

Social History of Art



Above: Jan Bruegel the Elder and Hieronymus Francken II, *The Archdukes Albert and Isabella Visiting a Collector's Cabinet* (1621-23), today in the collection of the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland. This seventeenth-century oil painting is a celebration of the visual arts and visual culture, depicting wealthy and privileged connoisseurs – including the archdukes of the title – appreciating beautiful and meaningful things: paintings, sculptures, antiquities, musical and scientific instruments, exotic shells, rare flowers, and even living animals. The painting is also a deliberate refutation of iconoclasm (the conscious destruction of art objects) and a philosophical statement asserting the importance of seeing (and touching) art and other objects as a legitimate path to understanding. For more information about this painting and its meanings, visit the Walters Museum website: <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/14623/the-archdukes-albert-and-isabella-visiting-a-collectors-cabinet/>

Best contact: email tfarnold@bsu.edu at any time with any questions or concerns.

Office hours MWF 10:00-10:55 and TR 10:00-12:00 + 2:00-3:00 or by appointment (don't hesitate to ask).

Using Canvas:

The course Canvas site is the essential organizing hub for this class, including announcements and other instructions. Threaded discussions will be hosted on the class Canvas site, and daily course class session outlines

and readings will be found on that site as well. For all these reasons, students should regularly and routinely check the course Canvas site, especially on the day of every scheduled class session.

Course goals include:

- Exploring the forms and meanings of "art" in human societies of very different times and places.
- Understanding the persistence and power of art in human society, including how historical images and artistic meanings help shape our perceptions and behavior today.
- Recognizing some of the most important and influential patterns of artistic expression in human history.
- Identifying some of the most significant art objects in history, and explaining the connections between objects of different times and places (or explaining a lack of connection between representative objects).
- Becoming familiar with the basic concepts and vocabulary of art history and artistic production.
- Learning how to better see the world, and understanding what is seen.
- Creating art to respond to the objects and ideas under study.

Class policies:

Attendance will be taken for all in-person sessions according to the policies explained in the student handbook. Please promptly contact the instructor with any questions regarding the application of those policies.

Students are free to use a laptop, tablet, or phone for class purposes at any time. Class session outlines, art object images, discussion readings and other materials will be online or distributed as a pdf document. Students may read or view these on a device, or print them out as hard copies, as they see fit. In any case, students are expected to be able to refer to any image or text under discussion.

Students are encouraged to take notes on all readings, and during any class sessions, as they see fit. Students are not expected to have mastered any reading or other material before the class session in which that image or text is first encountered or discussed. However, if students find that they do not understand the basic ideas and examples presented by a text or image, even after in-class conversation, then they have a responsibility to further work on that material – with their fellow students as well as with the instructor – to be able to contribute to the online threaded discussion.

A generous time allowance will be provided for all online threaded discussions. If you need extra time, please ask. Reasonable accommodations will be provided should circumstances warrant. In the case of missing threaded discussion posts, a grade of 0% may be entered if a required discussion post is not made before a given thread is closed, and no accommodation or extension has been granted. In the case of other missed assignments, a grade of 0% may be entered if no assignment is received by the given due date, and no extension has been granted. Any 0% grade may be replaced upon submission of work, with an appropriate grade penalty for lateness, and after discussion with the instructor to determine acceptance and any appropriate penalty.

Grades will be posted to PowerSchool following a reasonable time for evaluation. Discussion grades will normally be posted within a few days of the last class session or final online discussion thread pertaining to a given topic or week. Other assignments will normally be evaluated and the grades posted within a week of submission. Students will be informed in circumstances of delay. Students should regularly and routinely check their grades on PowerSchool, share those grades with parents or guardians, and promptly contact the instructor with any questions or concerns.

Academic dishonesty and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Please review the student handbook for a full discussion of the relevant policies.

There may be provision for extra credit or additional or replacement assignments. Such opportunities, if any, will be announced during the semester.

If circumstances warrant, alternate assignments, extended due dates, and other exceptions to stated policies can be arranged on a case-by-case basis after consultation with the instructor. All reasonable accommodation will be made.

Any student with a disability will be accorded appropriate accommodation, as arranged in advance.

As the semester develops, course topics and readings may be amended as the instructor sees fit. Therefore, be alert to all announcements and any revisions to the below calendar of readings and threaded discussions.

This syllabus may be amended by the instructor at any time. In such cases, students will always receive timely prior notification of any changes.

Required syllabi statements:

1. Ball State University diversity and inclusion statement:

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff, and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge and through university resources found at <http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/multiculturalcenter>.

2. Indiana Academy History Department content statement:

As with many history classes, the lectures, readings, and discussions [in this course] will include a range of topics that may be triggering, emotionally distressing, and difficult for some students. Engaging with topics such as slavery and human suffering is essential to this discipline. History seeks to understand the experiences and thought processes of former generations, whether for good or ill. Sometimes the language and word choices used by people in the past may be insensitive or politically incorrect today. Nevertheless, the goal of history is to understand the past within its own context and time. If a reading, image shown in class, or discussion is truly troubling to anyone, please do not hesitate to talk to your instructor. In such circumstances, an alternative reading [or other course material] can be assigned.

Evaluation overview:

Online threaded and in-class discussion		
16 weekly discussion grades @ 25 points each	400	
Curatorial assignment series		
Virtual Museum Visit paper	25	
Kunstkammer Collection construction	200	
Exhibition catalog	100	
Art Auction final exam simulation	50	
Formal analysis papers		
5 short essays @ 25 points each	125	
total	900 points + any extra credit	

Grading scale:

Percentage	Grade
.940-1000	A
.900-939	A-
.870-899	B+
.830-869	B
.800-829	B-
.770-799	C+
.730-769	C
.700-729	C-
Below 700	D*

Discussions:

Students will receive a discussion grade for each week of the semester, from Week 1 through Week 16. Evaluation will be based both on in-class oral discussion and on student posts to online discussion threads hosted on the course Canvas site. Further information regarding the expectations for discussion participation and evaluation will be shared early in the semester.

Normally, there will be three threaded discussion topics per week, first posted on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and highly correlated with the content and questions of that day's class session.

Some topics may have only one question or thread; others may have more than one question or thread. These will always be clearly labeled; i.e., Week 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, etc. Students will have a generous 24 hours to first post to a given topic or thread; the expectation is that the online conversation will flow and develop over a couple of days or more. Students are encouraged to respond to each other's posts, and to post their own follow-up points, etc. Students are expected to return to and potentially add to the online conversation, not just post once and not return to read comments, reply to others, etc.

The instructor will of course post and respond to student activity, but cannot guarantee responding to each and every student post. Students will receive further general and possibly individual instruction and guidance as to what constitutes effective or impressive online discussion performance. Students should feel free at any time to contact the instructor with any questions or concerns regarding discussion evaluation. In their posts, students will be expected to be respectful of all persons at all times.

Curatorial assignment series:

One theme of this course will be the investigation of museums and art collections: Why do we collect and display art, and what is accomplished by this practice? This exploration will include four very different assignments: a short "virtual museum visit" paper; a "Kunstkammer" private art collection project that includes fabricating a model space for an ideal personal art collection; curating and writing a "catalog" for a public art exhibition; and an "art auction simulation" experience final exam. Further information about these assignments, including instructions and due dates, will be provided over the course of the semester.

Formal analysis papers:

An essential tool for the academic examination and understanding of art is the formal analysis. (In this case, "formal" refers to artistic form – that is, the observable qualities of line, shape, color, composition, etc. that can be described and then analyzed to determine or deduce meaning.) The terms and purposes of formal analysis will be the focus of the first unit of the course. Students will write a formal analysis paper examining one specific art object for each of the five units of the course.

Textbook and readings:

This class requires no printed book from the book room.

Discussion readings and other materials will be provided by the instructor, in most cases as a pdf documents or links posted to the daily session pages of the course Canvas site.

Course calendar

Unit 1, Weeks 1-2: Form

How can we more carefully and effectively look at and describe art objects, as a preliminary step to discovering their potential meanings?

Week 1

Mon Aug 14 Introduction to the course
Wed Aug 16 Exploring form class discussion
Fri Aug 18 Introduction to Virtual Museum Visit assignment

Week 2

Mon Aug 21 Exploring form class discussion
Wed Aug 23 Exploring form class discussion
Fri Aug 25 Introduction to first formal analysis paper

Unit 2, Weeks 3-6: Nature

Describing and finding meaning in the world we see. How do artists depict the world around us, and what do those depictions tell us about our world? Why do artists (often, but not always) work hard to depict the world as we actually see it? What is gained by such attention – and what is potentially gained by abandoning this “naturalism?”

Week 3

Mon Aug 28 Workshop session
Wed Sept 30 Workshop session
Fri Sept 1 Workshop session

Week 4

Mon Sept 4 No class, Labor Day
Wed Sept 6 Workshop session
Fri Sept 8 Workshop session

Week 5

Mon Sept 11 Workshop session
Wed Sept 13 Workshop session
Fri Sept 15 Workshop session

Week 6

Mon Sept 18 Workshop session
Wed Sept 20 Workshop session
Fri Sept 22 Workshop session

Unit 3, Weeks 7-10: Body

Describing and finding meaning in the human body. How do artists depict the human body, and what do their interpretations tell us about how different people and cultures view – and understand – the physical human presence?

Week 7

Mon Sept 25 Workshop session
Wed Sept 27 Workshop session
Fri Sept 29 Workshop session

Week 8

Mon Oct 2 Workshop session
Wed Oct 4 Workshop session
Fri Oct 6 Workshop session

Week 9

Mon Oct 9 No class; extended weekend
Wed Oct 11 Workshop session
Fri Oct 13 Workshop session

Week 10

Mon Oct 16 Workshop session
Wed Oct 18 Workshop session
Fri Oct 20 Workshop session

Unit 4, Weeks 11-13: Person

Describing and finding meaning in the individual person. How do artists depict individual, specific human beings (such as in a portrait)? What do these images tell us about how different societies and cultures view – and understand – the possibility that a human being can be (or become) a distinctive, individual person?

Week 11

Mon Oct 23 Workshop session
Wed Oct 25 Workshop session
Fri Oct 27 Workshop session

Week 12

Mon Oct 30 Workshop session
Wed Nov 1 Workshop session
Fri Nov 3 Workshop session

Week 13

Mon Nov 6 No class, extended weekend
Wed Nov 8 Workshop session
Fri Nov 10 Workshop session

Unit 5, Weeks 14-17: Narratives

Finding meanings in the collective and historical human experience. How does art communicate narratives, or tell stories? And how do these stories – these myths and histories – shape our human societies?

Week 14

Mon Nov 13 Workshop session
Wed Nov 15 Workshop session
Fri Nov 17 Workshop session

Thanksgiving break, no classes Nov 20, 22, or 24.

Week 15

Mon Nov 27 Workshop session
Wed Nov 29 Workshop session
Fri Dec 1 Workshop session

Week 16

Mon Dec 4 Workshop session
Wed Dec 6 Workshop session
Fri Dec 8 Workshop session

Week 17

Mon Dec 11 Workshop session
Wed Dec 13 Workshop session

Final exam session for Art Auction simulation experience TBA