

Art History and Visual Culture Studies

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The discipline of art history and visual culture studies considers artistic production across a spectrum of social and historical contexts and conceptual frameworks. AHVCS courses investigate the lives of images, artifacts, and built environments, and consider how visual practices have shaped human values, experiences, identity and action. Whitman College offers major and minor study programs in art history and visual culture studies. Both prepare students to become active historians and interpreters of the visual world who can communicate about multiple forms of cultural expression.

Learning Goals: Upon graduation, a student will be able to:

- **Major-Specific Areas of Knowledge**
 - Demonstrate an ability to critically situate artists, movements, artworks, artifacts, exhibitions and other visual practices within larger historical frameworks.
 - Demonstrate a familiarity with the historiography of the study of visual texts and artifacts.
 - Demonstrate a facility with contemporary cross and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of visual texts and artifacts.
 - Understand the interconnectedness of cultural production across different geographic and historical contexts.
- **Accessing Academic Community/Resources**
 - Retrieve and evaluate relevant resources from libraries, databases, archives and collections.
- **Communication**
 - Express ideas cogently through forms of oral and written communication, including visual analyses, in-class presentations, reviews, curatorial texts, research papers and examinations.
- **Critical Thinking**
 - Synthesize, assess and apply existing scholarship to the study of visual texts and artifacts.
 - Analyze visual texts and artifacts through their socio-political roles, cultural and market values, materiality, iconology, aesthetics and ethics.
- **Research Experience**
 - Generate original analyses of artists, movements, artworks, artifacts, exhibitions and other visual practices based on primary and secondary sources.

Distribution: Courses completed in art history and visual cultural studies apply to the fine arts or humanities distribution areas, and to cultural pluralism as indicated.

Total credit requirements for an Art History and Visual Culture Studies major: A student who enters Whitman without any prior college-level preparation in art history and visual studies will have to complete 36 credits to fulfill the requirements for the art history and visual culture studies major.

The Art History and Visual Culture Studies major:

- 36 Credits
- Required Courses
 - AHVCS 103 and 490
 - One 300-level course
 - One non-Western course
- Other notes
 - A maximum of two courses can be approved from outside the major including transfer credit, study abroad and Whitman courses
 - No PDF courses

- If an AHVCS major and also an Art major or minor, no course may satisfy both major and minor requirements
 - If a course is required for both an additional course must be approved by the department
- Senior Requirements
 - AHVCS 490
 - A written critical review of a piece of art historical scholarship
 - An oral object analysis of a visual text or artifact
- Honors
 - Students do not apply for admission to candidacy for honors
 - Students must submit a proposal for their thesis or project
 - Must be submitted within the first six weeks of the two-semester period in which student is eligible
 - Accumulated at least 87 credits
 - Completed two semesters of residency at Whitman.
 - Cumulative GPA of at least 3.300 on all credits earned at Whitman College
 - Major GPA of at least 3.500
 - Complete a written thesis or research project prepared exclusively for the satisfaction of this program
 - Earn a grade of at least A- on the honors thesis or project and the honors thesis course
 - Pass the senior assessment with distinction
 - Chair of the department will notify the Registrar of students attaining Honors no later than the beginning of week 12 of the semester.
 - An acceptable digital copy of the Honors Thesis must be submitted to Penrose Library no later than Reading Day

The Art History and Visual Culture Studies minor:

- 18 Credits
- Required Courses
 - AHVCS 103
 - If a class is required for a separate major and the minor an additional may be approved by the department
 - With approval one course from outside the department can be used
 - No PDF courses

103 Introduction to Critical Art History

Fall, Spring Fall: Miller, Uddin; Spring: Reynolds, Uddin 4 credits

This course is a critical introduction to the discipline of art history and the study of visual culture. Students will examine a range of works within different cultural contexts, dating from antiquity to the present day. We will interrogate four categories that have been at the center of art history as a discipline: the object, the artist, the viewer, and the institution. Our goals will be 1) to understand how social power has manifested through the idea, production, and circulation of “art” and forms of visual culture more broadly, and 2) to practice reading, writing, discussion, and sustained looking in relation to the visual field. Short papers, presentations, and/or exams are required. Required for the art history and visual culture studies and studio art majors and minors. Closed to juniors and seniors.

210 Museums and The Politics of Display

Not offered 2021-22

4 credits

This course is designed to introduce students to the museum as a social institution that produces value, organizes material culture, and structures knowledge. An exploration of the ways in which museum display can augment and/or alter the meanings and functions of objects will be central to the class. Students will examine the birth of the museum in 18th century Europe as a product of Enlightenment values and imperial ambitions. Using historical and contemporary examples from Britain, France, and the United States, students will research and critique shifting collecting and exhibition philosophies. The class will explore the following topics (and more) as they relate to the

rhetoric of display: identity formation, race and gender politics, memory and history, ethnography and social taxonomy, "non-Western" art in Western museums, repatriation of objects, sacred art in secular spaces, narrative constructions and claims of historical veracity, and the modern encyclopedic museum. The course is based on student presentations and discussion, with various written assignments and/or exams. Multiple field trips are required to complete the course. These will take place outside of class time, and may be scheduled either during the week or on Fridays and/or Saturdays. *Prerequisite:* Art History 103 or consent of instructor.

224 Powerful Art/ifacts: Greece/Rome
Fall **Davies**

4 credits

This course explores the art, architecture, and archaeology of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. Beginning with the Bronze Age and ending with the Roman Imperial period, we will examine the material evidence for key areas in Greek and Roman society and history, from class and socio-political change, to cultural identity, religious practice, and daily life. We will consider the nature of the surviving archaeological record, from public monuments to works of sculpture and pottery, to coins and other remains. All the while, we will highlight the ways in which the visual heritage of a "classical" and "Greco-Roman" past have been and continue to be exploited in the construction of subsequent self-images and claims to supremacy. In this light, we will not only encounter the histories of "classical" archaeology and art history, but we will also emphasize the ways in which the material cultures of ancient Greece and Rome have been manipulated – both in antiquity and modernity – for a wide array of cultural and ideological aims. May be elected as Classics 224 or History 224.

225 Inventing Egypt
Spring

Miller

4 credits

This course examines the various ways in which ancient Egypt has been imagined in the European, Egyptian, and American nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with an emphasis on visual culture. Egyptology, the scientific discipline that studies Ancient Egypt, emerged in the nineteenth century in tandem with "Egyptomania," a Western obsession with all things (ancient) Egyptian. At the same time, Egyptians were struggling against European colonial intervention and vying for control over Egyptian archeology. With particular focus on the ways in which people, imagery, and discourses circulated between three continents, the course will introduce students to the history of Europe's "discovery" of (ancient) Egypt, the use of Pharaonic imagery in the construction of Egyptian nationhood, the place Egypt occupies in museum collections and art historical narratives, the role of ancient Egypt in American racial politics, and Egypt in European and American pop culture. Lecture and discussion-based with short response papers and a longer final paper. May be taken for credit toward the Race and Ethnic Studies major or minor or the South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies major.

226 Landscape and Cityscape in Ancient Rome
Not offered 2021-22

4 credits

Despite Rome being one of the greatest cities in the ancient world, its identity was fundamentally rooted in its natural landscape. In this intensive 4-week course in Italy, we will study the ancient city of Rome and its supporting landscape, both through the lens of ancient literary accounts and directly through field trips to major archeological sites and museums. We will explore how the realms of urban, rural, and wild were articulated in Roman culture, conceptually and materially. We will investigate both how the Romans conceived of the relationship between the built environment of urban space and the natural environment that supported and surrounded it and how they dealt with the real ecological problems of urban life. Students will also actively participate in archeological excavation at a Roman coastal settlement. May be elected as Classics 319 or Environmental Studies 319.

228 Mayhem, Machines, Manifestos: Modernism in Art and Architecture
Spring **Uddin**

4 credits

Modernism in the visual arts and the built environment is more than "my kid could paint that" and clean lines on HGTV. In this course, we will study key makers, movements, works, exhibitions and institutions in the canon of modern art and architecture before 1945, as well as scholarship that has called this canon into question. Emphasis will go toward the social, political and material conditions under which modernism emerged and flourished as an

aesthetic category, and how modernism articulated different senses of an avant-garde marked by nation, class, gender, sexuality and race. Our ultimate goal is to learn how artistic and architectural modernism was invented, mobilized and modified in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Students will sharpen their visual and spatial literacy skills and deepen their historical knowledge of art and architecture. Lecture-based with presentations, short papers and exams. May be taken for credit toward the Art-Environmental Studies major. *Prerequisite:* Art History 103 or consent of instructor.

229 Art Since 1945

Fall

Reynolds

4 credits

This course examines some of the issues raised by artists and critics since the end of World War II, including the changing nature of the art object, how Modernism differs from Postmodernism, the influence of technological developments on aesthetic practices and the role of popular culture, mass media and new methods of scholarship in challenging the distinctions between high and low art, the universality of meaning, the genius European male artist, the precious museum work. While the majority of the material is devoted to movements and figures from the United States and Europe, the course also will investigate “the margins” — those artistic practices that may have been overlooked by the mainstream, but which nevertheless have a broad cultural base in their respective communities. May be taken for credit toward the Art-Environmental Studies major. *Prerequisite:* Art History 103 or consent of instructor.

230 The Social Life of Photography

Not offered 2021-22

4 credits

This course will explore the importance of photography to our collective history. Through careful analysis of specific images alongside an overview of the medium's aesthetic, technological and ideological turns, students will be introduced to a broad range of topics, including (but not limited to): the photograph's use as a means of documentary and artistic expression; significant photographic movements, markets and publics; theories and debates surrounding reproduction and truth claims; photography's affiliation with other modes of cultural production. Students will develop a critical toolkit for analyzing the modern world vis-à-vis this vital medium. May be taken for credit toward the Art-Environmental Studies major.

235 Forms and Feels: Race and Visual Culture

Fall

Uddin

4 credits

Race is foundational to modern life and complex in its permutations. How does one go about engaging it in a critical and sensitive way? This course cultivates observation, analysis and response in this direction. We will study how racial meaning, experience and power are produced through practices of visual representation in art, film, education, science and the law, and how the visual field itself is a racial formation. We will also explore the lines between seeing race and feeling race. Topics may include racial identifications, embodiments, caricature, performance, surveillance, spectatorship, and archives. Students develop conceptual vocabularies, historical contexts and interpretive skills for understanding race in and through the visual world. Lecture-based with short papers, projects, presentations and exams. May be elected as Race and Ethnic Studies 235.

237 Theory and Performance

Fall

Petit

4 credits

What theories have inspired contemporary avant-garde Theater, installation and performance art, tanz-Theater, experimental video/film, and new media? In this interdisciplinary course we will chart the evolution of performance theory from the writings of Bertolt Brecht to the present day. We will explore how artists have embraced and challenged these emerging forms, and examine seminal works from each genre in their historical, political, and social contexts. Designed to bring students from a variety of disciplines (art, art history, theater, dance, film, and video, etc.) into a collaborative forum; coursework will include outside readings, in-class screenings, class discussions, and short essays, as well as group and individual projects. May be elected as Theater and Dance 357.

243 Buddhist Art in Asia**Not offered 2021-22****4 credits**

This course presents an overview of Buddhist art and architecture, beginning with its origins in South Asia and tracing its dissemination into East and Southeast Asia. A variety of media will be examined and interpreted within the context of Buddhist religious practice, regional artistic traditions, and shifting religious doctrine. Topics including the origin of the Buddha image, pilgrimage and modes of worship, Buddhist iconography, and the intersection of Buddhist religion and politics will be discussed. Several short papers, presentations, exams, and class participation are required.

246 The Art of India**Spring****Gulbransen****4 credits**

This course presents an overview of the art and architecture of the Indian subcontinent spanning roughly 5,000 years of history, from the Indus Valley Civilization to the 21st century. Particular emphasis will be placed on the study of objects and sites in their religious, cultural, political, and historical contexts. Topics addressed in the class include (but are not limited to) the origin of the Buddha image, the function of erotic sculpture in religious contexts, ritual practice and sacred space, trends in patronage, cultural exchange between Muslim and Hindu courts in the medieval and early modern era, methods of art collecting and display, the impact of British imperialism on artistic production in India, the importance of visual culture in the Indian nationalist movement, and the tension between tradition and globalization in the contemporary art of South Asia. Several short papers, presentations, exams, and class participation are required.

248 Ways of Seeing: Japanese Art and Aesthetics**Spring****Takemoto****4 credits**

This class on Japanese aesthetics will focus on the literary, visual, and performing arts of Japan. As we survey the traditional arts of Japan, we will ask questions about what it means to be a craftsman, an artist, a performer, an archer, a monk/poet, or any person who has developed the skill “to see.” More specifically, this class will address the relationship between two subjects — Japanese Buddhism and the arts of Japan, and in particular, the arts related to the serving and receiving of tea. We will pay special attention to the relationship between the artistic process and Buddhist spiritual disciplines. Classes will meet for slide lectures, discussions, and demonstrations of the Japanese tea ceremony in “Chikurakken,” the Whitman College tea room. Two examinations, oral presentations, and several short essays will be required. Two periods a week. May be taken for credit toward the Japanese major or minor.

250 Architectural History of Walla Walla**Spring****Reynolds****4 credits**

This course will focus on the physical development and transformation of the city of Walla Walla, including the Whitman campus, since the 1850s. Students will conduct primary research on individual buildings and plans, and present their findings to the class throughout the semester. Two project reports and presentations. May be taken for credit toward the Art-Environmental Studies major.

253 Transnational Interplanetary Film & Video Consciousness**Not offered 2021-22****4 credits**

This course takes its title from underground director George Kuchar’s irreverent approach to making low-budget, low brow movies that helped situate film and video as a legitimate artistic media. Topics will explore experimentations with technologies of the moving image that exist outside of mainstream commercial moviemaking practices, histories of individual artists, groups and collectives experimenting with film and video, “expanded cinemas,” and how new forms of image production and distribution in the digital era challenge traditional hierarchies of taste and value. A weekly screening, typically no more than 1 hour, is required. The class will agree on a set screening time during our initial class meeting. Requirements include short papers and presentations and one longer research project chosen in consultation with instructor. May be taken for credit toward the Film and Media Studies major.

257-260 Topics in Visual Cultural Studies

2 or 4 credits

Any current offerings follow.

291, 292 Individual Projects

Fall, Spring

Staff

1 or 2 credits

Projects designed by the student and under supervision of a professor that expand upon a completed 200- or 300-level course. *Prerequisites:* a 200- or 300-level art history course in the area of the project, and consent of the supervising instructor.

351 Los Angeles: Art, Architecture, Cultural Geography

Not offered 2021-22

4 credits

This seminar will study the emergence of Los Angeles as a center for cultural production since 1945. It will assess the relationship between urban space and the visual arts — including painting, photography, architecture, film, and video. And it will investigate the role of representation in shaping the social topography of the city. This course will ultimately seek to answer a series of questions: How has Los Angeles established itself as one of the most important global art centers? How do the city's history and landscape create the conditions for certain artistic movements and styles? And how do Los Angeles' ethnically and economically diverse communities use the arts to address issues of social justice and marginality? *Prerequisite:* Art History 103 or consent of instructor.

352 Art/Environment

Not offered 2021-22

4 credits

This class will explore contemporary artistic responses to climate change. Whether we call this period “Anthropocene,” “Capitalocene,” “The Sixth Extinction,” or “The Dithering” we are now forced to confront a new era of human-generated global warming and rapidly vanishing biodiversity. How are artists and other cultural producers helping us to rethink and reimagine our relationship to the planet? From the Land Art movement of the 1960s and 70s to more recent experiments in so-called “Third Nature” digital domains, this course will explore how creative individuals and collective actions are helping to envision human adaptability, cross-species justice, and new modes of collaboration to halt—or at least slow—ecological disaster. Likewise, the class will explore how art is often implicated in the same cycle of overconsumption that threatens our shared habitats. Lectures, in-class screenings, guest speakers and fieldtrips will be used to supplement course readings. This is a writing intensive course open to students from all disciplines but rooted in the capacity for the Arts and Humanities to generate creative responses to complex problems. May be taken for credit toward the Art-Environmental Studies major. *Prerequisite:* Art History 103 or Environmental Studies 120 or consent of instructor.

353 Blues, Blood, Bruise: Blackness in Art
Not offered 2021-22

4 credits

What does blackness look and feel like? To whom does it belong? When and how has it generated value, reinforced power structures, or remade the world? Riffing on Glenn Ligon's 2015 installation that featured three words in white neon tubing, "blues," "blood," and "bruise," this course investigates racial blackness through the lens of modern and contemporary art. By moving between archives, expressive objects, and critical scholarship in black studies, art history and visual culture, we will study how visual art across multiple media has emerged from Afro-diasporic communities since the early 20th Century. We will ask how these practices have negotiated Euro-American canons, state violence, industrial and post-industrial capitalism, and the politics of gender and sexuality. And we will explore and assess the possibilities of art as a channel for black expression and liberation. Topics may include: the Harlem Renaissance, art and Black Power, Afrofuturism, Afropessimism and Afropolitanism. Discussion-based classes with presentations, short papers and projects. May be taken for credit toward the Race and Ethnic Studies major or the Gender Studies major. Prerequisite: Art History 103 or consent of the instructor.

355 Indigenous Aesthetics: Native North American Art and Visual Culture

Fall

Uddin

4 credits

This course examines art and visual culture as an expression of Indigenous people in North America. Working directly with campus collections and regional arts and culture centers, we will study the material, formal, and iconographic dimensions of specific artworks and visual objects, while considering the historical, social, and environmental conditions that have shaped and are shaped by them. The course will expose students to traditions, cosmologies, and frameworks for understanding Native North American art and visual culture, and develop research and writing skills for interpreting all forms of cultural expression. Topics may include: sovereignty, settler colonialism, "Indian-ness," gendered and queer indigenities, and human/nonhuman relations. Discussion-based classes with field trips, presentations, short papers, and projects. May be taken for credit toward the Race and Ethnic Studies major, Gender Studies major, or the Art-Environmental Studies major. *Prerequisite:* Art History 103 or consent of instructor.

356 The Taj Mahal and Beyond: The Art and Architecture of Mughal India

Spring

Gulbransen

4 credits

This class explores the art and architecture of the Mughal dynasty in South Asia, from the origins of the empire in the sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, when British forces exiled the last Mughal ruler. Manuscript and album paintings, palace and tomb architecture, jewelry, enameled weaponry, and elaborate textiles will all be interpreted within the context of Mughal politics, Islamic doctrine, art workshop structures, and pre-existing aesthetic traditions in South Asia and the broader Islamic world. Topics examined include (but are not limited to) public space and imperial propaganda, art objects in networks of gift exchange, artistic and cultural exchange between Mughal and contemporary Rajput courts in Rajasthan and the Himalayan foothills, and the impact of the British presence on Indian visual culture. Various written assignments, presentations, and class discussion are required. May be taken for credit toward the South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies major. *Prerequisite:* Art History 103 or 246, or consent of instructor.

357 Art of Colonial India

Not offered 2021-22

4 credits

This seminar examines the impact of European colonial expansion on the art and architecture of South Asia between 1750 and 1947, when India and Pakistan gained independence from British control. Although multiple colonial powers were present in India beginning in the early sixteenth century, a study of the British Empire in South Asia will be the primary focus of this course. Paintings, photographs, buildings, monuments, and other objects produced by both indigenous and European artists will be considered. This course explores the ways in which visual forms engaged with imperial ideologies, either promoting or resisting Western presence in India. Issues including race, gender, religion, class/caste, and the politics of display will be addressed as they relate to artistic production in this

period. Various written assignments, presentations, and class discussion are required. May be taken for credit toward the South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies major. *Prerequisite:* Art History 103 or 246, or consent of instructor.

358-360 Seminar in Visual Culture Studies

4 credits

Special studies not generally considered in other courses offered by the department. The specific material will vary from semester to semester and may cover various subjects from early times to contemporary developments in art. Any current offerings follow.

421, 422 Individual Projects

Fall, Spring

Staff

2 or 4 credits

Projects designed by senior Art History & Visual Culture Studies majors under the supervision of a professor.

Prerequisite: consent of supervising instructor.

490 Senior Seminar In Art History

Fall

Reynolds

4 credits

Weekly discussions and critical papers based on: 1) selected primary and secondary readings in the history of western art theory (ancient, medieval, renaissance, the academy); 2) primary and secondary readings in the methodology of modern art history; and 3) primary readings in contemporary approaches to art. Emphasis will be placed on the role of the art theorist/historian in the history of art. Required for the major.

493 Thesis

Fall

Staff

4 credits

Open only to senior art history and visual culture studies majors except those registered for Art History 498. Taken during the spring (or final) semester of the senior year. Devoted to the completion of a substantial written project under the supervision of at least one faculty member. *Prerequisite:* approval of a proposal submitted to the Art History and Visual Culture Studies department.

498 Honors Thesis

Spring

Staff

4 credits

Designed to further independent investigation leading to the preparation of a written thesis or research project in art history. Taken during the spring (or final) semester of the senior year. Required of and limited to senior honors candidates in art history and visual culture studies. *Prerequisite:* admission to honors candidacy.