

Visual Culture in North America, First Contact -1860

Instructor: Matthew H. Fisk, Ph.D.

Description:

This course conducts a broad survey of fine, vernacular, and decorative arts, as well as architecture, in North America from the time of the first contact between indigenous communities and Europeans, to the end of the antebellum period in the United States. The fine arts, as we know them, were often a fluid concept in the colonized lands of North America from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. In addition to more traditional art-historical objects, such as painting and sculpture, we will also consider archaeological artifacts and material culture, vernacular arts, decorative and architectural design, urban planning, and transatlantic print culture. British, Dutch, and French colonial objects will be studied, in addition to works by African-American slaves, and post-contact Native-American arts, in the context of other forms of cultural production.

Course Requirements:

- 20% Participation (Attendance and Online Activities)
- 30% Assignments (5)
- 20% Midterm Exam (in-class)
- 30% Final Exam (take-home)

Two exams, a midterm and a final (not cumulative), will test your knowledge of the facts and themes in this course. Barring catastrophic circumstances there will be no make-up exams. 5 assignments will require extra time outside class for research, writing, and often some sort of creative component, group-work, and/or oral presentation. This class will make regular visits to area art and archaeological collections. These visits are required and equivalent to lecture days.

Required Texts: Sarah Burns and John Davis (eds.), *American Art to 1900: A Documentary History* (UC Press, 2009)
PDFs and Hyperlinked Sources available on the Course Site

Recommended: Charles Harrison (ed.), *Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 3 vols (Blackwell, 2002)
Morgan, *Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists* (Oxford UP, 2007) – also online through the library

Lecture Structure and Readings

Note: Primary source readings are indicated by an asterisk (*);
A = Assignment; XC = extra-credit opportunity

Jan 21&23: Course Introduction & Pre-Columbian Indigenous Peoples

Readings: None yet assigned
SA-1: in-class group assignment: *Print Artifacts from Early America*

Jan 28&30: Pre-Contact to First Contacts

Readings: Janet Catherine Berlo, Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art* (Oxford, 1998), Chapters 1 & 3
*Thomas Hariot (1560-1621): excerpt from [*A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*](#) (1588) [PDF]

Timothy Sweet, "Filling the Field: The Roanoke Images of John White and Theodor de Bry," in *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*, eds. Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 23-42 [PDF]

Hayden White, "The Forms of Wildness: Towards An Archaeology of An Idea," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (JHU Press, 1978) [PDF]

Q-1: Reading Quiz on Hayden White reading

A-1: Native Artifact Perspectives response essay

Feb 4/6: Before the Great Migration: Puritan New England

Readings: *Burns & Davis (*American Art to 1900*): pp. 8-15
*Anne Bradstreet (c1612-1672): "The Flesh and the Spirit" (c1670) [PDF]
*Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705), "The Day of Doom: or, A Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment" (1662) [PDF]
Wendy Katz, "Portraits and Production of the Civil Self in Seventeenth-Century Boston," in *Winterthur Portfolio* 32:2/3 (2004): 101-128 [folder]

A-2: New England Families and their Things

Nicholas C. Vincent, "American Furniture, 1620–1730: The Seventeenth-Century and William and Mary Styles," *Metropolitan Museum of Art* website [link]

XC-1: Create or Write Your Own Puritan Work of Art (2+)

Feb 11/13: New Netherlands and New France

Readings: *Adriaen van der Donck, *Description of the New Netherlands* (1655) -- excerpt [PDF]
The Virtual Museum of New France [LINK]
Frances Pohl, *Framing America: A Social History of American Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002, 41-54 [PDF]
Joseph Monteyne, "Absolute Faith, or France Bringing Representation to the Subjects of New France," in *Oxford Art Journal*, 20:1 (1997): pp. 12-22 [PDF]

Online Game: Art and Diplomatic Exchange

Feb 18/20: Colonial New England and the Mid-Atlantic

Readings: *Burns & Davis book: pp. 25-30, 38-55
Richard Bushman book: pp. xi-xx, 139-205
Leslie Green Bowman and Morrison H. Heckscher, "The American Rococo," and "Engravings," both in *American Rococo, 1750-1775: Elegance in Ornament* (Abrams, 1992) [PDF]
Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "A Chimneypiece," in *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of An American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 142-173, 445-449 [PDF]

Feb 25/27: The Colonial American Chesapeake and Tidewater regions

Readings: Bushman book: pp. 3-100
Carolyn Weekley, *Painters and Paintings in the Early American South* (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2013) – selection tbd
Ronald L. Hurst and Jules Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680-1830: The Colonial Williamsburg Collection* (Williamsburg Decorative Arts Series, 1997) – selection tbd

Private & Public Correspondence concerning taste – selections tbd

A-3: Oral Presentations at the [museum]

Mar 3/4: MIDTERM EXAM

Midterm Exam (In-Class, [museum], and Moodle)

Mar 11/13: SPRING BREAK

Mar 18/20: Creole Visual Cultures from the Mississippi Bayou to the West Indies

Readings: Lucie Pradel, "African Sacredness and Caribbean Cultural Forms," in *Caribbean Quarterly* 44:1/2 (March-June, 1998), pp. 145-152 [PDF]

Jay D. Edwards, "The Origins of Creole Architecture," in *Wintertbur Portfolio* 29:2/3 (1994): 155-89 [PDF]

Ina J. Fandrich, "Yorùbá Influences on Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo," in *Journal of Black Studies* 37:5 (May, 2007): 775-791 [PDF]

XC-1: C18 Creole Culinary History topic (1+)

XC-2: Response Essay ~ Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (novel, 1966) (2+)

Mar 25/27: Revolution and Republic

Readings: *Burns & Davis book: pp. 56-75, 102-106, 359-374

David Bindman, "Americans in London: Contemporary History Painting Revisited," in *English Accents: Interactions with British Art, 1776-1855*, eds. Christiana Payne and William Vaughan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 9-28 [PDF]

Amy Torbert, "Impressions of Tar and Feathers: The 'New American Suit' in Mezzotint, 1774-84," *Common-place.org* 16, no. 1 (Fall 2015). <http://common-place.org/book/impressions-of-tar-and-feathers-the-new-american-suit-in-mezzotint-1774-84/> [PDF]

David L. Barquist and Ethan W. Lasser (eds.), *Curule: Ancient Design in American Federal Furniture* (Yale, 2003) [PDF: selection tbd]

A-4: Art Theory, Education, and Morality

XC-3: Create Your Own Grand-Manner Portrait (2+)

Apr 1/3: American Romanticism I: The Gothic Imagination

Readings: *Burns & Davis book: pp. 107-133, 136-138, 388-392

*Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) [LINK]

*John Ruskin, "The Nature of the Gothic," from *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53) [PDF]

Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (UC Press, 2004) – [excerpt - PDF]

Apr 8/10: American Romanticism II: American Landscape Painting

Readings: *Burns & Davis book: pp. 138-140, 234-240, 255-307

*William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878): "Thanatopsis" (1821) [PDF]

Angela L. Miller, "The Fate of Wilderness in American Landscape Art: The Dilemmas of 'Nature's Nation,'" in *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American*

Art History, eds. Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 85-10. [PDF]

Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875* (Oxford UP, 2007). [PDF - selection tbd]

A-5: Group Assignment – The Strangest Show on Earth / Museum of Oddities

XC-4: A Ruskinian Sketching Trip – 2 drawings (2+)

Apr 15/17: Academies, Museums, and Circuses: 19th-C American Showmen and Spectacle

Readings: *Burns & Davis book: pp. 133-134, 145-174, 206-233, 439-454

Roger Stein, "Charles Willson Peale's Expressive Design: The Artist in His Museum," in *Reading American Art*, eds. Marianne Doezema and Elizabeth Milroy (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 38-79 [PDF]

Martin Berger, "The Anatomy of the Early Republic," in *Early Popular Visual Culture* 7:3 (2009): 231-252 [PDF]

Wendy Bellion, *Citizen Spectator: Art, Illusion, and Visual Perception in Early National America* (Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, 2011) – [PDF, folder]

Apr 22/24: Antebellum Genre Painting: Race, Gender, and Class Consciousness

Readings: *Burns & Davis book: 309-346

*Digital Collections on Victorian heirlooms, American Antiquarian Society [link]

Peter John Brownlee, "Francis Edmonds and the Speculative Economy of Painting," in *American Art* 21:3 (2007): 30-53 [PDF]

John Davis, "Eastman Johnson's Negro Life at the South and Urban Slavery in Washington, D.C.," in *The Art Bulletin* 80:1 (March, 1998): 67-92 [PDF]

William Truettner, "Introduction" and "Painting Republican Indians: 1800-1840," in *Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America, 1710-1840* (UC Press, 2010) [PDF]

Final Exam Oral Presentations at the [museum]

Apr 29/May 1: FINAL EXAM

A-5 DUE on Moodle

TAKE-HOME EXAMS (due 1 week later)