Far from an unchanging concept, classicism has proven revolutionary and controversial across the centuries. By examining the legacy of Greco-Roman art, architecture, and culture, this course will explore the ways that classical antiquity has impacted the modern artistic and political imagination. Topics of discussion will include representations of the body, expressions of political authority, and debates about cultural patrimony across time, place, and medium; (mis)understandings of classical sculpture, including its supposed white surface, and their impact on ideas about race and morality; the invocation of Greco-Roman models of government from Revolutionary America to Nazi Germany; and the role of classical ideals in shaping modern-day arguments about cultural patrimony.

Longer Course Description:
Classicism broadly invokes ideas of balance, harmony, order and beauty not just in art but in the political and moral spheres. Inseparable from the legacy of Greco-Roman art and culture, it has been used for centuries to invoke authority and power. And yet, classicism is not a staid or unchanging concept. It too has been revolutionary and controversial.

We will examine the modern legacy of classical art and architecture in three inter-related areas: the body, political authority, and cultural patrimony.

First, how did classicism define bodily ideals of beauty, health, and moral worth? How did representations of male and female, of “white” and “colored” skin, and of social standing convey ideas about what it was to be a “perfect” or “good” human?

Second, how did classical philosophy and aesthetics influence political authority? How were thousand-year old Greco-Roman ideals of government invoked by societies as diverse as Revolutionary America and Nazi Germany?

Third, how do classical ideals serve to inform modern-day arguments about cultural patrimony? Which works of art are deemed valuable, and who is responsible for assessing their worth? To whom do classical objects belong, and to whom should they belong?

Beginning with the eighteenth-century origins of art history and first definitions of “the classical,” the course will examine the way classicism has been conceived, utilized, represented, and modernized by artists for creative, cultural, and political purposes. By looking at works in different media throughout Europe and America, we will study the way classicism was a regenerative, revitalizing and sometimes divisive force that could have been used for many ends, both good and evil.
Office Hours: Via Zoom, after class and by appointment.

Teaching Assistant: John Webley, john.webley@yale.edu

Requirements

Attendance:
Attendance to all classes is mandatory. Yale Summer Session courses have a condensed schedule, and no absences are allowed.

Class Participation:
In a small seminar, preparation for class and attentive, active participation are fundamental for stimulating and engaging discussion. Among the goals of the course, therefore, is to help students learn how to engage in and lead discussion and to read productively. Students may be called upon to prepare questions for class discussion, to select of works of art for discussion or as comparative images, to select key quotes for analysis, or to work individually or as a group on the formal analysis of selected objects.

Optional Formal Analysis Workshop
We will hold two thirty-minute workshops after the first two class meetings so students can practice formal analysis—i.e. how to describe and analyze a work of art’s visual and structural components. These meetings are optional but are highly recommended, particularly for students who do not have formal training in the history of art.

Readings:
Readings have been selected not only to provide the context, history and background of classical art and architecture, but also to probe how these works and issues surrounding them have been thought about and shaped by scholarship. Readings must be done in preparation for class, rather than after.

All required readings will be available on CANVAS as PDFs.

Weekly Assignments:
In addition to the regular course readings and assignments, each week there will be a larger assignment that deals with broad themes of the course. These assignments should take about 3 hours or so to complete. It is expected that students submit these assignments by the following Sunday at 11:59 pm. Details on the assignments and expectations will follow but a general outline is included below.

Dean’s Extensions are not offered at YSS. If you run into difficulties with the on-time completion and submission of an assignment, please reach out to both me and John before the assignment is due.

Images:
I will also make key images available on CANVAS as PowerPoints.
Assignments and Evaluation:

Class Attendance and participation: 15 %

Mandatory weekly assignment: 10 % each assignment; 50% total

Reading Responses (one-two paragraphs, max, and 1 question for discussion per class, to be submitted the evening before): 1% each, 10% total

Exhibition proposal with checklist, wall text, gallery labels, and floor plan: 25%

Academic Integrity:

Any form of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Executive Committee. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please read the resources available on the Center for Teaching and Learning’s website at http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources or come speak with me.

Students Requiring Accommodations

I am happy to make academic adjustments for students registered with Student Accessibility Services who require accommodations. Please contact me as soon as possible to ensure your needs are met in a timely manner.

MANDATORY WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS, due each Sunday, 11:59 pm.
Additional assignment details to follow.

Week 1. Classicism as Power

Walking tour* of your current environment: what classical references can you find in the architecture and public spaces? Where are those features located and what is the purpose of the classical reference? Write up a 2-3 page response, including photos, and be prepared to share with the class.

*Students in areas where a walking tour is not feasible can drive or can substitute a Google Street tour.

Week 2: Classicism as Cultural Patrimony

Rhetoric Exercise, the Parthenon Marbles: Take a stance for or against the repatriation of the Parthenon marbles. You are making a claim for the Parthenon marbles, either as a museum director or the president of the Greece. Record a 5-minute speech, with video, as though you are delivering it to an audience. Your goal is to convince your viewers that you have a claim—
ethical, legal, political, etc.—to the objects. (A 5-minute speech is the equivalent of ca. 2 pages of double-spaced, 12-font text).

The following readings will be useful for historical background and conceptual framing:
Thucydides Funeral Oration

Week 3: “White” Classicism
Watch: APES**T - THE CARTERS https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbMqWXnpXcA
Select one tableau or scene from APES**T. Explore which work of art is selected and why. How do the actors in the video respond and relate to the object selected? Consider this in relation to some of the information you learned in the BBC series on the color “white”. What is the overall effect on our understanding of the actors, the work of art, and of the Louvre itself? (2-3 pages).

Week 4: Classicism and the Athletic Body
Watch: The opening sequences (the first 24 minutes) of Leni Riefenstahl’s Olympia: Part I, The Festival of Nations (1938) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3LOPhRq3Es
How is the body depicted in contemporary sports culture? Do contemporary images (advertisements, commercials, videos, etc.) associate the athletic body with classical antiquity and beauty? Find an example (or counter-example) and compare it to one of the scenes in Reifenstahl’s film. (2-3 pages).
Week 5. Contemporary Classicism

Through galleries and auction house sales, explore contemporary art (art made in the past 20 years or so). Are there works that make use of classical references? Compare and contrast them to each other and works of art you have seen in class. (2-3 pages)

CLASS SCHEDULE

Class 1. May 30. Introduction

No Readings. Students will be asked to email one or two examples of classical/modern works of art for discussion prior to the first class meeting. An email will be sent to students prior to class meeting with instructions.

Watch: Videos on classical art/formal analysis TBD.

Syllabus and Class Expectations.

7:30-8: Optional Formal Analysis Workshop

Class 2: June 1. What is Classicism?

Read:

7:30-8: Optional Formal Analysis Workshop

Sunday June 4: Weekly Assignment no. 1 due, 11:59 pm.

Class 3: June 6. Enlightenment Assumptions: Whiteness and the Beautiful (Male) Body
Read:

Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Winckelmann, Excerpts about the Apollo Belvedere, Laocoön, Venus de’Medici, and other sculptures.


Class 4: June 8. Enlightenment Assumptions II: Classical Collections as Power
Discussion of the Vatican and the Louvre
Ideas for exhibition proposal due

Read:


Sunday, June 11: Weekly Assignment no. 2 due, 11:59 pm.

Class 5: June 13. Classicism and Democracy
Discussion of Thomas Jefferson and George Washington

Read:


**CLASS 6: June 15. “Venus” in Color**


Sunday, June 18, Weekly Assignment no. 3 due, 11:59 pm.

**Class 7. June 20. Classicism Between the Wars: A Return to Order**

*Draft of Exhibition Proposal and longer wall texts due*

**Read:**


**Class 8. June 22. Classicism in the Service of Fascism**

Discussion: Hitler and “Degenerate Art” and Mussolini’s Rome
Read:

Sunday, June 25, Weekly Assignment no. 4 due, 11:59 pm.

**Class 9: June 27. Classicism Contested: Reclamations and Repatriation**

Read:


**Class 10: June 29. Contemporary Classicism?**

Read:

Friday, June 30, 11:59 pm, Weekly Assignment no. 5 due.

Sunday, July 2, 11:59 pm, Final Project due. **No extensions on work beyond this date.**