

Fine Arts in Central Europe: Themes and Motifs

Lecturer: Dr. Adéla Muchová

Course Description:

This course offers a curated journey through the history of human consciousness, with Prague's fine arts as our guiding light. Rather than dry chronology, we journey from the macro to the micro, tracing the artist's gaze as it evolved from the divine medieval representations to the internal, emotional world of the modern individual. Through classwork and visits to galleries and sites, we begin by analyzing the foundations of reality—the city as a canvas and the body as a sacred vessel. We witness a transition from theological symbolism to sociological realism. By examining the elite power structures that shaped perspective and patronage, we arrive at the emergence of internal worlds in which painting becomes a mirror of the human psyche. This course not only fosters academic analysis but also inspires students to engage in meaningful self-reflection throughout their study abroad experience.

Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

Students will map the thematic landscape of Central European art history, exploring how core motifs—from Gothic symbolism and Mannerist allegory to Baroque drama and Romantic inner worlds—reappeared and transformed from the 14th to the 19th centuries. To enrich this foundation, the class will engage in a contextual study of other regions, examining how these artistic developments intersected with broader European movements. Students will connect these key themes to their own experiences, drawing on Prague's vibrant art history to better understand how they interact with external influences and foster personal growth.

Course Requirements:

The course is available to all students without any specific prerequisites. Weekly sessions include presentations, discussions, and visits to galleries and related sites. Students are expected to actively participate in discussions and site visits and engage with assigned study materials. Course assignments include a presentation, a mid-term test, and a final project.

Grading Policy:

Class participation	20%
Presentation	20%
Mid-term test	30%
Final project	30%

Mandatory Completion Policy

Note that all mandatory assignments and exams must be completed to the best of your ability in order for your final grade to be issued. Failure to complete a mandatory assignment or exam may result in a failing grade.

AEP Academic Integrity Policy

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description
A+	97-100	Excellent Work
A	93-97	Outstanding Work
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good work
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Acceptable Work
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	Work that is significantly below average
D	63-66	
D-	60-62	
F	0-59	Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not tolerated. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the development of knowledge and learning is encouraged at many stages of the learning process. While we value technology for educational purposes, we also value originality and the retainment of knowledge, and thus using AI for assignments and examinations, even if rephrased, is strictly prohibited and considered an academic integrity violation, unless the instructor explicitly allows for it in the context of evaluated work

AEP Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy

The AEP program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristics, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

AEP Diversity Policy

AEP is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming community that values diversity in all its forms. We believe that one of the most meaningful lessons of studying abroad is learning to navigate and appreciate differences with curiosity and an open mind. While engaging across differences can sometimes be challenging or uncomfortable, these moments are essential for growth and learning. We recognize that every member of our community, even with the best intentions, may occasionally make missteps. Our commitment is to provide a supportive environment where respectful and honest dialogue helps us learn from these experiences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and broaden their perspective.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

CEE Introductory Lecture Series

AEP Introductory Lecture Series

Week 2

Art in Context

Themes	Disciplinary framework for exploring European art history and reading fine arts. Overview of course topics, study resources, and assignments
Field visit	Stained-glass windows and mosaics

Week 3

Generations: Madonna of Veveří by Master of Vyšší Brod

Themes	Maternal iconography, lineage and ancestry, birth and creation myths
Field visit	Infant Jesus of Prague Church

Week 4

Spirituality: The Třeboň Altarpiece by Master of Třeboň

Themes	Ritual and devotion, mysticism and transcendence, sacred space
Field visit	National Gallery – Medieval Art in Bohemia and Central Europe, Convent of St Agnes of Bohemia

Week 5

Body: Adam and Eve by Lucas Cranach

Themes	Anatomy and idealization, gendered bodies, the medicalized body
Field visit	Church of Our Lady before Týn

Week 6

Celebration: A Lady on a Swing by Norbert Grund

Themes	Festivals and public gatherings, ritual celebrations, everyday joy
Field visit	National Gallery – Old Masters I, Schwarzenberg Palace

Week 7

Suffering: St John of Nepomuk by Petr Brandl

Themes	Heroic suffering, violence and spectatorship, martyr iconography
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Field visit Lesser Town and St Cajetan Church

Week 8

Mortality: The Last Judgment by Martino Rota

Themes Vanitas symbolism, memento mori, wars and catastrophes

Field visit St Ignatius Church

Mid-term test

Week 9

Politics: Habsburg Frescos by Abraham and Izaak Godijn

Themes Colonialism and empire, propaganda and censorship,
resistance and revolution

Field visit Prague City Gallery -Troja Palace

Week 10

Landscape: Forest Interior by Julius Mařák

Themes Nature as sublime, pastoral ideal, cosmological landscapes

Field visit Old Town and Prague Astronomical Clock

Week 11

The City: A Merry Musical Company by Dirc Hals

Themes Urban lifestyle, alienation and anonymity, classes and professions

Field visit National Gallery – Old Masters II, Sternberg Palace

Week 12

Identity: Self-portrait with Father by Josefina Mařáková

Themes Portrait and power, self-fashioning, collective identity

Field visit St Joseph Church

Final Projects due

Week 13

Memory: The Seamstress by Josef Mánes

Themes Personal and collective memory, memory and materiality

Conclusion, remarks, and evaluation

Readings:

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin, 2008.

Boehm, Barbara Drake, and Jiří Fajt (eds). *Prague: The Crown of Bohemia, 1347-1437*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005.

Gombrich, Ernst. *The Story of Art*. Phaidon, 1995.

Petrasová, Taťána, and Rostislav Švácha (eds.). *Art in the Czech Lands 800-2000*. Prague: Arbor Vitae: 2017.

Royt, Jan. *Medieval Painting in Bohemia*. University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Stokstad, Marilyn, and Michael W. Cothren. *Art: A Brief History*. Pearson, 2019.