

The Arts in New York City
Fall 2016, MHC 100
Rm 407 HN
Wednesday, 2:55-5:25

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“The indefatigable pursuit of an unattainable perfection, even though it consists of nothing more than the pounding of an old piano, is what alone gives a meaning to our life on this unavailing star.”

Logan Pearsall Smith (1865-1946)

Class Website: <http://macaulay.cuny.edu/eportfolios/graff16>

Course Objectives

The primary goal of this course is to introduce students to a wide spectrum of arts offerings in New York City. Weekly classroom meetings are combined with group visits to museums, theaters and concert halls. Visual arts, literature, opera, musical theater, dance, and instrumental music (both solo and chamber music) are explored. The class is largely participatory. Students keep journals in which they document emotional responses and write critical analyses of various works of art and performances and read these short essays aloud in class. Discussion and debate are essential. There will also be a website for students to post journal writings and opinions on a blog between class meetings. The course is a collective journey in which we develop our ability to listen, to see, to feel and to create, largely through interaction with other members of the class. The class will culminate with a final group project: we will write and perform a short musical together. No prior musical training is required.

The progression of Western music history, from The Middle Ages to the present, forms the basis of the curriculum, and from there the course branches out to other art forms. By finding correlations between different genres, we maintain a clear historical perspective throughout the semester, which will ultimately shed light on the kinds of lives people from these periods led. The course also aims to develop the ability to assimilate, appreciate and *be moved by* the beauty and power inherent in great works of art. In doing so, the form and content of particular works will be examined very closely and thoroughly, with repeated listening and viewing.

Course Requirements

Attendance at all class meetings and outside events is required. More than one unexcused absence can affect the final grade. A willingness to participate in discussions, to read aloud from journals, and to contribute to group projects is mandatory. In addition to weekly writing and observations, there will be two formal papers, and the final group project. Readings will be assigned. Final grades will be determined by the effort and thoughtfulness put into weekly writing (2-3 pages per week, 20% of grade), attendance and class participation (20% of grade), formal paper #1 (5 pages, 15% of grade), formal paper #2 (10 pages, 25% of grade), and contribution to the final project (20% of grade).

Course Calendar (dates of outside events to be confirmed)

W, August 31, 2:55 PM:

Introduction

Topic: The Middle Ages

Listening: Gregorian chant, organum, estampie, mass

Poetry reading: "Sir Patrick Spens" (Anonymous, 13th century)

Viewing: medieval European paintings

Assignment: go to the Metropolitan museum, pick one painting from the 13th or 14th century, and write a poem in a medieval style describing what you see and feel. Post paintings and poems on our website. Also: pick a short passage from a Shakespeare play, around 20 words, memorize, and be prepared to recite in class next week...then retell in modern tongue.

W, September 7, 2:55 PM:

Read medieval style student poems and Shakespeare passages aloud

Topic: The Renaissance

Listening: motet, mass, madrigal

Viewing: Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael

Assignment: read pp. 19-53 of *Looking at Art* by Alice Elizabeth Chase (Chapter 3: *The Artist Looks at the View* and Chapter 4: *The Artist Looks at People and Space*). Write a 2-3 page summary for next week. Post on website.

Topic: The Baroque Period

Listening: concerto grosso, fugue, baroque opera

Poetry reading: "Sound and Sense" by Alexander Pope, 1711, "'Adam Posed'" by Anne Finch, 1713. Viewing: El Greco, Caravaggio, Rembrandt.

W, September 14, 2:55 PM:

Topic: The transition from Baroque to Classical

Listening: sonata, symphony, classical opera

Poetry reading: "The Sick Rose" by William Blake, 1794, "A Red, Red Rose" by Robert Burns, 1796

Viewing: Watteau, Fragonard, Boucher

Topic: The transition from Classical to Romantic

Listening: Beethoven: sonatas, symphonies, extension of forms

Poetry reading: "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways" by William Wordsworth, 1800, "On the Grasshopper and the Cricket" by John Keats, 1816

Viewing: Jacques Louis David, Francisco Goya, Theodore Gericault

Assignment: Read pp. 227-268 ("The Great Operas") from *The Letters of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, selected and edited by Hans Mersmann. Write a 2-3 page description of Mozart's character and ability to relate to others, as suggested by his letters. Post on website.

Assignment: read pp.69-74 ("A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful" by Edmund Burke, 1757) and pp. 150-156 ("An Essay on Poetry and Music as they affect the Mind" by James Beattie, 1776), both articles from *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries*, edited by Peter le Huray and James Day.

Start to write formal paper #1, 5 pages, on the progression of the arts from the Middle Ages through the end of the 18th century, and how the aesthetic perceptions of artists evolved during those years. Due on September 28. Please submit a hard copy - do not post.

W, September 21, 2:55 PM:

Topic: Romanticism

Listening: art song, program music, piano miniature

Poetry Reading: "To George Sand" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1844 and "The Wind begun to knead the Grass-" by Emily Dickinson

Viewing: Delacroix, Friedrich, Turner

Assignment: Go to the Metropolitan Museum, pick a 19th-century painting and write a 2-3 page short story based on you being pulled inside the painting, the world you discover there, and what happens to you. Post painting and story on website.

W, September 21, 7:00 PM:

Maestro at 59east59

W, September 28, 2:55 PM:

Formal paper #1 due today – turn in a hard copy (please do not submit electronically).

Students show romantic paintings on projector and read their short stories aloud in class

Topic: Impressionism (whole tone scales, nonfunctional chords) and symbolist poetry

Listening: Debussy: *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, and assorted piano pieces

Poetry Reading: “Afternoon of a Faun” by Stephane Mallarme, 1876

Viewing: Monet, Renoir, Degas, Cassatt

Assignment: Read pp. 198-208 (letters of Claude Debussy) from *Composers on Music*, edited by Josiah Fisk. Then create your own character - an impressionist painter or musician - and write a 2-3 page letter as though you were that artist living in Paris and writing to a friend in America.

W, October 5, 2:55 PM:

Read student “letters” aloud

Topic: Twentieth Century trends (dissonance, polytonality, changing meter, primitivism, expressionism, twelve-tone)

Listening: Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* and Schoenberg’s *A Survivor from Warsaw*

Poetry Reading: “Cassandra” by Louise Bogan, 1929, “Buffalo Bill’s” by E. E. Cummings, 1923, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost, 1923

Viewing: van Gogh, Munch, Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Kandinsky

Assignment: Go to the Museum of Modern Art, select two works painted 1910 or after, and write a 2-3 page comparison of each artist’s use of color, light and form. Post on the website.

W, October 5, 8 PM:

Fall for Dance at CityCenter (131 W. 55th Street – between 6th and 7th Avenues)

Friday, October 14, 8 PM:

The New York Pops at Carnegie Hall, Stern Auditorium, 57th Street and 7th Avenue

W, October 19, 2:55 PM:

Topic: Twentieth century trends

Listening: minimalism, chance music, electronic music, jazz

Poetry reading: “A Supermarket in California” by Allen Ginsberg, 1955, “Other” by Dorothy Livesay, 1955

Viewing: Chagall, Dali, Miro

Begin writing formal paper #2, 10 pages. Select three individual works of art representing three different art forms. Compare and contrast the way the artists use dissonance and consonance, tension and relaxation, conflict and resolution to generate movement and excitement in their work.

W, October 19, 7:30 PM:

***Don Giovanni* at The Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center**

W, October 26, 2:55 PM:

LINCOLN CENTER BACKSTAGE TOUR

We will meet at the David Rubinstein Atrium (on Broadway between 62nd and 63rd Streets) where our tour will begin sharply at 3:00 pm. Please do not be late or you will miss the tour!

W, November 2, 2:55 PM:

Topic: American contribution

Listening: Broadway, rock and roll, folk

Poetry reading: "The Leap" by James Dickey, 1967, "Marks" by Linda Pastan, 1978

"Parsley" by Rita Dove, 1983

Viewing: Pollock, Lichtenstein, Warhol

W, November 9, 2:55 PM:

Work on musical

W, November 16, 2:55 PM:

Formal paper #2 due – hard copies please. Do not post electronically.

Work on Musical

W, November 23, 2:55 PM:

Work on Musical

W, November 30, 2:55 PM:

Work on musical

W, November 30, 8 PM:

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, Stern Auditorium, 57th Street and 7th Avenue

W, December 7, 2:55 PM:

Last class – perform musical