Visual History: The Past in Pictures
Professors Daniela Bleichmar and Vanessa Schwartz
MDA 599, Spring 2017
Doheny Memorial Library 241

Description

Images make history. They document events, preserve memories, allow us to witness at a distance, and move us to act. Images can serve as both records and sources for the writing of history. This graduate seminar investigates the history of “writing” history in images (what Hayden White termed “historiophoty”) from the rise of European print culture circa 1450 to the global spread of digital media in the present, with an emphasis on the Western tradition and experience, including its imperial contexts. By investigating the many ways in which histories have been told with and in images, we aim to contextualize the current ubiquity of visually mediated evidence, documentation, and narrative.

In the age of digital media, the power of images to transmit information in the present and craft accounts about the past appears obvious. That power, however, rests on a series of widely held and sometimes contradictory assumptions, among them: that images can be trusted as evidence if their provenance and accuracy are judged adequate; that images have greater emotional impact than words, but are on their own insufficient to write history and thus serve as illustrations to textual narratives; and that images are more universal and more capable of traversing geographic distances and cultural differences than words, except when impeded by unbreachable culturally-specific interpretive walls. The epistemic work of images, their evidentiary status in relation to words and things, and their perceived value as both historical sources and historical accounts have shifted again and again in the period our seminar examines, as have notions of what “history” itself means.

This graduate seminar will be taught concurrently with the 2016–2017 Mellon Sawyer Seminar of the same title: http://mellonsawyervisualhistory.vsri.org/. The class is structured as a combination of (1) public events with presentations by distinguished invited speakers, followed by a dinner; (2) discussions of assigned readings, limited to graduate students enrolled in the class and the professors; and (3) guided independent
research that will result in a final project.

**Requirements**

Students must (1) attend all meetings indicated in the schedule below; (2) conduct all assigned readings in preparation for each meeting and participate in group discussions (readings are available on the website); (3) post on our website a short response to the readings no later than 8pm the day before the seminar meets (these postings will be password-protected); and (4) complete a final research project. The final project will consist of a short oral presentation and a 25-page paper providing a scholarly analysis of a “visual history.”

**READINGS:** Please note the majority of the readings are available online; each assignment is hyperlinked to the webpage or downloadable PDF file. Please purchase the following books, which we will read on their entirety:


**Grading**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Posts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
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**Schedule**

**Monday, 01/09: Introduction to the Seminar**

3.30–6.30pm

In preparation for this meeting, please look at the following visual histories:

   
   There are many digitized copies; look at this [one](#).
   
   Get a sense of the contents from the [English translation](#) of the text.
   
   If you’d like some background, read this brief and helpful [essay](#); or look at this [website](#).


Readings:


Further Reading:
Reviews of Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images:*

01/16: No Meeting

*Independent Project, Step 1:* Start to consider the “visual history” you will investigate. Please review possible examples in our bibliography.

01/23: Visual History: Methods & Questions

**3.30–6pm: Workshop One**
Keith Moxey: “Art as History/History as Art”
Lynn Hunt: “Visual Images and the Political and Social Unconscious”
Peter Geimer: “Remembrance of Things Past. On Unavoidable Anachronism”

**6.30–8.30pm: Discussion of Readings**


01/30: No Class Meeting

*Independent Project, Step 2:* By 8pm on 01/30, post the title of the visual history on which you will write your final project, a brief (one- to two-paragraph) explanation of why you have selected this object, and at least three key questions you would like to explore through your analysis.


02/06: The 16th & 17th Centuries

**3.30–6pm: Workshop Two**
Peter Miller: “Antiquarianism and Its Images”
Christopher Wood: “The Referential Image”
Evonne Levy “The Council of Trent in Images: Subjects, Audiences and Intermediality”

6.30–8.30pm: Discussion of Readings

   (Optional: read also "Portraits from the Past," 26–79)
   (Optional: read also the introduction, 1–19)

02/13: No Class Meeting

*Independent Project, Step 3:* Preliminary Annotated Bibliography due by 8pm. You need to make sure you are well into “contextualizing” your object and have gathered the appropriate materials to give shape to your paper and presentation. This preliminary annotated bibliography will present your sources, organized, described, and with some notes that will help you begin thinking about how they will support your paper.


02/20: No Class Meeting, President’s Day

*Independent Project, Step 4:* By 8pm, submit a two page, single-spaced summary of your approach to your visual history, sketching what you currently know and why you think it is significant. Make sure you provide a very brief description of what the primary source is, and concentrate on the questions you will be asking and the arguments you will be making.

**02/27: The 18th Century**

**3.30–6pm: Workshop Three**
Darrin McMahon: “Illuminating Time: History and Historicity in the Age of Enlightenment”
Andrew Schulz: “Exoticism and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Visual Culture”

**6.30–8.30pm: Discussion of Readings**

**03/06: No Class Meeting**

*Independent Project, Step 5:* Everyone writes a 5–7 page chunk of what will eventually be a 25 page paper. It does not have to be the start of the paper; it can be any portion of the paper. Each student is part of a group of 4; everyone reads the other group members’ chunks and acts as the official “respondent” to one. Everyone emails their section of text to their group by 5pm on Saturday. Bring a hard copy to your group meeting, which you will have marked up for the authors. Groups meet in locations of their own choosing.

**03/13: Spring Break**

As if! Do lots more independent work.
03/20: The 19th Century

**3.30–6pm: Workshop Four**
Michael Leja: “Politics and Spectacle: Historical Pictures and the Mass Audience in the 19th Century”
Sumathi Ramaswamy: “Empire & History, Interrupted”
Jennifer Tucker: “History as Hot News”


**6.30–8.30pm: Discussion of Readings**

Further Reading:

03/27: No Meeting

*Independent Project, Step 6: Individual Meetings*

04/03: The 20th Century

**3.30–6pm: Workshop Five**

Stephen Bann: “Visual History and The ‘Manufacture of the Past’”

Catherine Clark “Twentieth-Century History: Profession and Pastime”

François Brunet: “What is ‘Social’ about Robert Taft’s ‘Social History’ of American Photography?”

*Please review the case study:* Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene* (New York: Dover, 1938)

**Readings:**

2. Catherine E. Clark, “*Capturing the Moment, Picturing History: Photographs of the Liberation of Paris,*” *American Historical Review*, 121: 3 (June 2016): 824–60

**7–9pm: Special Visions and Voices Event on Visual History**

Amanda Vickery, “From the Classroom to the BBC”

DML 240, Library Lecture Hall

RSVP needed

04/09: Serial Visual Histories

**3.30–6pm, Workshop Six**

Richard Kagan: “Pictorialized History at the Habsburg Spanish Court of Philip IV”

Leonard Folgarait “Series and Narrative in Visual History: Diego Rivera’s National Palace Murals”

Hillary Chute: “History, Witness, Print: Callot, Goya, Spiegelman”

**6.30–8.30pm: Discussion of Readings**


04/17: No Meeting

Independent Project, Step 7: Submit the text and images of your five-minute oral presentation and an annotated outline of the final paper.

04/23 and 4/24: Concluding Symposium

Sunday 04/23 at the Velaslavasay Panorama
3pm Tour of the Panorama
3:45pm Introduction, Daniela Bleichmar and Vanessa Schwartz
4pm Felipe Pereda, “Images' Oblivious Memory. Ancient Funerary Lament and its Afterlife”
5pm Billie Melman, “Ur: Empire, Modernity and the Visualization of Antiquity between the Two World Wars”

Dinner at the Panorama

Monday 04/24 at Doheny Library
9:30am Peter Parshall, “Picturing the Present as History: The Problem of Episodic Narration”
11am Jeremy Melius, “Schlosser’s Photographic Histories”
12pm Lunch
1pm Allan Doyle, “Lithographic History in the Voyages Pittoresques”
2pm Randall Meissen and Aaron Rich
3:30pm Case study presentations by graduate students and general discussion
5:30pm Conference dinner

05/10: Final Papers Due at 5pm via email