

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND ART HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

ARH 339N/AMS 325: PAINTING IN AMERICA TO 1860
SPRING 2019

Professor Susan Rather

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prefer mail via Canvas; ARH 339N in subject line

Office: DFA 2.116

Office Hours: T 1:45-2:45, Th 2:30-3:30
& by appt.

Class times: TTh 12:30-1:45 (DFA 2.506)

The syllabus is your contract with me. Read it carefully.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course considers American painting—and the cultural work that paintings perform—from the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries. During the first half of the semester, we'll focus on portraits, the dominant subject in our geographical locus, British colonial North America. Portraits have a great deal to tell us about social, economic, political, and gender and race relations, and excavating those meanings will be our aim. In the early United States, a newly expanded conception of "artist" facilitated greater diversity of painting subjects, from grand historical tableaux to seemingly modest still lifes, both seen as having roles to play in shaping the body politic. By the later 1820s, landscape and genre (scenes of everyday life) had emerged as the clearest and most popular expressions of national identity. Among the shifting identities we engage during the semester, those attached to artists, and specifically American artists, loom largest and constitute a sustained focus throughout this course.

My goal in this course is to help you to expand your capacity to analyze both visual and written materials, a time-consuming process that precludes survey comprehensiveness. Analytical skills require and reward careful cultivation, having much wider application than knowing artists' names, dates, and so on. We will aim for depth and quality of knowledge, rather than mere breadth of "information." The course depends on the participation of active, engaged learners, who take responsibility for themselves.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS CREDIT (VAPA)

This course fulfills the visual and performing arts component of the university core curriculum, addressing four core objectives established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: communication skills, critical thinking skills, teamwork, and social responsibility.

READINGS

Much has been written about American art of the period, but no single text adequately covers the range of material we'll engage this semester or offers a sufficiently rich basis for discussion. So your readings comprise primary sources and essays from periodicals, books, and exhibition catalogues, available online through Canvas, via various other online resources, and in the Fine Arts Library.

The only book I ask you to acquire for the class is Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, useful beyond its nominal subject. The University Co-op Bookstore should have the most recent (11th) edition on hand, but I will accept your use of any edition, which you may be able to find used locally and can certainly find online. Beyond its guidance on paper writing (helpful for anyone taking humanities courses), Barnet offers tips for organizing your thoughts about art in ways generally appropriate to all of your work in this class. Henry M. Sayre's *Writing About Art* addresses the subject at a somewhat more rudimentary level but is also excellent and recommended if you feel at all insecure about visual analysis. Again, you may be able to find copies around town and, without doubt, from online sellers.

I also expect you to use a superb and extensive online writing resource, which the author has offered for fair use: "Reading, Writing, and Researching for History: A Guide for College Students," by Patrick Rael, Bowdoin College <http://www.bowdoin.edu/writing-guides/>

GRADED WORK

Exams would not be pedagogically useful in this class; therefore, there are none.

I've designed reading/writing assignments for most weeks, though you'll have options and need not do them all. This arrangement is to your advantage—assuming you have the discipline to avoid leaving everything to the last minute—because it gives you considerable control of your time. Please be aware that it is *your responsibility* to be on top of what you have or have not done in fulfillment of the course requirements. Details follow. (N.B., assignments in this course do not meet the specific criteria for a Writing Flag.)

SHORT READING/WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (45%)

To promote class discussion and to ensure that you make a solid effort to engage with assigned (usually primary) texts, the course presents a steady sequence of short (300-600 word) reading/writing assignments, each with a well-defined prompt. The fundamental criteria of good to very good (B range) work is that it: follows the prompt, clearly indicates completion of and careful consideration of the assigned text, is plainly written with a minimum of errors (in grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.), and is submitted on time.

Work cannot be accepted after the class date to which it is relevant, since we'll talk about your findings in class. If you haven't managed to complete an assignment on time, you should still come to class to benefit from discussion and because I keep track of attendance, so you can't afford to be cavalier about that.

OPTIONS: While I offer eight of these short assignments, only six count in your final grade. Five of those are required but you may omit two from among three marked “option” on the schedule and prompts. (You may *not* skip the associated class meeting, however.) I strongly caution you against eliminating any assignment without a really good reason (“I don’t feel like it” is not a good reason); reserve the option for when expect to really need it, as when you have an excess of exams/projects that week, are preparing for a job interview, etc. Better yet, do more assignments than you must; I’ll drop lowest grades assuming six are fulfilled.

LONGER READING/WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (30%)

These serve the same end as the preceding group of assignments—to stimulate thought and discussion—but they carry somewhat greater weight. That’s because most engage scholarly writings, which are longer and more obviously challenging than readings for the short assignments (though I urge you not to underestimate those).

OPTIONS: From among four longer assignments, you need only do three. In each half of the semester, one is required and one optional (among those two, you must pick one). The options are clearly indicated in three places: under Assignments in Canvas, on the assignment rubrics, and on the course schedule.

TEAMWORK (15%)

In fulfillment of university requirements for VAPA, there will be four occasions for structured teamwork, each with some individual advance prep in the form of a reading/writing assignment. For the first team exercise, you’ll practice skills of visual and primary source textual analysis that are absolutely critical to this course. The second engages secondary texts and unfolds over two days, with an informal team presentation at the end. For the third, you’ll take on the personae of historical artists to debate art world issues of the 1830s (informed by previously completed scholarly readings), anchored by a notable pair of paintings. The fourth will take place in the Blanton Museum.

SPEAKING IN CLASS/PARTICIPATION (10%)

Each and every class meeting affords opportunities to speak. Completed assignments will prepare you for some of that, though our conversations will not be limited to them. If you speak readily and often, be aware that I will likely ask you to hold back to allow others to enter the discussion; you’re on my radar as a participant, so don’t worry. **And note:** quality of participation counts more than quantity. “Quality” does not mean being “right”; it means being thoughtful and willing to stretch your thinking, especially when encouraged to do so.

CANVAS SET UP

Announcements – check regularly

Syllabus – syllabus & class schedule **READ!** + course summary (due dates in order)

Assignments – prompts for all graded work

Modules – class schedule, various writing guidelines

People – all class members & teams once constituted

IMAGE SOURCES/LIBRARY RESOURCES

Class discussion will center on works of art. Key images are available online, though [DASE \(Digital Archive Services\)](#). DASE is a UT-generated resource accessible through the Databases heading on the UT Library home page and it requires your UT EID and password. I suggest you bookmark the site.

I have set up an image bank for this class. While it won't include all the works I show, it does provide easy access to some of the most important examples. From the DASE homepage, click on "Public/Shared Sets" from the menu at the side. You then have two ways to look at the images. Selecting the **set** labeled "Rather-American Painting to 1860" takes you to key works with their data (artist, title, date, collection, size, medium, etc.); you can see them altogether or click on the first image to isolate it and data on your screen (from there, "next" advances through the group). Or, from the first page for the set, clicking **slideshow** at the top will isolate the image against a black background.

You can also search DASE yourself. You might want to do this if you wish to see other works by the same artist or to gain more information about a work for our class than I have provided in the caption (e.g., dimensions, collection, etc.). Your search will yield the best quality images if you limit it to the "Art & Art History Visual Resources Collection" or the "Classics Collection," which are also two of the largest.

Oxford Art Online (via UT Library online) is a terrific resource that consolidates multiple websites for the history of art—notably the formidable scholarly encyclopedia *Grove Art Online*. In addition, I recommend the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* for its maps, art-historical timelines, numerous image slideshows, and thematic essays.'

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS CONDUCT

Having relief from exams and being able to manage your work time is a privilege, but it can have a negative effect on attendance and a related drag on the dynamic of a class that depends on your presence, attention, and participation. Therefore, attendance will be taken starting the second week of the semester.

From that point, we have 28 classes. If you reach 4 absences (15% of class meetings) during the semester, you'll lose five points on your final grade; at 6 (more than 20%), you'll sacrifice 10. With 8 absences, you fail the class, regardless of grades posted. This policy is more generous than some because I don't want to have to make distinctions between "excused" and unexcused absences.

If you have ongoing personal or family emergencies, do yourself a favor and consult Student Services in your College—who will notify all of your instructors of any legitimate extenuating circumstances. A considerable amount of flexibility is authorized and warranted in such cases.

Class conduct: Arrive on time, turn off cell phones and other devices. Computers and other devices are acceptable if used for class purposes.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

Students may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities: 512-471-6259

<http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>

ACADEMIC HONESTY

The ready availability of online information has contributed to an epidemic of plagiarism on college campuses and elsewhere, some of it perhaps unintended—which is not the same as "innocent" (ignorance is no excuse). The University of Texas has clear policies on Academic Integrity, including a concise statement of what constitutes plagiarism

(http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acadint_plagiarism.php) and a more detailed characterization: http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/cwgs/_files/pdf-4/ai2012.pdf

GRADING

Short Reading/Writing Assignments (6 required from 8 options): 45%

Longer Reading/Writing Assignments (3 from 4 options): 30%

Teamwork: 15%

Participation: 10%

No single grade will make or break you, which is good. But do not underestimate the cumulative effect of activities that may seem small on their own. Constant and conscientious application are major virtues in this class. Without them, you cannot do well; with them, you have a firm basis for success.

Final letter grades for the course follow this rubric:

A = 93-100 (UT does not recognize A+); A- = 90-92

B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82

C+ = 77-79; C = 73-76; C- = 70-72

D+ = 67-69; D = 63-66; D- = 60-62

F = 0-59

For a B, your work must (1) demonstrate that that you have applied yourself seriously to assignments and have a good to very good understanding of the material; (2) participate in class discussions; (3) produce clearly written and argued written assignments or show a pronounced upward trajectory from weaker work early in the semester.

To merit an A, you must be more intellectually adventurous and academically rigorous, performing beyond the level required for B. Thus, (1) demonstrate that that you have applied yourself seriously to assignments and exams and have an excellent understanding of the material; (2) contribute substantially and responsibly to class discussions; (3) write with conviction and flair.

C grades fall below the B standard (Ds and Fs are not off the table)