Course Description:

The course provides an introduction to the artistic production of Germany and to a lesser extent, the Netherlands, during the period of the Reformation. Educated elites responded quickly to the humanist revival of ancient culture that accompanied the Renaissance in Italy. The new learning transformed widely held and long accepted ideas concerning the status and role of the artist. Instead of being limited to the role of an artisan involved primarily in the production of imagery that served the devotional interest of the Christian faith artists were recognized as supremely gifted individuals engaged in the creation of unique objects that engaged with the intellectual interests of their elite patrons. The result was the introduction of a spectrum of new subjects into the iconographic repertoire and a new respect for pictorial invention.

Just as this process was approaching completion, German culture was traumatized and transformed by the religious upheaval associated with the Reformation. Centuries of ecclesiastical ritual, along with many aspects of popular devotion, were challenged by the radical agenda of the reformers. Christianity was deprived of many of the qualities that had made it intelligible and accessible to ordinary people in order to enhance the doctrinal purity demanded by an educated elite. In attempting to sketch a history of this fascinating period, we will try to be self-reflexive about the process of historical writing itself. How has the scholarship on this period of artistic production changed in the course of time? What has motivated the narratives told about the artists of the past? What sort of meaning do we hope to create by examining these long-dead developments today? To what extent do the works themselves escape our attempt to ascribe them historical significance?

Requirements: This course attempts to combine lectures with discussion. Readings have been assigned for each session. They should serve as the basis for our conversations. It is important to come to class prepared to intervene. You will be asked to write responses on what you have read.

Attendance is crucial. Please advise me in advance if you have to miss class. Absences will have unfortunate consequences for your grade. Graduate students taking the class for an "R" grade are expected at all meetings. If you miss class you will still be expected to turn in assignments as they are due.

Exams: There will be a mid-term and a final exam. The mid-term is scheduled for March 10. The date of the final will be announced later.
Papers: Students will be asked to write responses to assigned readings on two or three occasions. These responses will be short: about five pages. Topics and due dates will be announced. Graduates taking the class for regular credit should also write two short papers (approx 8-10 pages) on subjects of their choice. One of these will be due at the mid-term and the other on the last day of the course. Please discuss your choices with me either by e-mail or in person at least two weeks before papers are due.

Museum Visits: We will visit the Print Room and the Northern Renaissance painting galleries at the Metropolitan Museum.


These texts are available at Book Culture (112th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam).

Reader: The readings for this class can be found on Courseworks.

Course Schedule:

Jan 22 Introduction: Outline and scope of the course; who's who, what’s what, etc.

Jan 24 Art as History or History as Art? (seminar format):
Jan 29 Medieval Image Theory (lecture/seminar):

Jan 31 Matthias Grünewald: Altar and Devotion (lecture):

Feb 5 Tilman Riemenschneider: Altar and Relic (lecture):

Feb 7 Printmaking and Culture (lecture):
Reading: Keith Moxey, "Chivalry and the Housebook Master," in 'Livelier than Life.' The Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet or the Housebook Master, ca. 1470-1500, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1985), 65-78.

Feb 12 Albrecht Dürer and the Creation of the Artist as Genius (lecture/seminar)

Feb 14 Durer and Melancholy (lecture/seminar):

Feb 19 Dürer: Between Renaissance and Reformation (lecture)

Feb 21 Hans Baldung Grien: Death of the Renaissance (lecture/seminar):

Feb 26 Albrecht Altdorfer: The Artist's Hand (lecture/seminar):

Feb 28 Altdorfer: Humanist Landscape and German Nationalism (lecture/seminar):

March 5 Lucas Cranach: Art and the Reformation (lecture):

March 7 Student Presentations: Paper Outlines

March 12 MID-TERM EXAM

March 14 Hans Holbein: Art and Iconoclasm (lecture/seminar):

March 19 and 21 SPRING BREAK
March 26 **Holbein in England** (lecture/seminar):

March 28 **Hieronymus Bosch and Humanist Morality** (lecture/seminar)

April 2 **Hieronymus Bosch: Fantasizing Genius** (lecture/seminar)

April 4 **Humanist Art in the Netherlands** (lecture)

April 9 **Landscape into Art** (lecture/seminar)

April 11 **Pieter Bruegel: Art and Morality** (lecture/seminar)

April 16 **Pieter Bruegel: Art and Iconoclasm** (lecture/seminar)

April 18 **Pieter Bruegel: The Peasant in the City** (lecture/seminar)
Reading: Gibson, "Calendar and Kermis," in *Bruegel*, 146-175.

April 23
April 25
April 30
May 2
Final Exam either May 14 or 16