

Syllabus of Record

Program/Term: CET Florence

Course Code / Title: FL/ARTH 260 Heroines and Heroes: Signs and Symbols in Italian Art

Contact Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Art History / Italian Studies, History

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites / Requirements: None

Description

How can a lion be a symbol of a saint, a city, or a mythological hero? Why do Italian students celebrate their graduation from university with a laurel crown? And what does Persephone have to do with Christ's resurrection? Art and symbols have long served as vehicles for storytelling - either illustrating narratives or as expressions of their essence. To decipher and interpret artworks in their historical and social contexts, we must learn the visual language through which those meanings were conveyed. The father of Iconography, Erwin Panofsky, explained: "Iconography is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form." Focusing on Italian art from the Middle Ages to the Eighteenth century, this course examines *what* is depicted rather than *how* it is rendered in technical and stylistic terms. Particular attention is given to subject matters, their typical artistic depiction, and the signs and symbols that expressed meaning across centuries.

Objectives

During this course, students gain knowledge of some of the most important painted, sculpted and constructed works of Florentine art. Emphasis is also placed on conceptual and critical thinking.

Through their participation in this course, students will:

- Examine key terminology used in the description of paintings, sculptures and architecture.
- Learn basic concepts of the system of symbols and allegories, both religious and secular.
- Explore major themes and fundamental characters in Western art, including their attributes.
- Understand the meaning of visual literacy.
- Analyze the fundamental relationships between the textual source (religious and secular), the development of artistic representations of figures and stories, and the use of typical symbols as a key for the interpretation of art.
- Study the relationship between artwork and its site - *art in context*.
- Examine issues of proportion and the concept of universal harmony in architecture.
- Gain openness to alternative perspectives, values, and points of view.
- Achieve a preliminary understanding of the relevant technical aspects of art.

Syllabus of Record

Requirements

Active participation is essential in this course. Students are expected to attend each class and field study course component as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy. Students are expected to read all assigned materials before the relevant class session and come prepared to participate thoughtfully in class discussions. Reading assignments are generally 15-20 pages per class session. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Graded assignments include:

- **Participation:** Students are expected to contribute actively to class discussions, linking the concepts and terms from the readings, lectures, and presentations with their own comments and observations.
- **Quizzes:** Students will take 2 short quizzes regarding readings, lectures, and site visits. These will consist of short answer questions.
- **Worksheets:** Students will complete 2 worksheets with questions regarding relevant pieces of art in churches and museums, submitted via Canvas.
- **Mid-term Exam:** Slide identification, questions on terminology, history and a short essay. A review sheet with the relevant information will be handed out in class.
- **Presentation:** Students will have to prepare a PowerPoint presentation and give an extensive description and explanation of a painting or sculpture that will be assigned in class. Create a 10-minute presentation, with 5 minutes for questions.
- **Final Exam:** Slide identification, questions on terminology, history and a short essay. A review sheet with the relevant information will be handed out in class.

Grading

The final grade is determined as follows:

Participation (<i>see rubric below</i>)	10%
Quizzes (2 x 10%)	20%
Worksheets (2 x 10%)	20%
Mid-term Exam	20%
Presentation	10%
Final Exam	20%

Syllabus of Record

Class Participation Grading Rubric

	A – 90-100% Exemplary	B – 80-89% Proficient	C – 70-79% Developing	D – 60-69% Unacceptable	F – 0-59% Missing
Frequency of class participation	Actively contributes 2+ times per meeting	Actively contributes at least 1 time per meeting	Actively contributes at least half of the time during term	Actively contributes less than half of the time during term	Does not contribute
Quality of class participation*	Contribution is always thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, frequently interacting with peers	Contribution is mostly thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, usually interacting with peers	Contribution is somewhat thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, sometimes interacting with peers	Contribution is rarely thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, rarely interacting with peers	Does not contribute or interact with peers
Level of class preparation	Always fully prepared and on task	Mostly prepared and on task	Somewhat prepared and on task	Rarely prepared and on task	Consistently unprepared and not on task

Readings / Resources

Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane. "Costuming Judith in Italian Art of the Sixteenth Century." *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, edited by Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrole Laehnemann, Open Book Publishers, 2010.

Avery, Charles. *Florentine Renaissance Sculpture*. John Murray, 1970.

Blake McHam, Sarah. "Donatello's Bronze 'David' and 'Judith' as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence." *The Art Bulletin*, vol.83 no.1, 2001, pp. 32-47.

Bohde, Daniela. "Mary Magdalene at the Foot of the Cross: Iconography and the Semantics of Place." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, vol.61. no.1, 2019, pp.45-68.

Botana, Federico. "Visual Religious Education in Late Medieval Florence: Zanobi Perini, *The Leggenda di Santo Tobia*, and the Misericordia." *Late Medieval Italian Art and its Contexts: Essays in Honour of Professor Joanna Cannon*, edited by Donald Cooper. The Boydell Press, 2024, pp.271-288.

Syllabus of Record

- Campbell, Lorne. *Renaissance Portraits. European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries*. Yale University Press, 1990.
- Di Cagno, Gabriella. *The Cathedral, the Baptistery and the Campanile*. Mandragora, 1997.
- Ditchfield, Simon. "Thinking with Saints: Sanctity and Society in the Early Modern World." *Critical Inquiry*, vol.35, no.3, 2009, pp. 552-584.
- Even, Yael. "Daphne (without Apollo) Reconsidered: some disregarded images of sexual pursuit in Italian Renaissance and Baroque art." *Studies in Iconography*, vol.18, 1997, pp. 143-159.
- Gibson, Claire. *The Hidden Life of Renaissance Art. Secrets and Symbols in Great Masterpieces*. Saraband, 2007.
- Gombrich, Ernst. *Symbolic Images, Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*. Phaidon, 1972.
- Hall, James. *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*. Westview Press, 2008.
- Harbison, Peter. "Old Testament Prefigurations of New Testament Events on Irish High Crosses." *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, vol. 118C, 2018, pp. 123-139.
- Hartt, Frederick, and David G. Wilkins. *History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*. 5th ed., Prentice Hall, 2003.
- Hibbard, Howard. *Michelangelo*. Westview Press, 1974.
- Jansen, Katherine L. "Like a Virgin: The Meaning of the Magdalen for Female Penitents of Later Medieval Italy." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, vol.45, 2000, pp. 131-152.
- Lash, Willem F. "Iconography and Iconology." In *The Dictionary of Art*, edited by Jane Turner, vol.15, Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Moxey, Keith. "Panofsky's Concept of "Iconology" and the Problem of Interpretation in the History of Art." *New Literary History*, vol.17, no.2, Interpretation and Culture, 1986, pp. 265-274.
- Oberer, Angela. *The Life and Work of Rosalba Carriera (1673-1757), The Queen of Pastel*. Amsterdam University Press, 2018.
- Panofsky, Erwin. *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. Westview Press, 1972
- Paoletti, John. *Art in Renaissance Italy*. 2nd ed., H.N. Abrams, 2002.
- Pedretti, Carlo. *Raphael. His life and work in the splendors of the Italian Renaissance*. Giunti, 1989.
- Poeschke, Joachim. *Italian Frescoes, The age of Giotto, 1280-1400*. Abbeville Press, 2005
- Rubinstein, Nicolai. *The Palazzo Vecchio, 1298-1532: Government, Architecture and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic*. Clarendon Press, 1995.

Syllabus of Record

Sarnecka, Zuzanna. "And the Word Dwelt amongst Us": Experiencing the Nativity in the Italian Renaissance Home", in *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, edited by Maya Corry, Marco Faini, Alessia Meneghin. Brill, 2019, pp. 163-184.

Stemp, Richard. *The Secret Language of the Renaissance*. Duncan Baird Publishers, 2012.

Talvacchia, Bette. *Raphael*. Phaidon, 2007.

Tioli, Eleonora, and Gianni Festa. "At the Table with Saint Dominic." In *Saint Dominic and His Mission*. Catholic University of America Press, 2025, pp.183-188.

Verdon, Timothy. *Mary in Florentine Art*. Florence: Mandragora, 2003.

Williams, Anne L. "Blasphemous or Beautiful? Leonardo da Vinci's Saint John the Baptist: Holy Masculinity and Its Ambiguities ca. 1500." In *Masculinities and Representation: The Eroticized Male in Early Modern Italy and England*, edited by Konrad Eisenbichler. University of Toronto Press, 2024, pp. 52-76.

Content

Topic 1 - What is Iconography?

- Introduction – Definition
- Erwin Panofsky, Aby Warburg
- Style – Technique – Iconography
- Timeline

Topic 2 – Main tools to decode an image and architecture

- History of church buildings – terminology and function
- Symbolism of numbers
- Allegories, Personifications
- Attributes and first symbols

Topic 3 – The synagogue – The mosque

- Guest lecture with the Florentine Rabbi, Gad Piperno
- Guest lecture with Imam or his representative

Topic 4 - The Bible: Old Testament and New Testament

- Genesis, main prophets
- Jesus

Topic 5 – Mary, the Mother of Christ

- First imagery – catacombs
- Iconography since Middle Ages

Topic 6 – Who and what are saints?

- Biblical Heroes and Florentine self-representation

Syllabus of Record

Topic 7 – Civic institutions and respective imagery

- Orphanages and Imagery
- Charity institutions
- City halls
- Legal Courts

Topic 8 – Mythology

- Hercules
- Gods of Mount Olympus

Field study and experiential learning components may include:

- Florence Cathedral Complex, Santa Croce, San Lorenzo, Accademia Museum, Uffizi Museum, Bargello Museum, Florence Synagogue, Florence Central Mosque
- Guest lectures by Florence Rabbi and Florence Imam or their representatives

Syllabus of Record is subject to minor changes in Term-specific Syllabus at faculty's discretion.