

IS 123: European Culture and Society  
Westmont College  
The Arts in Europe /  
Performing and Interpreting the Arts; Faith, Witness and Belief  
Europe Semester, Fall 2020

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Instructor and coordinator:

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Prospective contributors:

**Graham Fawcett, MA (Cantab)**

-Former tutor, The Poetry School (1998-2015), and former President of the TS Eliot Society, London (retd)

**Alessandra Arseni, MA**

-University of Vienna (lecturer and PhD candidate), Fine Arts Museum Vienna (docent, lecturer, director of the “**Verein der Freunde des Kunsthistorisches Museum**”)

*Plus*

Various speakers across Europe addressing the topic “my personal culture”

### **Required Reading**

*Ways of Seeing*, John Berger

*The Story of Art*, E.H. Gombrich (paperback version accepted)

*Civilisation*, Kenneth Clark (paperback version available)

Please note: all online and books/articles used during written work must be included in a bibliography appended to written work.

### **Performing and Interpreting the Arts: Expressions of Faith, Witness and Belief – a course overview**

#### **What we will study, and where**

While this class will encourage and require engagement with the full range of artistic wealth in the European cities we are visiting – from architecture to music - we will focus on the interpretation of **poetry** and the **visual arts**, the performance of **poetry** and the performance of tours in art museums. There will also be an opportunity to create a piece of visual art, which we expect to happen under the supervision of a trained artist and art educator at a studio in Amsterdam. Time permitting we may address the application of **visual art** to photography.

### **London**

*Poetry, including how to write your own poetry  
Introduction to visual art (National Gallery),*

### **Paris**

*Visual art in Giverny, the Louvre and Musee D'Orsay*

### **Amsterdam**

*Visual art in the Rijksmuseum, Van Gogh Museum*

### **Berlin**

Visual Art in the Gemäldegalerie, Alte National Galerie, Käthe Kollwitz Museum

### **Warsaw**

Poetry, Visual Art in the National Museum

### **Krakow**

Poetry, Visual art in the National Museum and churches

### **Budapest**

Poetry, Visual art in the Hungarian National Museum

### **Vienna**

Visual art in the churches, Fine Arts Museum, Leopold, Secession, Belvedere

### **Prague**

Visual art in Terezin / Theresienstadt

### **Munich**

Visual art in the Alte Pinakothek, Lenbachhaus, palaces and churches

### **Venice**

Visual art in the churches, Scuola di San Rocco, Accademia

### **Florence**

Visual art in the churches, Uffizi

### **Rome**

Visual art in the churches

**Poetry:** In **London** and **Oxford** the poets studied will range from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and may include John Donne, John

Milton, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelly, John Keats, WB Yeats, Wilfred Owen, TS Eliot.

In Warsaw, Krakow and Budapest we will study Polish and Hungarian poets in translation and in their original language. Wisława Szymborska, Tadeusz Różewicz and Ady Endre will feature prominently, among others.

We will focus on the way these poets witnessed the modern history of their nations (independence, war, holocaust and communist occupation).

Our in-depth study of this art form will facilitate our own creation of poetry.

### **Visual Arts:**

**London's** National Gallery and locations on our city expeditions will provide the proving ground for pre-Semester reading and work as well as introductions to key figures and concepts. We will build on these first contacts with original art with deeper investigations in the **Paris** Louvre, where we will also ponder connections between art in the specific historical context of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Imperial periods. Giverny and the Musée d'Orsay will permit detailed appreciation of the Impressionist and Post Impressionist Periods.

**Amsterdam's** Rijksmuseum and its 17<sup>th</sup> century streetscapes are the venue for the art of Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. The Van Gogh Museum allows us to prime the next phase of our journey from post-Impressionist journey to Expressionism.

Berlin's art collections allow students contact with German Romanticism, the world's first public collection of French Impressionism, and German Expressionism, and a chance to review a survey of 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century painting at the Gemäldegalerie.

**Poland** and **Budapest** offer individual highlights (a Memling in Gdańsk, a Da Vinci in Krakow) as well as local variants of major international art movements. A key field of enquiry will be the role played by artists in 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century revivals of national identity in these countries, as well as counter and complimentary witness.

The Fine Arts Museum in **Vienna** boasts pictures from all the one-time Habsburg lands, with the richest collections being from Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This makes an excellent location to bring together the studies of

the Semester up to this point, and for students to give their own performances of visual art tours of their highlights of this collection, with the blessing and professional guidance of the museum.

**Vienna** also complements our knowledge of Expressionism gleaned in Germany, introducing its masters of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, **Gustav Klimt** and **Egon Schiele**, bringing the theme of modernism in the visual arts into sharper focus.

In **Italy** you will also trace the greatest artists of the Renaissance and Mannerist periods – including in those churches where their works can still be viewed today.

### **The principles of the course**

Artists' expression of Christian faith and tradition, as well as the role of witness and faith will be threads connecting the cities we visit. Students will explore the role of witness and conviction in the production of art as the principle window on the wealth that they encounter. Students will also trace how the nature of belief changes with author, location, audience, art form and era.

At the Fine Arts Museum in Vienna; for example, students will have the opportunity to compare the greatest expressions of faith created during the Renaissance, Reformation and Baroque eras – all by moving mere footsteps down the gallery.

The course is titled 'Expressions of Faith, *Witness and Belief*' because students will also be expected to consider the artistic expression of seemingly non-religious convictions as we meet them: for example Marxism and socialism in London and Berlin; psychology in Vienna; patriotism and nationalism in various cities; capitalism and commerce in London and Amsterdam; as well as more personal convictions and witness from artists we encounter.

**Goal: students will broaden their Christian faith and experience some of its greatest expressions. Students will understand the role of other convictions in the creation of art, and appreciate the quality of witness and response to it.**

### **Classroom**

In the classroom we will develop frameworks for examining art in Europe: you will acquire knowledge that enables you to identify, describe, analyze, compare and better enjoy art. Time in class will also be reserved for discussion of works already experienced.

**Goals:**

(i) You will better recognize and engage even with previously unseen pieces of art, (ii) You will appreciate how discussion is the beginning of performance.

**City explorations**

In the cities we visit, walks will supplement classroom time by introducing artists as well as the places and times in which they lived and worked. You will also be participating actively in these walks – see ‘what will be expected of me as a student on this course’.

**Goal: practice and improvement in public speech and commentary as a life skill, as well as a component of performance.**

General Education: This course meets the “Performing and Interpreting the Arts” component of Westmont’s general educational requirements. The following is a description of that requirement:

While historical perspectives on an art form are desirable, these perspectives alone are not sufficient to qualify a course in this area. Students should be engaged in the production of at least a modest amount of art as a means of increasing their own abilities to produce art and of understanding the process by which artists create. On the other hand, studio courses will not generally fulfill this requirement since they do not provide sufficient reflection on the general principles underlying artistic production.  
It also has these desired student outcomes: There are more details in the “What will be expected of me as a student on this course?” but here is listed how these outcomes are met:

In thinking, speaking, and writing students will use:

1. Correct language and terminology for varying artistic types, forms, movements.

Students will keep a journal which will lead to evaluation by both oral interview and written work. This will require using correct language and terminology.

2. Appropriate methods and processes for analyzing, interpreting, and enjoying artistic production, including with respect to the Christian faith.

Both in the class discussions and the evaluated written work you will respond to performances you encounter. This will include works that are new to you.

In their making and performing students will demonstrate competence in:

1. Creative / interpretive methods for artistic production and expressiveness.

You will be reading and/or performing works of others and your own creation for the group including giving a brief commentary afterwards.

2. Physical processes and manifestations necessary for artistic realization and production.

You will be composing and performing poetry as well as having one supervised opportunity to create visual art, and perform tours of art galleries. The evaluation will look not just at the finished product but the process of development as well.

### **Contributions from other lecturers and artists**

Our contributors in different European cities will provide both general tools for our interpretation of art as well as expertise in our key art forms of **poetry**, and **visual arts**.

Graham Fawcett will also facilitate our performances of poetry. Specifically, their contributions will involve experiences and classes addressing the following issues:

Graham Fawcett in London – a series of lectures and workshops

Why do poets write? Why should we read poetry and how? How do we read poems from other places, times and in other languages? Which poets have expressed Christian faith and other beliefs most powerfully? What is the relationship between a poet's

creativity and their faith? How have poets helped their publics to a deeper experience of faith? How do poets witness? How can we perform their poetry? How do we write our own poetry?

How does one become an active audience for art, poetry and culture more broadly. What does it mean to develop a personal culture?

#### Various speakers in conversation

What role can art play in our lives? What kind of practical applications does art have? With a focus on visual art, classical music and literature: which art should we choose to make a part of our lives and why? How do we discern quality in art and how subjective is that determination? What is a 'personal culture' and how do we develop and share such a thing? Why will this help us live more richly? How are 'personal culture' and belief related? What might be the pitfalls of artistic sensibility?

#### Alessandra Arseni in Vienna – a series of lectures

How should we look at painting? What are the different eras in the visual arts and how do we distinguish them? What lies behind the transition from one era to another? How does the story of art in Europe reflect the history of Christianity, and how do the visual arts reflect political, social and economic change? How can we act as intermediaries to communicate such works of art to others who may have no knowledge of the visual arts?

Graham Fawcett and Alessandra Arseni are *international lecturers and performers. If their schedules place them in one of our other cities while we happen to be there, we may be able benefit from additional on-site contributions, limitations permitting.*

#### **What will be expected of me as a student on this course?**

There will be many opportunities for you to contribute to this course, and the success and our enjoyment of the course depends on your participation as a performer, interpreter and audience.

There will be times, themes and activities which will engross you more than others, and in a course of this length and variety, sustained high levels of observable engagement are neither practicable nor desirable. Often, unstructured reflection will be the most important form of engagement. Students should allow

themselves to learn and experience without anticipation of assessment. However, students will also be expected to show increasingly structured understanding of artworks.

Required from students:

**1) Interpretation**

You will keep a **reflections journal** updated every few days. This journal must include entries on the artists and artworks that have made the most impression on you. 'Like' and 'dislike' responses are merely the start of the reflection required. Students should consider why they have the responses to artworks that they do, and what these responses might signify. Students' responses must demonstrate an understanding of the artwork, rather than just a reaction to it, and be presented in the context of other interpretations: the artists' own intentions - especially their communication of Faith, Witness and Belief - the reactions of contemporaries, subsequent revised assessments and other contrasting evaluations. It is required that students' assessments of the artworks they meet should also habitually involve comparison and contrast with artworks previously seen, especially those from different artistic periods, as well as artworks in different mediums from the same period. They must show understanding of the economic, societal, political and faith context in which artworks were created, in as far as these can be said to have influenced their creation and reception. Students should deploy the context and tools of interpretation provided in lectures, tours and by our contributors. Your **journal** will feature in the **interview** / oral assessment at the end of the course.

**2) Encounter**

\*Students will be expected to show they are conversant with the Kenneth Clark text by the start of the course. Students will be expected to show they know the EH Gombrich text well enough to use it as a handy reference work by the start of the course. A physical, paperback version of the EH Gombrich text and of the Kenneth Clark text should be brought on the semester.

\*In preparation for the course, students are expected to post three paintings selected from European art up to 1945 and produced by three different artists - from countries we are visiting – who are also artists mentioned in either E.H Gombrich or Kenneth Clark's set texts, uploaded to the Facebook group 'ES2020 Art and Poetry In Europe'. Each painting should be accompanied by the artist's name and dates in the first comment field, and a sentence on why

the painting appeals to you in a second comment field. Students will also be required to comment briefly on one other painting posted in the group by other students on the semester, responding to it briefly, explaining why they have chosen to respond to that particular image. Those students without a facebook account may send three subtitled images to mail@gabrielfawcett.com, who will send an image back in return for a brief comment ‘response’.

\*You will contribute to **discussions**, whether in class or during visits.

\*You will be given **unseen verses or texts to read out** to the group in certain classes.

\*You will be given **verses or texts to prepare to read out** to the group at relevant locations on certain city tours, and accompany your reading with a brief unscripted commentary afterwards.

\*You will be given unseen and prepared verses and texts to read and comment upon in **interview**.

\*You will be an audience for performances from within the group and people outside it.

### 3) Performance

\*You will compose **poetry** during the course

\*You will **create** at least one piece of **visual art** during the course

\*You will be expected to bring together your knowledge and communicative skills in **performing** your own tours in art galleries.

### Preparation for the course

As well as reading the set texts, students will be required to prepare for this class before Europe Semester. As a reference for later use throughout the semester, students will be required to draw up a ‘Table of Art Eras’:

-In the form of a table with three columns: list the different periods in art that will be encountered on the course from 1000AD to 1945, list one European artist working in each period, plus a painting created by that artist, as well as identifying the most important event occurring in Europe during each period which might have shaped the art produced and/or the way in which art was received in that era.

-Additionally, add one quotation from EH Gombrich *A History of Art* and one quotation from Kenneth Clark *Civilisation* that you would wish to have to hand as a guide for each era of art you have identified.

A first draft version of this table is to be completed before Europe

Semester (its presence will be expected in the first week) During the course of the Semester students will be expected to add to this document more detailed understanding of the eras of art, the key historical events in each era, more examples of artists working in each era and their creations, and additional useful quotations from secondary sources about the art of these eras. Students will submit a final version of the Table of Art Eras at the end of the course, and it will form part of their grade.

\*In preparation for the course, and to accompany summer reading, students are by August 10<sup>th</sup> 2020 expected to post three paintings selected from European art up to 1945 and produced by three different artists - from countries we are visiting - who are mentioned in either E.H Gombrich or Kenneth Clark's set texts, uploaded to the Facebook group 'ES2020 Art and Poetry In Europe'.

Each painting should be accompanied by the artist's name and dates in one comment field, and the reason why the painting appeals in a second comment field.

Students will also be required to comment briefly on one other painting posted in the group by other students on the semester, responding to it briefly, explaining why they have chosen to respond to this particular image.

Those students without a facebook account may send three subtitled images to mail@gabrielfawcett.com, who will send an image back in return for brief comment 'response'.

## **Grade**

### **Your final grade will be made up of equal parts of:**

- A) Your performance of art (poetry reading, writing your own poetry, performance of art tours, production of one piece of visual art)
- B) Your participation in preparatory exercises, classes, walks, gallery visits, conversations
- C) An oral interview and assessment of the course, in which you will be expected to refer to your Table of Art Eras and Journal.
- D) Your submission of a final version of the Table of Art Eras at the end of your course and one piece of written work

### **How will your grade for this course be assessed?**

Your grade will be determined by:

\*How fluently you write and speak about art, and how far you have been able to understand and deploy the terms and concepts we will encounter in our studies. This means:

- knowing when and how to use ‘baroque’, ‘meter’, ‘associative understanding’, ‘modern art’, ‘kitsch’, ‘stanza’ et.c
- broadening your general cultural vocabulary, which will probably also require identifying and using synonyms for ‘awesome’.
- \*Your degree of soundness and improvement in public discussion and address.
- \*Your understanding and use of methods in interpreting art, including as an active audience for art.
- \*Your understanding and use of creative processes and techniques in producing art.
- \*Awareness of movement, timing, delivery, atmosphere, presence and audience in performance of art tours.

### **How Will My Work Be Evaluated?**

Self-assessment, group assessment and assessment by the instructor, contributors and faculty will express the following judgments:

A = Exceptional; surpasses others of its kind; well argued or developed;

original; shows uncommon insight; maturely and correctly presented in style and form; leaves little to be desired.

B = Exemplary; good, solid, even admirable; insightful; quite complete

and refined; shows promise.

C = Satisfactory; meets basic requirements; complete and

comprehensible; has substance; offers valid insights; clear

D = Unsatisfactory; needs to be more thorough or show better basic comprehension; needs to be expanded; generally unrefined

F = Failure to complete, failure to hand in, failure to comprehend demands of the assignment