SCHOOL OF DIVINITY, HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

ACADEMIC SESSION 2016-2017

HA2509
MAKING MASTERPIECES: SIX WORKS IN CONTEXT

15 credit, 6 week course

PLEASE NOTE CAREFULLY:
The full set of school regulations and procedures is contained in the Undergraduate Student Handbook which is available online at your MyAberdeen page. Students are expected to familiarise themselves not only with the contents of this leaflet but also with the contents of the Handbook. Therefore, ignorance of the contents of the Handbook will not excuse the breach of any school regulation or procedure.
You must familiarise yourself with this important information at the earliest opportunity.

COURSE CO-ORDINATOR/COURSE TEAM
Course co-ordinator:
John Gash
50-52 College Bounds
Room CB406
01224 272619
j.gash@abdn.ac.uk

Course team:
Dr. Helen Pierce, Prof. John Morrison, Prof. Jane Geddes, Dr. Mary Pryor.
Discipline Administrator:
Mrs Kathleen Brebner
50-52 College Bounds
Room CB001
01224 273733
history-art@abdn.ac.uk
TIMETABLE
Lectures are held in Taylor C11 on Mondays, and Regent Lecture Theatre on Tuesdays, between 2.00pm and 3.00pm. Seminars are held in College Bounds CB203 on Fridays from 10.00am to 11.00am, 11.00am to midday, and midday to 1.00pm. Please sign up for a slot at https://www.abdn.ac.uk/mycourses/ after the first lecture at a time when you will be regularly available.

There is also a compulsory fieldtrip to Edinburgh on Saturday 25 February 2017. A small charge will be made at the beginning of the course to cover the bus hire. You are obliged to pay this even if you elect to travel independently.

Students can view the University Calendar at http://www.abdn.ac.uk/students/13027.php

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The term ‘masterpiece’ is common to most European languages (e.g. ‘chef d’oeuvre’ in French; ‘capolavoro’ in Italian) and implies a work of exceptional quality produced by a major artist at the height of his or her powers. It can apply to literature as well as the visual arts but is here restricted to the latter. However, it is one of the aims of the course to evaluate just how exceptional the paintings and sculptures under consideration were, or whether in some cases their designation as such had more to do with fashion or skewed perception than genuine quality. And, anyway, of what does masterly quality consist: technical brilliance, ground-breaking conception or reformulation, human or philosophical insight, poetic subtlety or dramatic flair (inter alia)? The idea of a masterpiece is often posited on a highly imaginative conception, but one cannot overlook the centrality in many cases of brilliant technical finish, as when Frans Hals (according to Arnold Houbraken) allegedly said ‘now to give it the master’s touch’, when adding the finishing brushstrokes after first laying in
a portrait with thick and wet broad areas of paint. The relation of the ‘masterpiece’ to the concept of ‘genius’ will also be considered, and in this respect students may find Honoré de Balzac’s classic short story of 1831, *Le chef d’oeuvre inconnu* [*The Unknown Masterpiece*] stimulating. Dealing as it does with an imaginary situation involving two famous painters, Nicolas Poussin and Frans Pourbus, and a purely fictional one, Frenhofer, it sardonically evokes Frenhofer’s failed attempts to produce the ultimate expression of his genius in a portrait of a beautiful woman, the reworkings of which over ten years meant that one could only finally discern a single foot and masses of overlapping lines, shapes and colours, verging on abstraction. The story inspired both Cézanne and Picasso.

The course focuses on six so-called masterpieces, but will include many other works of art by way of comparison and contrast. Each week consists of two lectures which will discuss the chosen masterpiece of that week in a wide range of contexts, including the interpretations offered by various scholars, the previous artistic traditions out of which the masterpiece emerges, contemporary historical, cultural or ideological factors (including religion) that informed its rationale, and its impact on subsequent art and culture, both in the short term and the *longue durée*.

All the works considered have achieved fame or notoriety and have had a major impact on the history of art. In addition, in the Friday seminars, the course introduces further contemporary, or otherwise related, masterpieces and non-masterpieces. Students will be expected to prepare for these seminars by selecting one or two works to study from those designated for that seminar on *My Aberdeen*. They may be called upon to present information and insights relating to their chosen work(s) as part of a wider discussion led by the tutor.
Students will also write one essay of between 1500 and 200 words from the list provided, and sit a two-hour visual test in May (see under ASSESSMENT below).

INTENDED AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

COURSE AIMS

1. This course aims to analyse a sequence of masterpieces, focusing in particular on the question of their place within the wider tradition of art to which they belong.

2. The influence of earlier art on these masterpieces and of contemporary contextual factors will be discussed, as will their impact on later works.

3. The problematic concept and cultural status of the ‘masterpiece’ will be explored through the sustained attention to these pre-selected works.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through studying this course you will:

1. Develop skills of inquiry, analysis and communication through the study of selected artistic masterpieces.

2. Study a series of key works in the history of Western art and understand the formative impact of the historical and artistic contexts in which they were created.

3. Examine their critical reception and impact on subsequent artists and their works.

4. Question the idea of a ‘masterpiece’ (and the related concept of the ‘genius’) from a critically-informed point of view.

5. Develop skills of synthesis and analytic comparison through the writing of an assignment on a ‘masterpiece’.
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<td>Giorgione or Titian: <em>The Concert Champêtre</em>, c.1506-11 (Musée du Louvre, Paris)</td>
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Paul Cézanne: *Still Life with Apples and Oranges*, c.1899 (Musée d’Orsay, Paris)
READING WEEK BY WEEK

Week 1. Giorgione or Titian: The Concert Champêtre

Lecture and seminar reading combined

S. J. Freedberg, Painting in Italy, 1500-1600 (1971, 1975)
Linda Murray, The High Renaissance and Mannerism (1977)
T. Pignatti, Giorgione (1969)
In the Age of Giorgione, exhibition catalogue, by Simone Facchinetti and Arturo Galansino, Royal Academy, London (2016)
Giovanni Morelli: Italian Painters in German Galleries (1883/1890)
The Age of Titian, exhibition catalogue by Peter Humfrey et al., National Galleries of Scotland (2004)
Charles Hope, Titian (1980).
Peter Humfrey, Titian (2007).


Michael Fried, *Manet’s Sources* (1969)


**Week 2. Thomas Gainsborough: The Blue Boy**

**Lectures**

Robyn Asleston and Shelley M. Bennett (eds.), *British Paintings at the Huntington* (2001) – see the detailed catalogue entry on this week’s lecture masterpiece.


**Seminars**


**Week 3. Velázquez: Las Meninas [The Maids of Honour]**

**Lectures**


**Seminars**

**For Bernini**


For **Rubens:**


For **Vermeer and Hobbema:**


For **Vermeer** see J.M. Nash; Arthur J. Wheelock; Albert Blankert; Lawrence Gowing; and Philip Steadman.

There are no modern books on **Hobbema** specifically, but, for *The Avenue at Middelharnis*, see, in addition to Seymour Slive’s volume on Dutch painting: *The Dutch School, 1600-1900*, by Neil MacLaren, revised and expanded by Christopher Brown (1991).

**Week 4. David Wilkie: The Blind Fiddler**

**Lectures and seminars together**


A. Cunningham - The Life of Sir David Wilkie, 4 vols, London 1843.


W.D. McKay – *The Scottish School of Painting*, London 1906


**Week 5. Francisco de Goya: The Third of May 1808**

**Lectures**
Goya monographs are located at 759.46 Goy in the Sir Duncan Rice Library. Many are relevant.

Enriqueta Harris, *Goya* (1972).


**Seminars**

Walter Friedlaender, *David to Delacroix* (1980).

**Week 6. Paul Cézanne: Still Life with Apples and Oranges**

**Lectures and seminars together**

**Weblinks:**

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Helbrunn Timeline of Art History:

- [Nicolas Poussin](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/184459) (1594-1665)
- [Impressionism: Art & Modernity](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/50313), Claude Monet (1840-1926),
- [Paul Cézanne](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/183944) (1839-1906)
- [Cubism](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/1842) (1907-1914)
Musée d’Orsay, Paris

Paul Cézanne, *Apples and Oranges* (c.1899)

The National Gallery, London

*Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin* (1699-1779)

**Books**


Belinda Thomson, Post-Impressionism (1998)

Richard Verdi, *Cézanne* (c.1992)

Richard Verdi., *Cézanne and Poussin: the classical vision of landscape*, (c.1990)

**ASSESSMENT**

A two-hour visual test will be held in May 2017. This examination is worth 50% of the overall mark for the class and will be based closely on the masterpieces discussed in the course lectures and tutorials.
A 1500 word written essay to be submitted in Week 5 (by 12 noon on Thursday, 16th February) and is worth 40% of the overall mark for the class. Students should choose ONE work from the list below and write an essay explaining why it can be considered a ‘masterpiece’. Marks will be awarded for essays in which the work is properly set into its wider ‘context’: social and historical as well as artistic. The essay should focus on: the impact of earlier works on the chosen masterpiece; on the specific historical conditions under which it was made; and on its subsequent influence on later works. Essays should make reference to the idea of an artistic ‘masterpiece’, and should show why the chosen example can arguably be considered to be a work in that category. Essays should be thoroughly researched and documented with reference to the scholarly literature and include footnotes and a bibliography.

List of Masterpieces for the Student Essay

Jan van Eyck, The Arnolfini Marriage, National Gallery, London
Michelangelo, David, Accademia, Florence
Leonardo da Vinci, Mona Lisa, Musée du Louvre, Paris
Titian, The Three Ages of Man, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh
Pieter Bruegel the Elder, The Peasant Wedding Feast, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
Hals, The Laughing Cavalier, Wallace Collection, London
Anthony Van Dyck, Charles I with M. de Saint Antoine, Royal Collection
Vermeer, The Art of Painting, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
Chardin, The Silver Goblet, 1769, Musée du Louvre, Paris
Allan Ramsay, Portrait of his Wife, Margaret Lindsay, 1758-60, National Gallery of Scotland
Francisco Goya, The Clothed Maja and The Nude Maja, Museo del Prado, Madrid [Discuss both pictures]
Millet, The Gleaners, Musée d’Orsay, Paris
Millais, The Blind Girl, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
Manet, *Olympia*, Musée d’Orsay, Paris

Seurat, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grand Jatte*, Art Institute of Chicago

John Singer Sargent, *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw*, National Gallery of Scotland


Picasso, *Still Life with Chair-Caning*, 1912, Musée Picasso, Paris

Picasso, *Guernica*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

Hopper, *Nighthawks*, Art Institute of Chicago

Pollock, *Lucifer*, Stanford University Museum and Art Gallery, Stanford

Warhol, *Marilyn Diptych*, Tate Modern, London

A further 10% of the course mark will be based on attendance and student participation in the six seminars and Edinburgh field trip.

**NB:** In order to pass a course on the first attempt, a student must attain a **CAS mark of at least 6 (six) on each element of course assessment**. Failure to do so will result in a grade of no greater than CAS 8 (eight) for the course as a whole. If you successfully complete the course, your coursework grades count towards your overall CAS mark, but you must pass the exam **CAS 9 (nine) to pass the course.** **NB:** This differs from the School Undergraduate Handbook.

Students who are retaking the entire course (not just the exam and resits) must submit new essays for their course work. It is **not** permitted to resubmit previous essays.

Click to view the discipline specific Common Assessment Scale (CAS) descriptors.

**ESSAYS**

Your essay should be **1500 words long** including quotations and footnotes, and should be word-processed; students should note that they will be
penalised for work which is either too long or too short. The acceptable margin below or above the word count for essays is 10%.

**ASSESSMENT DEADLINES**
(List deadlines here)

**SUBMISSION ARRANGEMENTS**
Submit one paper copy to the drop boxes in CB008 in 50-52 College Bounds and one electronic copy to Turnitin via MyAberdeen. Both copies to be submitted by 3.00pm on the due date.

**Please note:** Failure to submit coursework to TurnitinUK will result in a mark of zero for the coursework.

**EXAMINATION**
Information on how the examination paper will be structured, if necessary, such as how many questions, etc. General exam guidance will be given in the Student Handbook.

*Past exam papers can be viewed at [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/learning-and-teaching/for-students/exam-papers/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/learning-and-teaching/for-students/exam-papers/).*