SYLLABUS

We will study the great Italian fresco cycles from the late Gothic (13c.-14c. Giotto) to the high Renaissance (16c. Michelangelo) and the texts on which those cycles were based: the Apocrypha and the hagiographical tradition that popularized the lives of the saints. During this time, devotional art reached its peak not in individual panel paintings (altarpieces, etc.), but in the fresco cycles that adorned whole walls of basilicas and churches, where this art was meant to be ‘read’ by the public in the way that the book of Nature or the sacred book of the Bible was read for spiritual edification. Having traveled extensively, I have seen tourists gaze at these great works with glazed incomprehension, unable to guess what they’re seeing. This course aims to unlock this rich world to you. You will be able to recognize the identifying details, the iconography of particular scenes, the identifying details of the artistic period, even the painter, and, very importantly, be able to evaluate the painter’s originality, his creative transmutation of tradition, and his own contributions both to the craft of fresco painting and to the interpretation of the major legends.

The advantage of this study abroad is that it allows you to see what you cannot see anywhere else, even in the greatest American museums that boast excellent collections of paintings: entire walls and chapels of magnificent interrelated fresco scenes in the spaces originally intended for them that simply cannot be transported from their location for even the most extravagantly costly exhibit.

We will devote much attention to the transposition of narrative from text to fresco and the questions this transposition involves: principles of selection from the story, the criteria of inclusion and exclusion, compositional design, iconographic motifs, and so on, as well as technical matters dealing with the preparation of wall surfaces and application of pigments. The main focus of the course will be the Christian art of the late Gothic to the high Renaissance, where the material of study is most plentiful and reaches its highest point of sophistication and accomplishment. You will read the primary texts that the artists themselves used: the apocryphal gospel (Protevangelium) of St James (for Giotto’s frescoes in the Arena Chapel of Padova, the unrivalled masterpiece of Gothic painting); St Bonaventure’s Major Life of St Francis (for the famous Francis-cycle in the Upper Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi and Giotto’s Bardi Chapel in the church of S. Croce, Florence); selected saints’ lives from Jacobus de Voragine’s seminal Golden Legend (e.g. the life of St Martin for Simone Martini’s Montefiore Chapel in the Lower Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi); and, from the same collection, certain famous narratives (e.g. the Invention of the Cross and the Exaltation of the Cross for the frescoes of Piero della Francesca in the apse of San Francesco in Arezzo); and passages in the Old and New Testaments (Genesis 1-9, Acts of the Apostles) for Michelangelo’s great frescoes in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican. Topics will include the significance of major Christian doctrines and events in Christian history and their depiction in art; the ongoing evolution of representational art during these centuries, from the stylized Byzantine formalism that Giotto broke away from in his revolutionary work to the almost, at times, surrealistic impressionism of the very late Renaissance, harbinger of the Baroque.
MARGARITIS: 2

REQUIREMENTS: In addition to the methods of evaluation listed at the end of the syllabus, there is an attendance policy. I allow you 2 absences, after which each additional absence will lower your cumulative course grade by one notch, e.g. from B to B- for the first of these, from B- to C+ for the second, etc.

TEXTS:

(1) Primary Works (All on WWU Canvas under “Files”):

- Protevangelium of St James (online)
  St John the Evangelist (58-64)
  The Invention of the Cross (269-276)
  St Peter (330-341)
  The Chair of St Peter at Antioch
  St John the Baptist (502-510)
  The Decollation of John the Baptist
  The Exaltation of the Cross (543-550)
  St Martin (663-674)

- The Bible: Genesis (Ch. 1-9)
  Luke (Ch.1)
  Acts of the Apostles (Ch. 1-12)

(2) Secondary Critical Works (recommended reading):

- Sven Sandstrom, “The Sistine Ceiling” in Seymour, 207-221
- Heinrich Wolfflin, from Die klassische Kunst in Seymour, 175-187

MARGARITIS: 3
The primary readings are available on the WWU Canvas site for the course, under “Files.” Most of the readings are short and manageable. However, St Bonaventure’s Life of Francis is very long, and that is why I am giving you plenty of time to get it read. If pressed for time (particularly when you get to Bonaventure’s section on the Miracles performed by Francis, you can go directly to those sections where I have annotated, in the margins, and numbered the particular scene that is depicted in the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi.

The pictures of the frescoes we will be studying and seeing are also available on the WWU Canvas site for the course, under “Files.” Click on the Appropriate “Folder” for the day in question. The pics are numbered (by place and artist) and labeled in the following order: City-Church-Artist-Chapel/Work. Familiarize yourselves with the pics for each day in advance of our class meeting; we will discuss them in detail in class, day by day. There are a total 284 pics here.

Pre-Departure WWU On-Campus Meetings:

Tues June 26: Introduction to the course: the nature of the study; background to fresco art; terms and techniques [slides]

Wed June 27: Discussion: Protevangelium of St James
Pics: # 1.10-1.54. Padova: Scrovegni Chapel. Giotto

Thur June 28: Giotto, continued. + Other Padova sites:
Pics: # 3.1-3.3. Padova: Basilica di S. Antonio + Donatello: bronzes

Fri June 29: Discussion: Jacobus de Voragine: The Golden Legend. John the Baptist (Birth, Decollation)
Jacobus de Voragine: The Golden Legend. John the Evangelist


Tues June 28: Other sites in Florence (images only):
(a) Duomo & Giotto’s Campanile
(b) Museo del Duomo: Michelangelo’s Deposition, Cantorie by della Robbia and Donatello, Donatello’s Magdalen, Ghiberti’s bronze Doors of Paradise to the Baptistry
(c) Baptistry: external and internal views
(d) Uffizi Gallery paintings
(e) Accademia Gallery works: Michelangelo statues
Wed June 29: Discussion: Bonaventure’s *Life of St Francis of Assisi*

Thur June 30: Discussion: Jacobus de Voragine: *The Golden Legend*. St Martin
   Pics: #7.39-7.61. Assisi: Basilica. Lower Church & Simone Martini:
   Montefiore Chapel

Fri July 2-4: Holiday

Thurs July 5: Discussion: Jacobus de Voragine: *The Golden Legend*. Invention of the Cross & Exaltation of the Cross
   Pics: # 6.01-6.27. Arezzo: S. Francesco. Piero della Francesca: Legend Of the Holy Cross

Fri July 6: Discussion: Genesis: Chapters 1-10

Mon July 9: Discussion: Last Judgment

Tues July 10: Other Sites in Rome:
   (a) Forum – Palatine – Colosseum – Pantheon – Circus Maximus
   (b) S. Pietro in Vincoli: Michelangelo’s Moses
   (c) Borghese Gallery: Bernini statues
   (d) Santa Maria della Vittoria: Bernini’s St Teresa
   (e) San Luigi dei Francesi: Caravaggio paintings
   (f) Piazzas: Navona, S. Maria in Trastevere, Spanish Steps

+ Language: Basic Italian prep

* You will take the online test on your own time and submit it via Canvas. You must do so by noon on Monday July 15 noon.

**Goals of the Course:**

As a result of taking the course, students will gain a knowledge of the following:

1. Major doctrines of Christianity & the importance of churches as places of devotional worship disseminating these doctrines to the public
2. Major events of Christian history and legends of Christianity
3. How these concepts and narratives were incorporated in the Italian fresco cycles covering the greatest period of fresco painting, the late Gothic to the high Renaissance: iconography, symbolism.

4. Evolution of style during this period: break with Byzantine past; new aims of representational realism; perspective; changes in the application of pigment, changes from “true” fresco to “secco” or “dry” fresco; technical procedures.

5. Corollary knowledge of art and culture beyond the focus on the above: e.g. other forms of art (Donatello’s bronze and marble sculptures, Michelangelo’s and Bernini’s sculptures; architecture); the way modern Italy has incorporated into its daily life the relics of its past in a kind of architectural and cultural palimpsest.

Methods of Evaluation:

1. Pre-U.S. departure comprehensive examination on the readings and pics (online): (30%).

2. One short paper, 500 words printed, on a specific aspect (compositional layout of the scenes in the chapel or the recurrence of certain motifs in the particular cycle or the relationship of the scenes to the architectural space, etc.) of one of the following: (a) Scrovegni Chapel (b) Brancacci Chapel (c) apse of San Francesco in Arezzo (d) Sistine Chapel: Michelangelo’s Ceiling or Last Judgment Wall. (30%). Submit to me via email attachment. Due September 26.

Margaritis: 6

3. Field Journal (on local and out-of-town excursions). (20%) You will record your impressions of:

(a) your experiences in the cities we will visit. This can include such things as the following:

   (i) aspects of Italy (place, life, culture) that either correspond to what you had imagined before coming, or (perhaps more interestingly) that are surprising and different from what you had imagined, so that your actual experience “corrects” your mistaken assumptions.

   (ii) aspects of Italian culture and way of life that serve to make you critically aware of the sort of things you had taken for granted about the way you live life in your own country and which you now see as not “the only way” or “the natural way” things are done – i.e. aspects of Italian life that seem to you perfectly viable, maybe even preferable, alternatives to ways of life back at home.

(b) notes on the works of art we will be viewing. Impressions derived on the spot (as opposed to simply having seen online images) will be especially useful as preps for your paper.

4. Participation on our Excursions: (20%)