

ARTH 325: VISUAL CULTURE OF RENAISSANCE VENICE



McGill University, Winter Semester 2023

Tuesday/Thursday, 4:05–5:25pm, ENGTR 0100

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Office Hours: Thursday 2:30-3:30pm, Arts West 240, or by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course looks at major monuments of Venetian architecture, sculpture, painting, graphic arts, and literary and historical texts within a framework that acknowledges Venice itself as an elaborately constructed work of art. Due to the unique position of the city—built upon a series of reclaimed islands in a shallow saline lagoon—Venice has always been understood as a floating *mundus alter* (‘other world’), positioned between East and West. Known as *La Serenissima* (the Most Serene Republic), Venice employed her leading artists and architects—including the Bellini and Lombardo family dynasties, Giorgione, Titian, Sansovino, Tintoretto, Veronese, and Palladio—to lend potent visual form to an intricately crafted self-mythology. This course recovers the complexity of this Venetian self-portrait as it changed over time, with special focus on the Renaissance period, c. 1450–1580.

Through course readings and lectures we will examine the various strands and figures in the visualized myth of Venice, including the dual origins of the Christian Republic in ancient Rome and Byzantium; cultural connections to the Islamic world; the cultivation of a materially opulent, hybrid architectural style; the display of socio-political values through texts, visual and ritual culture; theories of Venetian artistic style and subject matter; and the ambivalent projection of Venice as both center of piety, pilgrimage, and republican values, and as marketplace, theater, and playground of the early modern world.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Strengthen visual, technical, and material literacy (the capacity to recognize formal, stylistic, and physical elements of artworks)
- Hone critical reading skills in applying theoretical and historical texts to the interpretation of artworks (primary and secondary sources)
- Enhance visual analysis skills in the interpretation of art, architecture, and material culture (similar to close reading in literature courses)
- Build art-historical research methods using library and digital resources
- Develop essay writing skills, the ability to formulate an art historical argument and utilize visual and textual evidence in its formulation

COURSE EVALUATION AND REQUIREMENTS

Final grades will be based on two take-home tests plus a research paper assignment according to the following percentages:

Midterm Exam:	25%	(February 16–19, MyCourses)
Term Paper:	40%	(April 2, MyCourses)
Initial Topic Statement and Bibliography:	0%	(by February 23, office hours)
Final Exam:	35%	(final exam period, April 14-28)

Completion of all course requirements is mandatory. Failure to complete both tests plus the term paper will result in a failing grade. This means missing one component will result in a failing grade, no matter the numerical average of the other components.

TESTS. The take-home exams (72 hrs, upload to MyCourses) will focus on the objects, sites, issues, and themes covered in the lectures, required readings, and class discussions. They will require students to master essential information about artworks and write argument driven essays focused on the comparison of artworks. As a rule of thumb, you cannot achieve above a B- on the exams unless you regularly attend lectures and keep up with the assigned readings. You should be familiar with the standard 5-paragraph essay style. Makeup exams and extensions can only be scheduled in the case of an emergency. Please contact Prof. Henry at least 24 hours before the due date; late requests cannot be granted. *Note:* do not make travel arrangements during the final exam period. If you require accommodations for exams, you must register with the Office of Student Accessibility and Achievement at the start of term: access.achieve@mcgill.ca. Final exam conflicts are not handled by individual professors and should be reported to the Faculty of Arts Student Affairs Office. Student obligations regarding exams are outlined at the following site: <http://www.mcgill.ca/student-records/exam/>

TERM PAPER.

A research paper (8-10 pages double-spaced, Word document) is due Sunday April 2 before midnight on MyCourses. Potential paper topics and detailed instructions for the assignment will be discussed early in the semester and posted to MyCourses. I strongly advise you to choose a topic and begin the involved process of procuring research materials early in the semester, as you will need to visit the HSSL library several times, and may need to recall books, visit the Concordia library, wait for interlibrary loan services, and continually revise your bibliography based on your evolving research. ***This is not a paper that can be done well by waiting until the final few weeks of the semester or without visiting the library multiple times.*** You will need at least 6-8 weeks for this assignment if you want to achieve a B- grade or higher. Plan to visit Prof. Henry or your TA in office hours early in the semester (**before Feb. 23**) with an initial topic statement and bibliography of 5-7 items. This is particularly crucial if you have not previously written an art history research paper and/or a visual analysis paper.

In addition to your professor and TA, the AHCS and Architecture liaison librarian, David Greene, is available for individual office hours to discuss library resources, the term paper research process, and bibliography software.
His email is: david.greene@mcgill.ca

Late papers will be graded down 5% per day. Extensions will only be granted in the case of an emergency and with prior permission. Contact Prof. Henry well before the deadline regarding late papers for any other reason.

ATTENDANCE. While lectures are recorded and posted to MyCourses several hours after class, along with the lecture PowerPoint presentations, regular attendance is crucial if you wish to do well in the course. In-person participation is not graded but provides the opportunity to ask questions, participate in class discussion, and meet your professor, TA, and fellow students. However, please respect others and stay home if you are sick!

COURSE WEBSITE. The syllabus, important course announcements, assigned readings, assignment instructions, lecture PowerPoint presentations, and other resources will be posted on the course website (www.mycourses.mcgill.ca), most of them under the “Content” and “Assignments” tabs. It is critical that you consult the course website regularly for announcements, updates, and materials before starting work on assignments or emailing your TA or professor.

COURSE MATERIALS. Readings should be done in advance of the class date for which they are assigned because they provide essential background for course lectures. You will also be tested on them on the midterm and final exams. The required textbook for this course is Patricia Fortini Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice* (Prentice Hall Abrams, 1997; reprint 2005). Unfortunately, the textbook is currently out of print. Therefore, a PDF version of the entire textbook is available on MyCourses. Alternatively, you may purchase either edition of the textbook through Amazon or another online vendor if you would like to have the actual book with color images. Assigned readings not in the textbook will either be available on MyCourses under the “Content” tab by class date.

LAPTOP POLICY. You are required to turn off and put away cell phones and other electronic devices during class time. I strongly prefer that laptops not be used in class, as they can be distracting to you, your professor, and other students sitting near you given the low lighting levels required for image projection. If you require a laptop for note-taking purposes only please see the instructor for explicit permission and disable Wi-Fi connectivity. I reserve the right to ask anyone distracting the class with their cell phone, laptop, or other electronic devices to leave lecture following just one verbal warning.

UNIVERSITY NOTICES.

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 (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

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

According to Senate regulations, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams. Please consult the Calendar, section 4.7.2.1, General University Information and Regulations at <http://www.mcgill.ca>.

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

SCHEDULE OF COURSE LECTURES AND ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION

Thursday January 5: class cancelled

Syllabus uploaded to MyCourses

WEEK TWO: THE OTHERNESS OF VENICE

Tuesday January 10: Syllabus and introduction to Venice

Thursday January 12: Venice as *Mundus Alter*

Reading:

Patricia Fortini Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice*, Chapter 1, “Venezianità: The Otherness of the Venetians,” pp. 9-37. [**textbook; MyCourses**]

WEEK THREE: MAKING A VISUAL WORLD

Tuesday January 17: Venice, *Forma Urbis*

Reading:

Marin Sanudo, *Praise of the City of Venice* (1493), in D. Chambers and B. Pullan, eds., *Venice: A Documentary History* (University of Toronto, 1992; 2001), pp. 4-21.

[**MyCourses**]

Thursday January 19: Jacopo Bellini’s Marvelous Imagination

Reading:

Fortini Brown, *Art and Life*, Chapter 2, “The Making of a Visual World,” pp. 39-63.

[**textbook; MyCourses**]

Final paper topics posted to MyCourses under Assignments tab

WEEK FOUR: ARTS OF CIVIC AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

Tuesday January 24: A Problematic Prince: The Doge as Man and Office

Reading:

Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, 1981), Chapter 7: “The Paradoxical Prince,” pp. 251-289. [**MyCourses**]

Thursday January 26: The Church as Treasury: Santa Maria dei Miracoli

Reading:

Edward Muir, “The Virgin on the Street Corner: The Place of the Sacred in Italian Cities,” *Religion and culture in the Renaissance and Reformation* (1989), pp. 25-40.

[**MyCourses**]

WEEK 5: VENICE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Tuesday, January 31: Gentile Bellini at the Court of Mehmed II

Reading:

Paul Wood, “Art in Fifteenth-Century Venice: An Aesthetic of Diversity,” in *Locating Renaissance Art*, ed. Carol Richardson (Yale, 2007), pp. 228–37. [**MyCourses**]

Thursday, February 2: Giovanni Bellini and the Sacred Icon

Reading:

Caroline Campbell, "The Bellini, Bessarion, and Byzantium," in *Bellini and the East*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong (2005), pp. 236–65 (read the thematic essay; you can skip over the catalogue entries on individual artworks)

[MyCourses]

WEEK SIX: THE SCUOLE GRANDI AND PICCOLI

Tuesday February 7: Gentile Bellini and the "Eyewitness Style"

Reading:

Fortini Brown, *Art and Life*, Chapter 3, "The Art of Public Life," pp. 65-83.

Thursday February 9: Vittore Carpaccio at the Scuola Dalmata

Reading:

Fortini Brown, *Art and Life*, Chapter 4, "A Pious People," pp. 91-115.

WEEK SEVEN: MIDTERM EXAM

Tuesday, February 14: In-class midterm review (bring your questions); practice visual analysis; image comparison; review key terms; practice forming art historical argument

Thursday, February 16: no class; take home midterm exam (72 hrs); due Sunday February 19 before midnight (11:59pm).

WEEK EIGHT: THE "MODERN" ARTIST AROUND 1500

Tuesday, February 21: Giorgione and the "Modern Manner"

Reading:

Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects.*, trans. A.B. Hinds (J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1927), vol. 2, "Preface," and "Life of Giorgione," pp. 151-5; 168-72. [MyCourses]

Thursday, February 23: Albrecht Dürer and the German Colony in Venice

Reading:

Wolfgang Stechow, *Northern Renaissance Art 1400-1600: Sources and Documents* (Northwestern, 1966; 1989), "Dürer: Biographical Writings, letters to Pirckheimer from Venice," pp. 86-91. [MyCourses]

Last week for office hours on research paper topic with preliminary bibliography (5-7 items)

WEEK NINE: READING PERIOD FEBRUARY 27 – MARCH 3

WEEK TEN: HUMANISM, COLLECTING, AND A NEW "GOLDEN AGE"

Tuesday, March 7: Inside the Venetian Collector's Palace

Reading:

Fortini Brown, *Art and Life*, Chapter 5, "Private Worlds," pp. 118-141.

Thursday, March 9: no-class: Prof. Henry is away at a conference; work on your research papers!

WEEK ELEVEN: PICTORIAL AMBITIONS AFTER 1500

Tuesday, March 14: Portraits and the Fashioning of Identity

Reading:

Fortini Brown, *Art and Life*, Chapter 6, "Caste, Class, and Gender," pp. 143-167.

Thursday, March 16: Mythology and the *Poesia*

Reading:

Rosand, David. "Giorgione, Venice, and the Pastoral Vision," in *Places of Delight: The Pastoral Landscape*, exh. cat., eds. Robert C. Cafritz, Lawrence Gowing, David Rosand (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Collection in association with the National Gallery of Art, 1988), pp. 20-81 (read pp. 20-45 only). [MyCourses]

WEEK TWELVE: CLASSICAL REVIVAL

Tuesday, March 21: Doge Gritti and Francesco Sansovino: *Renovatio Urbis*

Reading:

Edward Muir, "Images of Power: Art and Pageantry in Renaissance Venice," *The American Historical Review* 84/1 (1979): 16-52 (read pp. 16-36). [MyCourses]

Thursday, March 23: Titian and Mythology

Reading:

Stephen J. Campbell, "Europa," in *Eye of the Beholder*, exhibition catalogue edited by Alan Chong et al. (Boston: ISGM and Beacon Press, 2003), pp. 103-107. [MyCourses]

WEEK THIRTEEN: PIETY, CHARITY, AND RELIGIOUS REFORM

Wednesday, March 28: Lorenzo Lotto, Poverty, and Piety

Reading:

Tom Nichols, "Secular Charity, Sacred Poverty: Picturing the Poor in Renaissance Venice," *Art History* 30/2 (2007): 139-169 (for the week). [MyCourses]

Friday, March 30: Tintoretto at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco

Reading:

Tom Nichols, "Secular Charity, Sacred Poverty."

Term paper due on MyCourses by Sunday April 2 before midnight

WEEK FOURTEEN: IN THE WAKE OF THE REFORMATION

Tuesday, April 4: Palladio, Veronese, and the Venetian Monastery

Reading:

Phillip Fehl, "The Decorum of Paolo Veronese: Notes on the *Marriage at Cana*," in *Art the Ape of Nature: Studies in Honor of H. W. Janson* (Abrams, 1981), pp. 341-365.

"Paolo Veronese before the Inquisition Tribune," in *Italian Art: 1500-1600. Sources and Documents*, eds. R. Klein and H. Zerner (Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 129-32. [MyCourses]

Thursday April 6: Palladio, Veronese, and the Venetian Villa

Reading:

Denis Cosgrove, *The Palladian Landscape: Geographical Change and Its Cultural Representation in Sixteenth Century Italy* (Penn State, 1993), Chapter 4, "Villa: The Palladian Rural Landscape," pp. 93-115. [**MyCourses**]

WEEK FIFTEEN:

Tuesday April 11: Course wrap-up and exam review session

Final Examination TBD, April 14-28