TEN WORKS OF WESTERN ART: Syllabus

Description:

This course will consist of close encounters with ten great works of art from the modern Western tradition (i.e. Europe, Britain and the U.S. from the 14th through the 20th centuries). Instead of a Renaissance-to-modern survey, we will delve deeply into each of the ten works that will form our “canon,” chosen both for their extraordinariness and for their capacity to represent different times and places, different media, different themes and different purposes. Along the way we will ask what makes these works “genuine and complete,” extraordinary and/or representative, and debate whether or not they properly belong in our “canon.” We will also address the changing notions of what art is and what functions it fulfills. Each of these ten works of art will be looked at in relation to relevant art objects in Yale’s collections (and once in the Metropolitan Museum in New York), as well as corollary works of poetry, literature and film. This will be done through readings, seminar discussions, close looking, presentations in the galleries, and three short (3-5 pp.) and one longer (10 pp.) close looking and research papers. By the end of the five-week session, each of the students in the class will form their own canon of ten works, and argue for it according to their own values, reasoning, and judgment, and their own rules of quality, range and comprehensiveness, “genuineness” and “completeness.”

Books suggested for purchase:

Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida
Michael Baxandall, Painting and Experience in 15th Century Italy
Norman Bryson, Looking at the Overlooked
Cennino Cennini, The Craftsman's Handbook
Bradford Collins, 12 Views of Manet’s Bar
Michel Foucault, The Order of Things
Lawrence Gowing, Vermeer
William Ivins, Prints and Visual Communication
Rosalind Krauss, Bachelors
Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey
Edward Snow, Inside Bruegel (available on Kindle)
List of Works:

1. Giotto di Bondone (Italian, 1267-1337), Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel, Padova, fresco, 1305

2. Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Flemish, 1525-1569), Children’s Games, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, oil on oakwood, 118 x 61 cm., 1560

3. Johannes Vermeer (Dutch, 1632-1675), Girl with a Pearl Earring, Mauritshuis, The Hague, oil on canvas, 46.5 x 40 cm., 1665

4. Diego Velázquez, (Spanish, 1599-1660), Las Meninas (The Maids of Honor), The Prado, Madrid, oil on canvas, 278 x 318 cm., c. 1656

5. Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (French, 1699-1779), The Ray, The Louvre, Paris, oil on canvas, 114.5 x 146 cm., 1726

6. Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes(Spanish, 1746-1828), Disasters of War, etching, aquatint and drypoint, 82 plates, 1810-1820

7. Joseph Mallord William Turner (English, 1775-1851), Rain, Steam and Speed: The Great Western Railway, National Gallery, London, oil on canvas, 91 x 121.8 cm., 1844

8. Eugène Manet (French, 1832-1883), The Bar at the Folies-Bergère, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, oil on canvas, 96 x 130 cm., 1882


SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

July 2: Giotto’s Arena Chapel, fresco.
   Read: Michael Baxandall, Painting and Experience in 15th Century Italy, chapter 1
   Cennino d’Andrea Cennini, The Craftsman’s Handbook, selection
   Michel Pastoureau, Blue: The History of a Colour, consult
   Giorgio Vasari, “The Life of Giotto…,” The Lives of the Artists

July 4: Pieter Bruegel’s Children’s Games.
      Visit to Art Gallery to look at early Italian as well as 16th, 17th century Northern works.
      Read: W. H. Auden, “Musée des Beaux Arts”
      Edward Snow, Inside Bruegel: A Play of Images in Children’s Games, selection
      William Carlos Williams, “Pictures from Bruegel”

July 9: Jan Vermeer’s Girl with a Pearl Earring.
      Watch film.
      Read: Tracy Chevalier, Girl with a Pearl Earring, suggested
      Lawrence Gowing, Vermeer, selection
      Edward Snow, A Study of Vermeer, selection

July 11: Diego Velázquez’s Las Meninas.
      Visit to Art Gallery to look at portraits.
      Read: Michel Foucault, The Order of Things, selection
      Enriqueta Harris, Velazquez, consult

First short paper due.

July 16: Jean Siméon Chardin’s The Ray.
      Read: Carol Armstrong, Still Lives, selection
      Denis Diderot, Salons, selections
      Norman Bryson, Looking at the Overlooked, selection
July 18: Francisco y Lucientes Goya’s *The Disasters of War*, print series.
Visit to Art Gallery’s print collection.
Second short paper due.

July 23: J.M.W. Turner’s *Rain, Steam and Speed*.
Visit to Yale Center for British Art.
Read: John Gage, *Turner: Rain, Steam, and Speed*, selections
Wolfgang Schivelbush, *The Railway Journey*, selections

July 25: Edouard Manet’s *Bar at the Folies-Bergères*.
Visit to Art Gallery to look at Manet’s *Young Woman Reclining in Spanish Costume*.
Read: Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, selection
Bradford Collins, ed., *12 Views of Manet’s Bar*, selections
Third short paper due/Weekend visit to Metropolitan Museum of Art

July 30: Eva Hesse’s *Contingent*, sculpture.
Visit to Art Gallery to look at Hesse’s work and abstract painting and sculpture.
Read: Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors*, selection
Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power*, selection

August 1: Zoë Leonard's *Analogue*, photographs.
Visit to Art Gallery’s photographic collection.
Read: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Final paper due following week.