

VISUAL ARTS - HISTORY (VAHI)

VAHI 100 – Introduction To Visual Arts Course count: 1

Fundamental, introductory course in art history and visual culture. Emphasis is on the acquisition of basic visual skills and an understanding of the major periods in the history of art. Exposure to works of art through the collections of The Worcester Art Museum is an integral part of the course.

GPA units: 1
Common Area: Arts
Typically Offered: Fall, Spring

VAHI 111 – History of Global Arch I Course count: 1

This class is an introduction to the history of the built environment from pre-history to the modern era (1700). We will examine architecture in its historic context around the globe, focusing on the ways that built forms reflect and shape social, religious, and political dynamics. The course will follow a hybrid chronological-thematic framework, using key issues to unite building issues from different cultures and regions at roughly proximate times. Through class discussions, exams, and writing, students will build foundational knowledge about key monuments and analytical approaches in architectural history.

GPA units: 1
Common Area: Arts
Typically Offered: Fall

VAHI 112 – History of Global Arch II Course count: 1

This course is the second half of a year-long introduction to the fundamental elements of architecture within a global and historical framework. Lectures and discussions are organized around different monuments from the Ming Dynasty and early modern Europe to the present, and they attempt to balance regional and chronological approaches to the study of architecture and the built environment.

GPA units: 1
Common Area: Arts
Typically Offered: Spring

VAHI 136 – Narrative In Art & Film Course count: 1

An introduction to the visual traditions of film making from its origins to today. Study of a wide range of types including documentaries, comedies, drama, and even science fiction gives student ample choices for their own topics.

GPA units: 1
Common Area: Arts
Typically Offered: Spring

VAHI 137 – Destruction and Renewal Course count: 1

Years after the collapse of the World Trade Center, we are profoundly aware of the powerful forces of destruction in our society. Yet these are also countered by stories of survival, preservation, and renewal. This course investigates how cities and landscapes absorb and accommodate radical change over time, with Rome as a fundamental point of reference. The Eternal City has earned its name by being continuously inhabited throughout its millennial history, even as its archeological sites continue to be destroyed, transformed, and reused. In the second half of the course, we will expand our investigation outward to consider how other people around the globe from the United States to Afghanistan continue to grapple with these complex problems in the present.

GPA units: 1

VAHI 199-F01 – Art, Travel, & Medieval Globe Course count: 1

This class treats the thousand-year period from 500-1500 around the globe, beginning in the Far East and ending in the lands of the first peoples in the Americas. We examine the structures and objects associated with Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholicism, as well as other, lesser-known belief systems. We follow the paths and engage with the narratives of medieval travelers like Xuanzang, Ibn Battuta, and Marco Polo. As we begin in Japan and move westward, this course echoes some of the traditional nationalistic narratives of western Europe, in which early eastern promise was thought to have been inherited and developed in western civilizations. But in our course, the traditional narrative conclusion of this directional movement is upended, because instead of western Europe functioning as the fulfillment of early promise, our narrative ends with the achievements of the empires of South and Mesoamerica. The dramatic fall of the Aztecs and Incas provides a strong ending for the course. After these conquests, the world was never the same.

GPA units: 1
Common Area: Arts, Cross-Cultural Studies

VAHI 201 – Introduction to Islamic Art Course count: 1

An introductory course exploring the art and architecture dating from the inception of Islam in seventh-century Arabia through the 16th and 17th centuries in Safavid Iran, Mughal India, and the territories ruled by the Ottoman Turks. The religious, and social, cultural, and political significance of Islamic art is analyzed.

GPA units: 1
Common Area: Arts, Cross-Cultural Studies
Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 202 – Art of Africa and the Americas Course count: 1

An introductory course exploring the art of Africa and the Americas. Art is considered within its cultural context (e.g., Benin, Yoruba, Maya, Aztec, Hopi) and within the larger contexts of imperialism, western and non-western ideologies, and practices of collection and exhibition. Deeper questions about the nature and function of art across cultures provide the focus for discussion.

GPA units: 1
Common Area: Arts, Cross-Cultural Studies
Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 203 – Arts of Asia Course count: 1

This course aims to familiarize students with works of art and architecture from South and Southeast Asia (including India and Pakistan) and East Asia (including China and Japan), from prehistory to the contemporary world. We will examine many types of objects, from jades and ritual bronzes, to ink paintings and textiles, to gilded sculptures within temples and palaces. We will also use the historical reality and metaphor of the silk roads – the textile and its portability – to draw threads across cultures connecting works of art, their makers, and (sometimes far distant) users. Finally, we will concentrate not only on the objects but also on the cultural and religious surroundings which enable us to understand their various meanings, realizing that meaning may be created through production and use. No background in art history required.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts, Cross-Cultural Studies

Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 204 – Arts of Religion Course count: 1

Deals with art from the 4th century and the era of Constantine to the age of the great cathedrals in the 13th century. Architecture, manuscript illumination, stained glass, and sculpture are included. Receives both Arts and Religion Distribution requirements.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts, Studies in Religion

Typically Offered: Annually

VAHI 205 – Global Commerce in 15th Century Italy Course count: 1

Early modern Italy was a commercial hub for the western world, with trade networks radiating across the Mediterranean into Europe, Africa, and Asia. We will consider how conditions in this flourishing economic crossroads favored the development of the unprecedented artistic culture of the early Renaissance. (Formerly Early Renaissance Art.)

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 206 – Art & Antiquity in 16C Italy Course count: 1

From "the rediscovery of classical antiquity" in Rome and the outpouring of artistic energy known as the High Renaissance, we will move outward to investigate the role of art and architecture in shaping the political and cultural realignments that defined this critical turning point in European history.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 207 – Art, Science and Power 17C Course count: 1

This course explores the explosive artistic creativity of 17th-century Europe as a process shaped by complex political and economic dynamics as well as by scientific discoveries. We will consider how the emergence of Baroque art was tied to the incipient scientific revolution, as well as the constant need to reinforce rulership, status, and authority.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 209 – Art in the Modern World, 1780 to 1940 Course count: 1

Traces major European art movements from the late 18th to the mid 20th centuries (including Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, and others) with a focus on the development of Modernism.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Annually

VAHI 210 – Art Since 1940 Course count: 1

Movements discussed include Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Minimalism, Conceptual Art, performance and installation art, time-based and digital art, activist art, public art, and current art.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

VAHI 214 – 17C Dutch Art & Society Course count: 1

The course studies the art the northern Netherlands at a time when maritime trade with North America and the Middle and Far East made it a global cultural center. Painting and printmaking receive particular focus.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 220 – The Arts in America Course count: 1

A study of painting, sculpture, architecture, and the decorative arts from the colonial period to the present. Emphasis on such major themes and styles as portraiture, genre painting, American impressionism, and modernism, including Native American and African American traditions and Asian influences. Art works will be studied in their cultural, social and political contexts. Course requirements include museum visits.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 230 – American Architecture Course count: 1

What is "American" about American architecture? What unique patterns can we discern by studying the built environment? This course will trace the evolution of American architecture from the country's earliest days to recent years. We will explore how national identity, local context, and diverse landscapes have contributed to a distinct American architectural narrative. The course will engage primary source texts and local site visits to illustrate the nuances of important themes.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 240 – Modern Architecture Course count: 1

This lecture course explores American and European architecture from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, interweaving major architectural movements with regional dialogues about political, socio-economic, and technological change. Strong emphasis on critical reading, class discussion, and preparation of research projects.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Annually

VAHI 250 — Making the Modern City Course count: 1

This lecture course probes the catalysts and implements of urban change around the globe since the Industrial Revolution. Using case studies of major cities, the course will explore how local political, socio-economic, and technical shifts wrought physical changes at the scale of the city. Our scope includes those figures who were agents of, and targets of, urban change; as well as the layers of water, sewer, electric, and transportation infrastructure that empower modern metropolises. We will also explore polarities of public vs. private and city vs. country. The course engages local examples, and when possible, includes a CBL component.

GPA units: 1

Typically Offered: Annually

VAHI 270 — Museum Studies Course count: 1

What is the role of the museum in today's hi-tech and multicultural society? How has that role changed since the rise of the museum among the educated elite in the early modern period? This course addresses such central questions in the history, mission, and structure of museums. We also explore the ways in which visual display conveys knowledge and builds broader arguments about cultures and society. We engage with the ethics embedded in acquiring and displaying irreplaceable and ritual objects from other cultures. In addition, this course also treats practical issues like funding, organization, and public outreach in museums. Students participate in field trips to different types of museums and learn about careers as directors, curators, collections managers, and educators in museums and historic houses.

Prerequisite: One previous Art History course.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Annually

VAHI 299-S01 — Arts of Modern China Course count: 1

This course looks at art and visual material produced in modern and contemporary China. We will start with discussions about the beginning of Chinese modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the new modern art movement in the 1920s and 1930s, and Maos revolutionary art of the 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s. We, then, will focus on the avant-garde movements in the post-Mao period since the late 1970s and in particular new artistic directions and phenomena that emerged in the Chinese art world since the 1990s accompanying the ongoing economic and cultural globalization.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts, Cross-Cultural Studies

VAHI 299-S02 — Art Now! Contemporary Activism In Art and Museum Collecting Course count: 1

The first two decades of the twenty-first century have seen unprecedented artistic engagement with topics of social justice, environmental policies, and political activism. Often presenting their work to a global audience, many artists see themselves as cultural changemakers. In this class, we will examine issues of engagement, audience, and acquisition in contemporary art. Our material will include artworks that have addressed identity issues like race, gender, and sexuality; cultural issues like colonial and post-colonial politics, national identity and history, and the role of museums; and societal issues like climate change, immigration, economic inequality, and globalization. In the twenty-first century, museums collecting practices also are seen to have ethical implications. This course will consider the ways in which museums acquire works of art, the history of collecting practices, and contemporary mission-driven goals of building collections of art. We will pair readings and class discussions with a series of field trips to commercial galleries and museums. Throughout the semester students will research works that would fit the mission of Holy Crosss Cantor Art Gallery, and through research, presentations, and voting, propose one object to be acquired by the Cantor.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

VAHI 310 — Kings & Caliphs: Art of Luxury Course count: 1

The art and architecture of the medieval Mediterranean region bore vibrant witness to the conflict and cooperation between Christian, Jewish, and Muslim cultures. This course explores how icons, illuminated manuscripts, palaces, mosques, reliquaries, and other objects and sites can reveal the ways in which medieval individuals viewed "others" and themselves. Students with an interest in art history, religion, history, politics, architecture, languages or literature are welcome; we will look at the "long medieval" period from the late classical through the Renaissance. This is a seminar, and students are expected to engage in intensive individual research.

Enrollment limited to 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students only

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts, Cross-Cultural Studies

Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 320 — The Modern Home Course count: 1

This seminar will probe the varying philosophical and stylistic definitions of home in the modern period. Is a home always a house? What kind of house? And what defines a modern home? We will explore the roles of patron/architect and developer/resident, definitions of stylistic modernity, modern materiality, and modern settlement patterns. The course will engage issues of race, gender, and power in the home, class and social welfare, as well as the architectural intentions and impacts of iconic buildings from the architectural canon.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 330 — Designing Green Course count: 1

Green," in color and concept, is a word that has meant many different things to different societies over the centuries. This course will explore the notion of "green" across time and space, focused on the application of this term to the natural and built environment, and mankind's relationship to them. Topics will include color theory, gardens as place-making tools in varying religious and cultural contexts, the protection and commodification of natural landscapes as public parks, the abundance and loss of trees, the history of "the lawn," the birth of modern environmentalism, and recent narratives about sustainable design of products, architecture, and landscapes.

Enrollment limited to 3rd and 4th year students only

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

VAHI 340 — American Art & Ecology Course count: 1

After studying the origins of landscape imagery, this course considers how landscape art was transformed in American culture. Topics include 19th century paintings of the Hudson River school, photographs and paintings of the American west, and the use of landscape motifs by contemporary environmental artists. We will engage in three main activities: 1) reading and discussing scholarly analyses of the history of landscape painting, nature writing and theories of/about the land; 2) working with a range of primary sources, including materials in local archives and museums; 3) trying our hand at creating new accounts of the landscapes around us.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

VAHI 350 — City Nature Course count: 1

It is a commonplace that the city and nature are in binary opposition, occupying either end of a spectrum that separates human manufacture from the spontaneous creations of an ideal natural world. But the emerging field of the urban environmental humanities complicates these assumptions: as it suggests, the artificial and natural worlds, the city and nature, are much more closely intertwined than we might expect. In this seminar we will explore a series of global examples from across history to explore foundational narratives of buildings, cities, and nature, the meaning of materials, the role of technology, and the ways that architectural and urban history intersect with natural history. The study of the urbanized world around us can also inform how humanists address the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts

Typically Offered: Alternate Years

VAHI 399-S02 — Islamic Art & the Crusades Course count: 1

This course operates in tandem with the NEH-funded exhibition, entitled "Bringing the Holy Land Home: The Crusades, Chertsey Abbey, and the Reconstruction of a Medieval Masterpiece," which Prof. Luyster is curating in the Cantor Gallery in spring 2023. Using the overall framework of Islamic art, and focusing on portable Islamic objects like precious silks, ivories, metalwork, seals, coins, gems, and other media, students in this class will learn deeply about objects in the exhibition. Students will become experts in the exhibition's subject matter and will occupy leading roles in interfacing between the exhibition and its public, assisting at the Makers' Day, and lunching with international speakers (including curators from the British Museum) at the conference

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts, Cross-Cultural Studies

VAHI 399-S24 — Global Medieval Seminar Course count: 1

In this course we work closely with the Worcester Art Museum to research and develop a web resource to highlight the connections between the WAMs medieval objects. Medieval in this course does not just refer to medieval European production but to any art object made 500-1500 CE anywhere around the globe, including the Americas, Europe, Africa, or Asia. While these art objects are displayed in different galleries in the museum, many witness connections between people, goods, and ideas that travelled long distances in the Middle Ages. Each student will choose their own object from the WAMs collections and engage in deep-dive original research about that object and its role in society. Each student will then create web resources (including video) to bring that object and global connections to life for WAMs broad audiences.

GPA units: 1

Common Area: Arts, Cross-Cultural Studies

VAHI 400 — Capstone Seminar Course count: 1

Designed for majors, this course provides a critical examination of issues and methods in the literature of the history of art. Students also complete a capstone project often concentrating on the collection of the Worcester Art Museum or other important local sites.

GPA units: 1

Typically Offered: Fall

VAHI 420 — Tutorial Course count: 1

Tutorials relate to all areas covered by Visual Arts History 200 courses. One unit each semester.

GPA units: 1

Typically Offered: Fall, Spring