

Phil 472/Vart 466: Renaissance Philosophy of Art (counts for the attached Renaissance Certificate Track)
Spring Semester 2012
Gonzaga University in Florence
Dr. Patrick Burke

Course Description

An on-site study of 15th and 16th century Florentine sculpture, painting, and architecture and the Renaissance philosophy of art, beauty, imagination, and the person which animated their production. This course is fundamentally interdisciplinary and will be co-taught with visiting Associate Professor Dr. Linda Tredennick of the Department of English at Gonzaga in Spokane.

The *purpose* of this course is two-fold:

1. to introduce Gonzaga University students to a specifically Florentine Renaissance philosophy of art and the person as portrayed primarily, though not exclusively, in a work by Marsilio Ficino originally entitled *De Amore* or *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*. To appreciate Ficino's achievement in this work and his place in Renaissance humanism, it will be necessary to interrogate, first of all, Plato's theory of art as imitation and art as inspiration; accordingly, after establishing the ontological, epistemological, and ethical problems to which Plato's entire philosophical itinerary is a response, selections from the following Platonic dialogues will be studied: *The Republic* [Books II and X], *Sophist*, *Laws*, *Ion*, *Phaedrus*, and *The Symposium*. Because Ficino's work also represents a rebirth and synthesis of the Neo-Platonic tradition, attention shall also be directed to the contributions of Plotinus and Augustine to his thought, namely selected passages of Plotinus' *Enneads* and Augustine's *De Ordine* and *De Musica*. The influence of the writings of Hermes Trismegistus on Ficino's thought will be examined as well. In addition, students will be exposed to the thought of another philosopher of the Platonic Academy of Florence, Pico della Mirandola, whose *Oration on the Dignity of Man* interrogates the place of the human person in the whole of creation and in art relative to the angelic person, the divine person, and all non-human life, an indispensable work for interpreting the art of the period as well as the role of freedom and inspiration in the creation of works of art. In our interdisciplinary context, we will also study Renaissance Humanism, the subject of Dr. Tredennick's interwoven course.
2. to assist Gonzaga University students in achieving a rigorous and sustained interrogation of the meaning and value of beauty and art in the social history of Renaissance Florence and, more important, in their own experience of the city. To this end, students will see how ideas engender material culture, how architecture, sculpture, and painting are, as it were, fossils of the philosophical thought and how philosophical thought is nonetheless nourished by the on-going creative praxis of artists working in these areas. In this regard, special study will be made of how specific social, political, and philosophical tendencies can be read from the style of Renaissance painting, sculpture, and architecture and how the humanistic philosophy of the Renaissance was already foreshadowed in the works under production in the late medieval and early Renaissance periods. Since this is an interdisciplinary course, cross-listed with VART 466, students will be introduced to the contributions of some of the major art historians of the period, principally Gombrich, Panofsky, and Baxandall, scholars who are also philosophers in their own right. In addition, they will read from Leonbattista Alberti's *On Painting* for an

analysis of the art of painting by a major 15th century humanist. Finally, all of these efforts will be consolidated in the articulation of a distinctly Florentine philosophy of painting, sculpture, and architecture.

Texts

Leonbattista Alberti, *On Painting*
Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in 15th Century Italy*
Burke, *The Renaissance Reader I and II*
Hofstadter and Kuhn, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*
Richard Turner, *The Renaissance in Florence* [on reserve]
Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* [on reserve]

Course Requirements

1. attendance at all scheduled classes and tours; the semester schedule will be submitted by the end of the first week of class;
2. careful reading of the assigned pages prior to each class session and thorough review of class notes;
3. because the course will be conducted in an interdisciplinary seminar style, students are expected to participate imaginatively and effectively in every discussion. The professor will distribute in advance of some seminar sessions a set of questions that will serve to focus the reading and guide the discussions. Some seminar sessions will be plenary sessions with faculty from the other Renaissance Certificate Track participating. Students are expected to prepare written responses to these questions prior to the pertinent class session.
4. students are expected to keep a journal which reports the results of their reading, their responses to discussion questions distributed, and their responses to works of Renaissance art.
5. all students enrolled in this interdisciplinary course are expected to complete three required 5 page papers each of which entails the interfacing of philosophical theory with monuments of painting, sculpture, and architecture; specific directions regarding the thematic focus of these assignments were will be provided at the end of the second week of class;

Course Grade: The course will be graded on a 450 point scale

100 points.....mid-term examination
100 points.....final examination
150 points.....three required papers (50 points each)
50 points.....journal writing
50 points.....effective participation (includes attendance)

Office Hours: by appointment only. Generally, the professor will be available from 8:45 – 9:15 on Mondays and Tuesdays, and on some afternoons to discuss pertinent issues for the position paper and other aspects of the course. Make appointments to see him immediately after class.