

September 18, 2015

Gods and Mortals in Ancient Art
Seminar for Graduate Students in Classics and Ancient History
Summer 2016, The Getty Museum

The aim of the seminar is to acquaint students with the major media and methods of Greek and Roman art, with a focus on visual modes of storytelling. Although parallels abound among the stories represented by ancient artisans and writers, the nature of those correspondences is complex. Myths appear on a range of objects, from domestic walls to marble sarcophagi. In which contexts did the stories appear, why, and what do we know about their reception among ancient viewers? What are the modern, scholarly, and museological contexts of Greek and Roman objects?

We will meet as a group twice a week for two-three hours, combining classroom discussion with gallery visits. Students will have weekly readings and assignments on original objects in the Getty collection. Based on previous experience, it is critical for the success of the seminar that students should have time in between classes to work in the library and collections, so as to formulate their ideas and their responses to the material. In the first week, each student will formulate a project for the six weeks. They will then meet individually with Bettina Bergmann every week in weeks 2-5 to discuss progress; the last week will be devoted to presentations and discussion, before submission of the final paper.

Week One : Introductions. The media of ancient art: materials, techniques, preservation, and conservation

- Class meeting (3 hours): viewing objects (from/in storerooms) in marble, clay, gold, silver, precious stones, bronze, vase painting, fresco, encaustic, mosaic, *opus sectile*
- Assignment: exercise in descriptive writing. Visual analysis and comparison of a subject represented in two different media (e.g. Leda and the Swan in a marble sculpture, in a South Italian krater, engraved gem, or Roman fresco)
- Class meeting (2 hours): visit to conservation lab/talk by conservator
- Extra Session, Getty Center: introduction to library and digital resources for the study of ancient art
- Individual meeting with BB to design research topic for 6-week seminar

Week Two : The lives of ancient objects: from manufacture to modern display

- Class meeting (2-3 hours): Manufacture: artist, craftsman, workshop, Guest: Ken Lapatin
- Class meeting (2 hours): Ancient contexts: urban, domestic, funerary, sacred
- Assignment: the biography of an object (see below)
- Individual meeting with BB on research topic

Week Three : Evolving evaluations: reception and the criteria for interpretation

- Class meeting (2-3 hours): the art history of ancient art (Pliny the Elder and his sources, the study of ancient art since the Renaissance), Guest: Claire Lyons
- Assignment: evolving evaluations (e.g. of the Apollo Belvedere, Laokoon, select objects in the Getty Collection).
- Class meeting (3 hours): Dating, style, “Greek”, “Hellenistic”, “Roman”, imitation and emulation, Guest lecturer: Elaine K. Gazda, Professor of Classical Art and Archaeology and Curator of Hellenistic and Roman Antiquities, the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan
- Individual meeting with BB on research topic

Week Four : Visual literacy – iconography and modes

- Class meeting (2 hours): recognizing signs, attributes, gestures, compositional schemes
- Assignment: analysis of a visual narrative on a Greek vase (e.g. of scene of the Trojan war or *Odyssey*)
- Class meeting (2 hours): artful combinations: pictorial pendants, cycles, and ensembles
- Individual meeting with BB on research topic

Week Five : Text and image, performance and image

- Class meeting (2 hours): Simonides, Lessing, *ekphrasis*, viewer supplementation
- Assignment: comparison of a textual and visual narrative
- Class meeting (2 hours): art of the ancient theater: performance and representation
- Guest lecturer: Mary Hart, Associate Curator, The J. Paul Getty Museum
- Individual meeting with BB on research topic

Week Six : Individual projects

- Class meeting (3 hours): 5 x 20 mins presentations + 15 mins discussion each
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- 15-page Final paper due: double-spaced, 15 pages (excluding images and bibliography)

Grades: five weekly assignments: 10 points each, final project and paper: 50 points

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS

The Biography of an Object 3-4 pages, typed, double-spaced

Read Philip Fisher *Art and the Future's Past*, Chapter One. In the beginning of the chapter, Fisher describes the several “lives” of a sword. Choose a Greek or Roman object in the Getty collection. Describe it as succinctly as you can. Then write a history of the object – its “lives” --beginning with its creation in antiquity, its uses, its means of survival, discovery, and eventual presence in the museum.

Although this is obviously a work of fiction, the first “lives” of the object can be researched fairly well. Cite your sources. Later “lives” may be more speculative, but whatever you suggest should lie in the realm of possibility.

Comparison of Objects in Two Different Media Representing the Same Subject 3-4 pages, typed, double-spaced

Choose two Greek or Roman objects (made between the 8th century BCE and 4th century CE) in the galleries that depict the same subject. Note down the relevant information from the “tombstone label” and briefly, but precisely, describe each object (a paragraph or two). (*Note:* each object poses different questions. Some may require identification (i.e. who was Briseis?); others that are fragmentary may need to be imagined whole. Part of the exercise is that *you* decide what is important to ask and find out about the object.) How do the two representations compare? Be prepared to talk about your objects in the gallery for 10 minutes.

Visual Narrative on a Greek Vase 3-4 pages, typed, double-spaced

Begin by describing the vessel: its shape, size, function (see Beazley Archive). Briefly describe the figural composition, noting the placement of the figures on the vase. Do they adhere to or ignore the shape of the vessel? What do the figures look like? What seems to be going on? Is the effect quiet, lively? Do research to see if you can find out more about the moment. Why might the vase painter have shown the story or situation in this way?

John Boardman, *The History of Greek Vases* (2001)

H.A. Shapiro, *Myth into Art: Poet and Painter in Classical Greece* (1994)

Thomas Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece: A Handbook* (1991)