per day.

You must write the paper to pass the course.

Note: Good writing style and a well-formulated argument are very important. Be sure to footnote any ideas or quotes that you have taken from sources other than your own imagination and common sense. *McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (www.mcgill.ca/students/srr).*

If there is any student in this course who may have a need for accommodations, please contact the Office for Accessibility and Achievement: <https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/>

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in French or English any written work that is to be graded.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

McGill University is located on unceded land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations.

LECTURES AND READINGS

Jan. 4

Introduction

Aims and issues of the course. Assignments and evaluation. Historical introduction to the visual culture of the Dutch Republic.

Jan. 9 / 11

The Production and Consumption of Art

The studio and the art market. Local wealth and global trade.

Read: Mariët Westermann, "Making and Marketing Pictures in the Dutch Republic," *A Worldly Art. The Dutch Republic, 1585-1718* (Prentice Hall, 1996), 17-45.

Jan. 16 / 18

Fictions of the Pose: Portraiture and Middle-Class Power

The functions, conventions, and fictions of portraits. Early modern identity. Sovereignty and subjection: personhood, racism, and non-personhood.

Read:

Ann Jenson Adams, "The Cultural Power of Portraits," in *Public Faces and Private Identities in Seventeenth-Century Holland: Portraiture and the Production of Community* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-9.

Joanna Woodall, "Sovereign Bodies: The reality of status in seventeenth-century Dutch portraiture," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester, 1997), 75-100.

Jan. 23 / 25

Self-Portraiture

Picturing self and painting as product and process

Women's creative practices

Women as artists and patrons

Read: Elizabeth Honig, "The Art of Being 'Artistic': Dutch Women's Creative Practices in the 17th Century," *Women's Art Journal* 22/2 (Fall 2001/Winter 2002), 31-39.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/1358900?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Jan. 30 / Feb. 1

Domesticity: Gender, Sex Work, and Patriarchy

The obsession with domesticity: the home, the brothel, and their blurred boundaries. Sex work at home and abroad. Republican politics and the private sphere as a public sphere.

Read: Richard Helgerson, "Soldiers and Enigmatic Girls: The Politics of Dutch Domestic Realism, 1650-1672," *Representations* 58 (1997), 49-87.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928823?seq=1>

Feb. 6 / 8

Discipline and Punishment

Public art in the Amsterdam town hall. Republican ideals and civic guard portraits.

Art, Crime, and Medicine

Dissecting the criminal body in the anatomy theatre. Prisons, workhouses, gallows fields.

Read: Anuradha Gobin, "Picturing Liminal Spaces and Bodies: Rituals of Punishment and the Limits of Control at the Gallows Field," *RACAR: Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 43:1 (2018), 7-24. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050817ar>

Feb. 13 / 15

Feb. 13: Library orientation session

Feb. 15: **Midterm Exam**

Feb. 20 / 22

Iconoclasm and its aftermath

Calvinism and the war against images. The paradox of post-Reformation graven images: public sculpture.

Read: Angela Vanhaelen, "Spiritual Culture," *The Cambridge Companion to the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. Helmer Helmers and Geert Janssen (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 225-245.

Feb. 27 / 29

Religious Coexistence: The Jewish community in Amsterdam.

Read: Steven Nadler, "Graven Images," in *Rembrandt's Jews* (Chicago, 2003), 42-103.

*WINTER READING BREAK: MONDAY MARCH 4 - FRIDAY MARCH 8

March 12 / 14

Curiosity Collecting

Curiosity collections: science, art, entertainment, and commerce. Amateur art: a sailor's response to Amsterdam's public collections. Anatomical assemblages: cadavers into art

Read: Claudia Swan, "The Nature of Exotic Shells," in *Conchophilia: Shells, Art, and Curiosity in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Marisa Bass, Anne Goldgar, Hanneke Grootenboer, and Claudia Swan (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021), 21-47.

March 19 / 21

Landscape, Seascape, and National identity

Representing the rural peasant body: social mobility and the ambiguous spaces of the insider-outsider. Landscape and power. Ship portraits and the sea.

Read: Ann Jenson Adams, "Competing Communities in the 'Great Bog of Europe.' Identity and Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting," in *Landscape and Power*, edited by W.T.J. Mitchell (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 35-76.

March 26 / 28

A Ruthless Trading Empire: The East India Company

The spice trade: war, violence, and genocide. The demand for porcelain: China, Japan, Delft; animal extinction

Read: Sugata Ray, "'Dead as a Dodo:' Anthropocene Extinction in the Early Modern World," *TDR: The Drama Review* 67, no 1 (2023): 126-35.

April 2 / 4

The West India Company: Necropolitics and Resistance

The slave trading fortress at Elmina. Dutch Brazil and the Plantation System

Read: Amy Knight Powell, "Life and death according to the 'episteme' of the fort. A picture of the slave trader Dirck Wilre in Elmina, 1669," *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art / Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 72 (2022): 272-305.

April 9

Final exam review