

FINE ARTS

SURVEY OF WESTERN ART

Required texts:

Gardner's Art through the Ages, 12th ed., 2005

In the course of the year, we will be covering nearly 33,000 years of art from the western tradition. To get through all of the material by the end of the year, you will have to get a head start during the summer. The following reading is **required**:

- 1) "Introduction" in *Gardner's Art through the Ages*, 12th ed., pp. 1-13. As you read, make notes and record questions that occur to you in a **response notebook**—this will be an important tool in class. Also, begin making **flash cards of art terminology**, with a word or phrase on one side of the card and the definition on the other. (Note: Your vocabulary cards must be handwritten; you will not learn the terms if you simply cut and paste them from the Internet. Record the words and meanings as you read and use the glossary at the back of *Gardner's*.) **I will collect your packet of cards, and you will need your notebook for class discussion, on the first day of class.** Take both of these assignments seriously—they will be very helpful to you in preparing for exams throughout the year.
- 2) On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions:
 - a. List five major questions that art historians ask when assessing a work of art.
 - b. What is the difference between *form* and *composition*?
 - c. What is the difference between *mass* and *volume*?
 - d. Define the following architectural terms: *plan*, *section*, *elevation*
 - e. What is the significance of context in the study of art history?
 - f. Why is the establishment of a correct chronological sequence important to art historians?
 - g. What is iconography and what are its functions in art-historical study?
- 3) I will collect your homework on the first day of class. Be sure your work is complete and your answers are legible.
- 4) Read *Girl in Hyacinth Blue* by Susan Vreeland (ISBN 014029628X) Penguin paperback, Oct. 2000. This is a quick read, but it has much to say about art, the importance of a single painting, and what makes it a thing of beauty for its owner. Be sure to make cards for any terminology you might need to know and record your reflections in your notebook. Also, answer the 10 questions below and **think** about the four essay prompts, which we will use for class discussion during the first week of class (and perhaps for an in-class essay).

When the semester begins, you will be tested on all of the assigned reading. All homework is due on the first day of class. Survey of Western Art is a fairly intensive course that requires a great deal of reading to cover a tremendous amount of material—**you must stay on track**. (If you have time, it will serve you well to read more than the assigned reading, taking notes and making flash cards as you go.)

Students who do not complete the summer reading and assignments by the first day of class or who fail the test on the summer material may be dropped from the course. We will be discussing the material in detail, using the notes and reflections you have recorded in your notebooks as the basis for our discussions. **I will collect your notebooks at the end of the first class.**

I. Short answer (please type your answers on a separate sheet of paper)

1. What does *Girl in Hyacinth Blue* suggest about the value (personal and monetary) and function/purpose of art?
2. How does art serve us? Why do we need it?

3. How does the painting function for each character?
4. What actually happened to the painting? Does it matter that the final outcome is not shown on scene?
5. In the end, does it matter whether or not the painting is a Vermeer? To whom does it matter and to whom is it irrelevant, and what does it say about their characters?
6. What does the book have to say about the joys and difficulties of being an artist?
7. What is gained by presenting the stories in reverse chronology? What is lost in this structure?
8. Discuss the range and significance of the last line.
9. Do you feel the author is focusing more on the role of art or the nature of life?
10. Where does the novel touch on the tragic? the triumphant?

II. Think about the following issues. Come to class prepared to discuss them enthusiastically (you may want to record some ideas in your notebook, so that you don't forget them by the time summer is over). You will not be submitting your answers separately, so you may record your ideas as bullet points or short notes. At least initially, these responses are only for you, to help you engage the book and be able to discuss important issues from it in class. Your notes may serve as the basis for an in-class essay, so make them work for you.

1. Give three examples of human cruelty found in the stories. How does each one play upon the others, and how does art play a role in each one (if at all)?
2. The painting seems to have a different effect on each of the owners. Name the effects, and speculate why the painting brings out different qualities in different people. Who loved the painting the most? Defend your choice.
3. Analyze the moral choices made in the novel. On what were they based? Given the situations and the characters, were they good choices? the best that could have been made? [e.g., Cornelius' treatment of his father; Cornelius' decision about what to do with the painting; Saskia's use of the seed potatoes; Aletta's killing one baby; Adriaan's giving up the other baby; Vermeer continuing to paint rather than taking a wage-earning job; Magdalena taking money from her husband's strongbox to buy the painting]
4. Examine the repeated motifs, phrases, themes, and details used in several stories. How are they used to stitch the individual stories spanning four hundred years into a novel? [e.g., milk, window, blue, potatoes, pigeons, high buildings in flat land]