

Art and Society in the West from the Renaissance to the Present

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Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*
(c. 1503-6) (Paris, Louvre)



Picasso, *Girl with a Mandolin* (1910)
(New York, Museum of Modern Art)

This 3-credit, 200-level survey course (applicable as CORE HA and GenEd DSHU, DVUP) is designed to introduce students to a representative, historically contextualized selection of works of painting, sculpture and architecture from the major artistic cultures of western Europe and America between the later Middle Ages and the contemporary period. As is standard for survey courses of this type, this selection will highlight those artists who indisputably introduced influential new artistic ideas or techniques, especially where these may have transcended immediate geographic and cultural boundaries to become part of a broader European, American or global artistic culture. Emphases also include the analysis and classification of visual and/or conceptual protocols characteristic of each cultural and stylistic 'moment,' the analysis and interpretation of narrative, symbolic or poetic content, and the political, social, and religious contexts of the works studied. Issues of socio-cultural, ethnic and racial diversity or socio-cultural pluralism will be explored in depth wherever possible. A term paper project will entail a visit to The National Gallery of Art (or some other comparable museum) in order to apply the visual analysis skills learned in the classroom to a close, in-person visual analysis. The course also features an element of disciplinary self-examination, asking such questions as: Who decides which artists or works of art should be 'famous'? By what criteria, exactly, can we know whether a given artist or work of art is of sufficient historical importance to merit a place in the grand narrative of the history of art? How indeed can we measure causalities of artistic 'influence' and 'progress' without making dubious claims of art-historical 'development'—schemes that assume the arts are making inevitable 'progress' towards some ideal state of artistic 'freedom' and self-expression? And how can a multi-cultural society share a 'history of art' capable of negotiating or resolving culturally conflicting values?