



European Primitivism

Course description

This course examines artistic production in Europe during the long nineteenth century (ca. 1789-1914) that demonstrates an interest in the myriad manifestations of “the primitive.” We will also investigate the nature of cultural exchange between European cultures and other nations during this period in order to understand structures of power and the ideologies fueling these exchanges. Students will also engage with the most critical period texts and current scholarship dealing with these themes, with particular attention given to issues of race, class, and gender.

Course Goals and Objectives

Students will gain an in-depth understanding of colonial power relations throughout the long nineteenth century, as well as of the foundational art objects that attest to encounters with the “primitive.”

Some of the skills students will gain in this course include:

- a foundation in the artistic production of this period
- a firm grasp of the central issues and debates in current scholarship devoted to nineteenth and early twentieth-century European primitivism
- increased capacity for visual literacy and formal analysis
- an enhanced ability to read, discuss, and write critically about the art within its appropriate contexts

Assignments

Readings and reading responses:

There is no standard textbook for this course. Instead, course reading will draw from a variety of period texts and current scholarship. This will be a reading-intensive and discussion-based course. Students will complete all course readings before attending class. Once a week, students will also submit a brief (~300 word) response summarizing the arguments of select readings.

Research paper and presentation:

Over the course of the semester, you will research one art object produced during the nineteenth century by a non-western culture. Your research paper (~10 pages, double spaced, standard font) will discuss the purpose of function of the object, its role in society, and its aesthetics. You will also provide three annotations summarizing existing scholarship performed on your object. Finally, you will conclude with the insights you gained into the culture that produced your object. At the end of the semester, you will give a ten-minute presentation in which you present a condensed version of your research to your peers.

Schedule

Week 1

1.1 What is Primitivism?

Marc Antliff and Patricia Leighton, "Primitive" in R. Shiff and R.S. Nelson's *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992) 170-84

1.2 Ctd.

Hal Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," *October*, Vol. 34 (Autumn, 1985): 45-70.

Week 2

2.1 Orientalism

Selections from Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

2.2 Encountering the Orient

Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient"

Mary Roberts, "Gérôme in Istanbul," *Reconsidering Gérôme*, eds. Scott Allen and Mary Morton (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2010): 119-34.

Francois Bernier *Travels in the Mogul Empire* (excerpts)

Gerard de Nerval *Journey to the Orient* (excerpts)

Week 3

3.1 Orientalism, revisited

Homi Bhaba, "The "Of Mimicry and Man" in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 115-131.

Deborah Cherry, "The 'Worlding' of Algeria in Nineteenth-century British Feminism" in *Orientalism's Interlocutors* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002): 103-30.

3.2 Ctd.

William Greenwood and Lucien de Guise, eds. *Inspired by the East: How the Islamic World Influenced Western Art*, exh. cat. The British Museum, 2019.

Week 4

4.1 Japonisme

Alice Y. Tseng, "Kuroda Seiki's *Morning Toilette* on Exhibition in Modern Kyoto," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (Sep., 2008): 417-440

Max Put, "Notes d'un bibeloteur au Japon" (English translation) in *Plunder and pleasure: Japanese art in the West, 1860-1930* (Leiden: Hotei, 2000) 43-72.

4.2 Ctd.

Elisa Evett, "The late nineteenth-century European critical response to Japanese art: primitivist leanings," *Art History* 6.1 (March 1983) 82-106.

Aileen Tsui, "Whistler's *La princess du pays de la porcelaine*: Painting Re-Oriented," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 9.2 (Autumn 2010).

Week 5

5.1 Universal Expositions

Lynn E. Palermo, "Race and the postcolonial city. Identity under construction: representing the colonies at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889" in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of race in France*, Sue Peabody and Tyler Edward Stovall, eds. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

5.2 Ctd.

Ashley Kerr, "From Savagery to Sovereignty: Identity, Politics, and International Expositions of Argentine Anthropology," *A Journal of the History of Science Society*, Vol. 108, No. 1 (March 2017)

Week 6

6.1 The Scramble for Africa

Selections from Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*

Selections from John Atkinson Hobson, *Imperialism*

6.2 The Dark Continent

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (part I)

Week 7

7.1 The Dark Continent Ctd.

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (part I)

7.2 The Center Cannot Hold

Selections from Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Week 8

8.1 Primitivism and the Avant-Garde

Gil Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern'" in C. Harrison et al, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction* (NewHaven: Yale UP, 1993), pp. 3-85.

8.2 Ctd.

Griselda Pollock and Fred Orton, "*Les données bretonnantes: La prairie du représentation*"

Patricia Leighton, "The White Peril and *L'art nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism and Anticolonialism," *Art Bulletin* 72.4 (1990): pp. 609-30.

Week 9

9.1 French Primitivism: Expressionism and Cubism

Gill Perry, "Gender and the Fauves: Flirting with 'wild beasts'," in *Art of the Avant-Gardes*, eds. Steve Edwards and Paul Wood (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), pp.63-83.

9.2 Ctd.

Roger Benjamin, "Orientalism, modernism and indigenous identity," *Art of the Avant-Gardes*, eds. Steve Edwards and Paul Wood (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004): 84-107.

Week 10

10.1 Primitivism at MoMA

William Rubin, et al. "Introduction," *'Primitivism' in 20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984): 1-82.

10.2 Ctd.

Thomas McEvelley. "Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief: 'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984," *Artforum*

Hal Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art, or White Skin Black Masks," *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (1998): 181-210, 228-31.

Week 11

11.1 Case Study: Paul Gauguin as M. Primitive

Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits, 1888-1893: Gender and the Color of Art History* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1992).

11.2 Ctd.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 312-29.

Stephen F. Eisenman, *Gauguin's Skirt*, "Introduction," New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997.

Week 12

12.1 German Expressionism

Excerpts from Marc, Macke, Nolde, in *Primitivism and twentieth-century art*, eds. Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch (Los Angeles: University of California, 2003) 47-53.

Nietzsche, excerpts from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Worringer, excerpts from *Abstraction and Empathy*

12.2 Russian Expressionism

Sarah Warren, "Spent Gypsies and Fallen Venuses: Mikhail Larionov's Modernist Primitivism," *Oxford Art Journal* 26.1 (2003): 25-44.

Week 13

13.1 Naïve Art and Popular Culture

Roger Shattuck, "Henri Rousseau: Object Lesson for Modern Art," *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885-World War I*: 45-112.

13.2 Ctd.

Robert Goldwater, "The Modern Primitives" and "The Child Cult" in *Primitivism in Modern Art*

James Smalls, "'Race' as Spectacle in Late-Nineteenth-Century French Art and Popular Culture," *French Historical Studies* 26.2 (Spring 2003): 351-82.

Week 14-15 Presentations