



# THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF ART

## AHST 6333

SPRING 2026

PROF. MARK ROSEN

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### Course Information

AHST 6333    Section: 001  
Spring 2026  
T 10–12:45

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### Professor Contact Information

Office: ATC 2.702  
Email: mark.rosen@utdallas.edu  
Office phone: 972-883-2931  
Office hours: Wed. 12–1 pm or by appointment

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

Graduate standing.

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### Course Description

Where once the study of art history depended largely on aesthetics and connoisseurship, the field now encompasses many different strains, some focused on the cultural, political, economic, and religious factors informing and in some cases defining art. This course will be a deep dive into art from a social-historical perspective, looking at issues of class, gender, labor, economics, mobility, patronage, globality, and race. The course will not be focused solely on one period, but will look at artworks from the Middle Ages to the present, covering major pioneers in the field like Linda Nochlin, John Barrell, and T. J. Clark to current practitioners like Anne Gerritsen and Ariella Azoulay. Our goal throughout the semester is to recognize the social factors and conditions that underlie the production and circulation of art.

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## Student Learning Objectives

- Students will analyze the formal and physical characteristics of works of art across historical periods and develop their skills of visual analysis and critical reading.
- Students will be able to identify and articulate the points of contact between art-historical objects and other fields of research and inquiry, both within the humanities and beyond them.
- Students will identify and evaluate worthwhile research and historiographical material and use that material effectively within their own thesis-driven essays.

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## Textbooks and Materials

### Required books:

- Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford University Press (Oxford University Press, 1972)
- Anne Gerritsen, *The City of Blue and White: Chinese Porcelain and the Early Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Other **required** readings will be available online through electronic course reserves. Readings should be done **before** each class meeting. It is expected that students will be prepared to participate in the discussion.

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## Papers and Assignments

All of your grade depends upon writing and participation. You will turn in writing every week we meet—a 400-word response to one (or all) of the week’s readings is due each week we have reading, plus you will write a 1000-word précis of Anne Gerritsen’s book for March 3. At the end of the term you will submit a **12–15 page historiographical paper** in which you review the literature in the field of social history (or some subset that interests you) and draw out some of the major themes and directions in past and current scholarship. If you wish, you can propose instead to write a research paper on a topic of your choice, provided that you get permission to do so. You will also do an **in-class presentation** of a work of art that you find especially useful to think about from a social-historical perspective; this may be from one of our local collections.

For information regarding plagiarism and other issues of academic integrity, see the university’s website: <http://www.utdallas.edu/conduct/integrity/>. 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.

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Assignments & Academic Calendar		
Class	Topic	Reading

20 Jan.	<b>Introduction</b>	
27 Jan.	<b>What is Social History?</b>	<p>David Carrier, “Art History,” and Craig Clunas, “Social History of Art,” both in <i>Critical Terms for Art History</i>, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago, 1996), online.</p> <p>T.J. Clark, “On the Social History of Art,” ch. 1 of <i>Image of the People</i> (University of California Press, 1973), 9–20.</p> <p>Nicos Hadjinicolaou, “Art History and Class Struggle” (1973), in <i>20<sup>th</sup> Century Theories of Art</i>, ed. James M. Thompson (McGill-Queen’s Press, 1980), 239–255.</p> <p>Robert Slifkin and Anthony E. Grudin, “The Present Prospects of Social Art History,” and Elizabeth Mansfield, “Social Art History in Retrospect,” in <i>The Present Prospects of Social Art History</i> (Bloomsbury, 2021), 1–10, 33–50.</p>
3 Feb.	<b>Case Study 1: Florence</b>	<p>Baxandall, <i>Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy</i></p> <p>Allea Langdale, “Aspects of the Critical Reception and Intellectual History of Baxandall’s Concept of the Period Eye,” <i>Art History</i> 21 (1998): 479–497.</p> <p>Niall Atkinson, “The Acoustic Art of City-Building,” in <i>The Noisy Renaissance</i> (University Park, 2016), 17–68</p>
10 Feb.	<b>Anthropological Approaches</b>	<p>Alfred Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology,” in J. Cotte and A. Shelton, eds., <i>Anthropology, Art and Aesthetic</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 40–63.</p> <p>David Freedberg, intro and ch. 1 of <i>The Power of Images</i> (Chicago, 1989), xix–xxv and 1–26.</p> <p>Hannah Baader and Ittai Weinryb, “Image at Work: On Efficacy and Historical Interpretation,” <i>Representations</i> 133 (2016): 1–19.</p> <p>Ariella Azoulay, “Introduction,” in <i>The Civil Contract of Photography</i> (Zone Books, 2008), 9–30.</p>
17 Feb.	<b>Material Culture: Europe</b>	<p>Ulinka Rublack, “Matter in the Material Renaissance,” <i>Past and Present</i> 219 (2013): 41–85.</p> <p>Jemma Field, “Female Dress,” in <i>Early Modern Court Culture</i>, ed. Erin Griffey (Routledge, 2022), 390–405.</p> <p>Timothy McCall, ch. 5 of <i>Making the Renaissance Man: Masculinity in the Courts of Renaissance Italy</i>, 174–213.</p>

24 Feb.	<b>Material Culture and the Global Turn</b>	<p>Pamela H. Smith, “Itineraries of Materials and Knowledge in the Early Modern World,” in <i>The Global Lives of Things</i>, eds. Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (Routledge, 2015), 31–61.</p> <p>Daniela Bleichmar, “Painting the Aztec Past in Early Colonial Mexico: Translation and Knowledge Production in the <i>Codex Mendoza</i>,” <i>Renaissance Quarterly</i> 72 (2019): 1362–1415.</p> <p>Jennifer Nelson, “A Ming Chinese and Spanish Imperial Collaboration in Southeast Asia: The Boxer Codex,” <i>The Art Bulletin</i> 104 (2022): 20–45.</p>
3 Mar.	<b>Case Study 2: Porcelain/ Discussion of paper topics and presentations</b>	Anne Gerritsen, <i>The City of Blue and White</i>
10 Mar.	<b>TBA: Museum Visit</b>	
17 Mar.	<b>Spring break</b>	
24 Mar.	<b>Case Study 3: Nineteenth-Century France</b>	<p>Meyer Schapiro, “Courbet and Popular Imagery: An Essay on Realism and Naïveté,” <i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i> 4 (1942): 164–191.</p> <p>T. J. Clark, “A Bar at the Folies-Bergère,” ch. 4 of <i>The Painting of Modern Life</i> (Princeton, 1984), 205–258.</p> <p>Alex Potts, “Social Theory and the Realist Impulse in Nineteenth-Century Art,” <i>Nonsite</i> 27 (2019): <a href="https://nonsite.org/social-theory-and-the-realist-impulse-in-nineteenth-century-art/">https://nonsite.org/social-theory-and-the-realist-impulse-in-nineteenth-century-art/</a>.</p>
31 Mar.	<b>Everyday Folk</b>	<p>Mark Rosen, “The Republic at Work: S. Marco’s Reliefs of the Trades,” <i>The Art Bulletin</i> 90 (2008): 54–75.</p> <p>John Barrell, introduction of <i>The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730–1840</i> (Cambridge, 1980), 1–34.</p> <p>Linda Nochlin, “The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law,” <i>Art in America</i> 61 (1973), no. 5, 54–61, and no. 6, 97–103.</p>

7 Apr.	<b>Gender and Representation</b>	<p>Lucy R. Lippard, “The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: Women’s Body Art,” <i>Art in America</i> 64, no. 3 (1976): 73–81.</p> <p>Mary Kelly, “Re-viewing Modernist Criticism,” <i>Screen</i> 22, no. 3 (1981): 41–52.</p> <p>Norma Broude, “Degas’s ‘Misogny,’ in <i>Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany</i> (Harper and Row, 1982), 247–270.</p> <p>Alessandra Comini, “Gender or Genius? The Women Artists of German Expressionism,” in <i>Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany</i> (Harper and Row, 1982), 271–292.</p>
14 Apr.	<b>Globalization and New Approaches in Social Art History</b>	<p>Okwui Enwezor, “The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition,” <i>Research in African Literatures</i> 34, no. 4 (2003): 57–82.</p> <p>Kobena Mercer, “New Practices, New Identities: Hybridity and Globalization,” in <i>The Images of the Black in Western Art</i>, vol. 5, <i>The Twentieth Century</i> (Harvard University Press, 2010), 225–300.</p> <p>Josefine Wikström, “The Social Form of Contemporary Art’s Autonomy,” <i>Third Text</i> (2024): 677–691.</p>
21 Apr.	<b>Presentations 1</b>	
28 Apr.	<b>Presentations 2</b>	
5 May	<b>Papers due</b>	

## Course Requirements

1. **Regular Short Reading Responses**—Everyone will write a 400-word responses to the weekly readings (only weeks when we have reading, that is).
2. **Essay on Anne Gerritsen, *The City of Blue and White*** (due Mar. 3)—1000 words
3. **Leading class in discussion** of readings (your slot will be determined in the third class meeting). You’ll circulate via email an outline of questions or topics you’d like to discuss **the day prior** to our meeting. You should make use of the instructor’s office hours to help you outline this.
4. **In-class presentation on a work of art** (April 21 or 28).
5. **Final Historiographical Essay**—12 pages long (due May 5).

## Grading Policy

The final grade will be broken down approximately like this:

Final essay: 30%

Gerritsen essay: 10%  
Regular short reading responses: 30%  
Leading Class Discussion: 10%  
In-Class Presentation: 10%  
Participation: 10%

Note: the final grades will use minuses and plusses, if necessary—that is, it is possible to get an A- or B+ (etc.) for the course.

### **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 me at some other time.
- I can be reached by email and will make efforts to respond in a timely manner, but I'm not on call at all hours; use email sparingly, please.
- Please send emails from your UTD accounts. Even if I receive email from some other account of yours, I 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+).
- Late assignments will be marked down substantially.
- Please refrain from texting in class. It's a drag for everyone.
- Class begins at 10. If you must come in late, try to be as quiet as possible.
- The campus carry policy of UTD is defined in detail on the university website:  
<https://www.utdallas.edu/campuscarry/>.

***These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.***