



Understanding Art: Leonardo da Vinci and His Time

PROF. MARK ROSEN

Course Information

AHST 2331 Section: 003
Fall 2012
TTh 11:30–12:45

Professor and TA Contact Information

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Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

Prerequisites: None. This course welcomes non-Arts & Humanities students as well as those planning to major in a Humanities discipline.

Course Description

He lived briefly enough that many of the boldest ideas in his notebooks were not gathered together for publication in his lifetime, yet he lived long enough to see several of his most ambitious projects start to deteriorate soon after their completion. He was an artist known for harmony and grace who represented himself to a potential patron as a military engineer first, artist second. He disdained sculpture yet seemed poised to change its foundations when the French army entered Milan in 1494 and derailed his plans for a great equestrian monument. He revolutionized the art of portraiture, yet apart from several canonical works, it still remains unclear which surviving portraits were truly his and which came from his many close followers. Restoration of his few surviving painted works over the past decade has proven extremely controversial and sparked hostilities between scholars and restorers. Difficulties in dating the

drawings and writings in his many assorted notebooks yield never-ending debates about what he knew when, the progression of his thinking, and his level of engagement in the artistic and scientific climate of his time. Leonardo is not just the genius we all know him to be, but also an extremely slippery figure who succeeded and failed in an era of war, shifting allegiances, and changing taste. And he has continued to provide inspiration for any artist interested in science, any scientist interested in art.

Because UTD encourages exploration of the relationship between science and the humanities, Leonardo da Vinci makes an exemplary figure upon which to focus an interdisciplinary course. We will approach him from many different directions and discuss what meaning he might have carried to his era and our own. The crowded Florentine workshops of the 1460s and 1470s will provide the starting point for Leonardo's career, and we will follow him through his long stays at the Sforza court in Milan, his return to newly republican Florence, and his other travels ending at the French court of Francis I. Among the topics we will discuss are Leonardo's training in Verrocchio's studio; his engineering, military, and cartographic projects; the traditions of portraiture and the altarpiece which Leonardo inherited and his role in changing them; the distinction between artistic production in Florence as opposed to in Milan and the many other ducal courts of Italy; the causes and meaning of Leonardo's experimentation with media and technique; the change in the Italian political and artistic climate marked by the arrival of French troops in 1494; Leonardo's relationship with contemporaries such as Bramante, Michelangelo, Raphael, Machiavelli, the *condottiere* Cesare Borgia, the mathematician Luca Pacioli, and the many others whom he inspired or was inspired by; and close readings of Leonardo's writings and drawings regarding war, machines, the human body, perspective, and optics. We will also discuss the latest finds in Leonardo studies, a field in which there have been several important discoveries recently.

Student Learning Objectives

All semester long we will be investigating the intersection of society, culture, and intellectual thought during a distant historical period. The objectives for students are:

- To examine and analyze a variety of works from the humanities (literature, art, history)
- To develop skills of visual analysis and critical reading through discussion and writing two short essays
- To grasp the interdisciplinary ways that historical works of art and culture can be understood, with the goal that this skill will carry beyond this class to studying or evaluating artworks from other periods and cultures

Textbooks and Materials

Required books:

1. *Leonardo on Painting*, ed. Martin Kemp (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989)
2. Martin Kemp, *Leonardo*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)
3. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Penguin, 1991)
4. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Note that you are free to use other editions of Alberti and Machiavelli, since there are many editions of both available, some for very cheap (or as free eBooks; see, for example, <http://goo.gl/EVNff>). Note also that you can compare prices for these textbooks online through

www.addall.com, which searches a number of online retailers and compares prices for the books. Other required readings will be available online through the course’s eLearning page. Readings should be done **before** each class meeting. Some readings will be discussed during the lecture and it is expected that students will be prepared to participate in the discussion and be familiar with the works.

After each, the image presentations shown in class will be posted on our eLearning site. These images are shown in class through a Mac program called Keynote, but they will be available as simple PDFs that you can download and read through Adobe Reader on your computer or tablet.

Papers and Assignments

Three exams will be equally weighted; there will be an exam in the final meeting, but it is not a cumulative final exam. There will be two papers for this course, one written in class on 9/13 and the other a four-page paper due 11/29. You will also turn in either a short paper, an artwork, a Powerpoint presentation, or a weblink for our Monuments Project (due 10/4, discussed in class on 10/9). There will also be regular eLearning discussion topics that you are required to participate in (these will occur before the classes on 9/4, 10/23, 10/30, 11/27, and 12/6). The eLearning discussions ask that you write an approximately 150-word question, response, or reflection to the topic of the reading for the next class. You may choose to write about a specific passage, to address some aspect of the reading or the artwork that you have trouble understanding, or to answer another student’s question from earlier in the thread. These are meant to be informal, but they are also in a sense “public”—your fellow students will also be the audience for them, so take care that everyone can follow what you are saying.

For information regarding plagiarism and other issues of academic integrity, see the university’s website: <http://coursebook.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>. Let me confirm that plagiarism is a very serious offense and will not be tolerated. It will result in your being forced to rewrite a paper or accept a failing grade for the assignment. Your own intellectual honesty is of the greatest importance in this class.

Assignments & Academic Calendar		
Class	Topic	Reading
28 Aug.	Introduction	
30 Aug.	Renaissance Florence	<i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , 9–20 Kemp, 1–10
4 Sept.	How Artists Learned	Kemp, 10–46; participate in eLearning discussion
6 Sept.	The Uses of Religious Art	Kemp, 47–89
11 Sept.	Perspective and Early Renaissance Science	Alberti, <i>On Painting</i> , 33–59 (preface and Book 1)

13 Sept.	In-class writing assignment	<i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , 47–88 Alberti, <i>On Painting</i> , 60–96 (Book 2 and 3)
18 Sept.	Portraiture	<i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , 20–46
20 Sept.	Renaissance Milan	Kemp, 91–130; and (on eLearning) Giorgio Vasari, “Life of Leonardo”
25 Sept.	How Monuments Worked; exam review	Kemp, 131–164
27 Sept.	Exam 1	No reading for today
2 Oct.	Leonardo’s Drawing Technique	<i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , 88–115
4 Oct.	□□□□□□□□□□	Kemp, 165–189. Submit eLearning project by the end of today.
9 Oct.	Discussion of Monuments Projects	Review others’ projects on eLearning. Also, watch hour-long video, <i>Mystery of a Masterpiece</i> , from PBS’s <i>Nova</i> program (http://goo.gl/Zim3G)
11 Oct.	The Court at Mantua	Kemp, 189–217
16 Oct.	The Young Michelangelo	Reading (on eLearning): David Wilkins, “Michelangelo to 1505,” in <i>History of Italian Renaissance Art</i> , 7 th ed. (2011), 469–480.
18 Oct.	Representing War	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> , 5–41 (preface through ch. 11)
23 Oct.	Machiavelli and the Art of Politics and War	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> , 41–88 (ch. 12 through end); participate in eLearning discussion
25 Oct.	Maps	<i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , 119–158
30 Oct.	□□□□ □□□□□□	Kemp, 219–250; participate in eLearning discussion
1 Nov.	The Renaissance Church and the City of Rome	Reading on eLearning: Loren Partridge, “Patronage and Popes: Saints or Sinners?” (from <i>The Art of Renaissance Rome</i> , 1996); watch video link on eLearning
6 Nov.	The Sistine Chapel	Reading on eLearning: Giorgio Vasari, <i>Prefaces to the Lives of the Artists</i>
8 Nov.	Exam 2	No reading for today
13 Nov.	The Northern Renaissance Guest Lecture by Marina Botros	Reading on eLearning: Jeffrey Chipps Smith, “Tangible Success: Early Portraits and Domestic Art,” in <i>The Northern Renaissance</i> (London, 2004)

15 Nov.	Leonardo's Notebooks	<i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , 159–189
19–24 Nov.	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
27 Nov.	Renaissance Mathematics and Anatomy	<i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , 193–214; participate in eLearning discussion
29 Nov.	Understanding Renaissance Prints	Watch hour-long video, <i>Da Vinci: The Lost Treasure</i> , from the BBC (http://goo.gl/cbJji).
4 Dec.	The Leonardo Industry: Copies and Fakes	<i>Leonardo on Painting</i> , 214–248; Paper Due in class
6 Dec.	Leonardo and France; exam review	Participate in eLearning discussion: Ask any questions on eLearning that you'd like answered in the exam review.
11 Dec.	Exam 3 (instead of final exam, this will be weighted equally to the midterms)	

Grading Policy

Short papers (one in-class on 9/13, one turned in 11/29): 25% (12.5% each)

Exams: 45% (15% each)

eLearning Monuments project (due 10/4): 10%

Attendance, Participation, and eLearning Discussion: 20%

Course & Instructor Policies

- Office hours are meant for the benefit of you students, so use them! They can be used to discuss class materials, assignments, and questions arising from the readings, or other issues you'd like to ask about. If you can't come to the scheduled hours, you can make an appointment with the Professor or the TA at some other time.
- We can be reached by email and will make efforts to respond in a timely manner, but we're not on call at all hours; use email sparingly, please. Use our emails on the front of this syllabus rather than sending it through the eLearning link; eLearning can be unreliable at times.
- Please send emails to us from your UTD accounts. Even if we receive email from some other account of yours, we reply to the official university account, so check that one regularly.
- All major assignments must be completed to successfully pass the class (you can't skip the first paper and still expect to get a B+).
- No written assignments will be accepted via email.
- Late assignments will be marked down substantially.
- Please turn off your phone and refrain from texting in class. It's a drag for everyone.
- Class begins at 11:30. If you must come in late, try to be as quiet as possible.
- You may have no more than three unexcused absences—beyond that, you will get a zero for your participation grade.

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