

Art History 699: U.S. Murals: 1893-1945

Fall 2012 Wednesdays 4:30 to 7:10 Research Hall Room 202

Prof. Ellen Wiley Todd Robinson B336

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3:00 Wednesdays 12:30-2:00 and by appointment
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Introduction. This course examines publically sponsored murals from two eras: The Gilded Age/Progressive era and the 1930s. Our approach will be that of an exploratory workshop in which we learn together by reading primary and secondary materials and making three trips to major murals in our area. We will ask how murals function as both decoration and ideology, and why they appear at these particular moments in time. We will examine the historiography of mural painting in the context of the ebb and flow of mural popularity. We will think about the continuities and discontinuities between the two periods of mural production, reflecting on terms of conservative and progressive politics—both the politics of art and those of government. And we will think about mural production as embodying different ideas about the role of the artist in society and culture.

The central work of the course is a research paper which may take a variety of different forms—focusing on the artist(s), an individual mural. We will talk about this in our introductory session. To help guide your projects our discussions will focus as much on how our scholars did their research and conceptualized their projects as on their findings.

Required Texts. I have ordered these through the bookstore but also advised you to seek them out online.

Wanda Corn, with Charlene G. Garfinkle and Annelise K. Madsen. *Women Building History: Public Art at the 1893 Columbian Exposition* (University of California Press, 2012)

Karal Ann Marling. *Wall to Wall America: Post Office Murals in the Great Depression*. (Minnesota: 2000)

Barbara Melosh. *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater*. (Smithsonian: 1992)

Sally Promey. *Painting Religion in Public: John Singer Sargent's Triumph of Religion at the Boston Public Library* (Princeton: 2001)

Bailey Van Hook. *The Virgin and the Dynamo: Public Murals in American Architecture* (Ohio Univ Press: 2003)

I have placed a number of additional readings Blackboard (BB) <http://courses.gmu.edu> (see schedule of readings below.)

Course Procedures/Requirements. During our first week of class I will provide a framework, and we will discuss our individual/class final project—basically orchestrating the rest of our class time. This is a reading/discussion/research class requiring the full participation of all class members. It demands active involvement with the material—with its assumptions, its arguments, its conceptual and interpretive frameworks as well as its absences. Engage, challenge, and embrace the readings at multiple levels—for information and interpretive insight. Requirements are as follows:

1. Short Papers: Each of you will write 3 short 3-4-page critical papers on the

readings/mural visits, due in class no later than the week after they appear in the syllabus. Everyone should write on a least one mural visit. (We will take the introductory session to parcel out the paper and presentation topics so that all topics are covered). Sometimes articles or chapters for a week of class will be divided a bit differently. In addition pairs should take a leadership role each week, generating a brief outline of key points covered and questions for discussion beforehand that can be distributed to the class—a 1 or page summary. Short papers will be a critical analysis of a chapter or group of readings—I've suggested topics in the syllabus below and these paper topics are also discussion topics. In general you will attend to the the relation between the thesis and the way a scholar has worked from a set of assumptions, followed particular forms of evidence, or relied on a theory or set of methodologies. PLEASE NOTE. We'll discuss our "discussion approach" the first class.

2. Final Project Paper: This will be a scholarly research project, of your choosing related to mural painting. We'll begin to think about this at our first and second meetings. You may write about a single mural or a small group of murals, or some aspect of an artist who might have been primarily a muralist. Or you may choose to write about some problem of mural painting, thereby engaging with a historiography of critical and historical literature: murals as architectural decoration, murals as art for public edification, murals and allegory, etc. Feel free to pose a topic. REMEMBER: Many of the murals we will see have records at the National archives and the Archives of American Art. This course should be an opportunity to engage with these records BUT many are off site. Start early to figure out the records and to get them ordered for a day you can peruse them.

Your final paper (15-20 pages) should chart your journey through your available materials on your topic, including a full bibliography and notes suggesting both the kinds of conclusions you have been able to draw and areas for additional research. Begin thinking about your topic as soon as possible. I will do a separate handout for this.

3. Participation. This consists of your attendance (mandatory at all sessions except for excused illness), your thoughtful questions and contributions in general discussion and your more formal engagement with material on leadership days and during our final presentations.

I will want to meet with you individually to discuss your projects—only one person should choose to work on a given artist if topics tend that way.

Expectations/Evaluation/Grading. This an upper level graduate seminar for the M.A. in Art History. It will demand more by way of reading, writing, intellectual engagement, participation, and commitment to group goals a combined grad/undergrad course. Classes will vary somewhat depending upon the topic; for most we will engage in in-depth discussions of assigned readings and specific questions; for others we may have an in-class project, working through selected examples with slides. It is essential that you do all assigned reading, attend class every time and participate in class. No one should dominate; all should speak. The presentation format should make this easier OR we may decide we do not need this to be so formal.

The key to success is organization—both weekly and for the entire course. Start the reading for over the weekend. The readings are dense, occasionally difficult. Even "informational" readings require you to assimilate interpretive information; others ask that you read, for lines of argument, assumptions, evidence. Others are more straightforward in their writing.

Honor Code: This is found in the university catalog and applies to this and all other courses. Cheating, plagiarism are expressly forbidden. For quick reference, plagiarism can be defined as: (1) presenting as one's own the words, work, or opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgement or (2) borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgement. Every single "direct" quote must be footnoted, even if you use the author's name in a sentence.

Every sequence of ideas from elsewhere must also be footnoted. I have noticed increasing sloppiness with this latter habit. If you paraphrase an idea from your readings...footnote it. Otherwise it is an honor code violation. All sources must be footnoted, no matter how ephemeral. This includes ALL websites, all museum brochures, all wall panels or label texts in museums. THIS MEANS YOU MUST FOOTNOTE NOT ONLY DIRECT QUOTES BUT ANY PARAPHRASES OF IDEAS, INFORMATION.

<u>Grading:</u>	Participation	30%	
	Attendance/discussion contrib.		10%
	Presentation(s) (10% class 10% project)		20%
	Three Papers	30%	
	Final Project	<u>40%</u>	
	Annot. Bib 10% Paper 30%		
<u>Total</u>		100%	

I use pluses and minuses; my scale is indicated below. You will earn some form of numerical grade so you will always have a clear indication of where you stand. Good papers include a thesis, claims supported by examples, and evidence from relevant readings and images. All written work will be graded on grammar, style, content, organization, and clarity. Spellcheck and proofread all papers before submitting them. I will meet with each of you on research topics, and you should consult with me for any changes.

A+ 100%; A 93-99%; A- 90-92% This is awarded for superior understanding of all concepts and factual material, for superior presentation in written work, imaginative projects that go beyond the assignment, and regular class participation. For surprising me.

B+ 87-89%; B 83-86%; B- 80-82% While B+ indicates above average mastery of the material, clear and well-produced written presentation on all assignments, B is for average work, merely adequate understanding of factual material and merely competent written presentation. B- is hanging on the brink.

C 70-79 This is a failing grade for graduate work if received as a final grade for the course. In order to receive a grade for the course, all work must be completed. PLEASE email me if you find you are struggling and we can work on some problem-solving strategies. If there are problems or if you need a moderate extension because of illness, contact me before the assignment is due. Email is the best resource for all communication.

HELPFUL UNIVERSITY INFORMATION:

OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>

WRITING CENTER: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES “Ask a Librarian”
<http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS): (703) 993-2380;
<http://caps.gmu.edu>

Key Dates for the Course:

Aug. 29	Course Introduction: Getting Organized
Sept 3	Labor Day—NO CLASSES
Sept. 4	Tuesday. Last day to drop with no tuition penalty. <u>Last Day to Add</u>
Sept. 18	Tuesday. Last day to drop with 33% tuition liability
Sept. 19	2:30 PM. Tour of the Murals at the Library of Congress
Sept. 28	Friday. Last day to drop. 67% tuition liability
Oct. 3	3:00 PM Tour of Department of the Interior Murals
Oct. 8	Columbus Day holiday. Monday classes meet Tuesday the 9 th this week
Oct. 24	3:30 to 5:00 PM Tour of US Department of Justice Murals.
Nov. 7	NO CLASS: Reading, Writing, Research
Nov. 21-25	Thanksgiving Break (No Wednesday Class on University Calendar)
Nov. 28	Final Presentations
Dec. 5	Final Presentations
Dec. 12	Final Presentations. <u>Final Project Due</u> NO LATER THAN 1:00 PM Submitted onto Blackboard

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS: Subject to slight modification as we move through the course. BB is for the Folder for this course in Blackboard. (<http://courses.gmu.edu>) Then to course content folder. Several of the JSTOR readings are actually in here. Readings must be completed for the class under which they are listed.

WEEK #1: August 29: Course Introduction/Set Up

Using Van Hook and my introductory materials we will think about the early history of Mural painting, and the questions that arise around these works.

READ: Bailey Van Hook. *The Virgin and the Dynamo: Public Murals in American Architecture, 1893-1917.*

WEEK #2: September 5: Murals at the 1893 World’s Fair: The Women’s Building

READ: Marie Jeannine Aquilino. “The Politics of Public Art in Late 19th-Century France,” *Art Bulletin* 75 (December 1993): 697-712; Wanda M. Corn with Annelise Madsen and Charlene Garfinkle. *Women Building History: Public Art at the 1893 Columbian Exposition.* Read Introduction and chapter 2-4.

WEEK #3: September 12: Art at the Nation’s Library

Here we are preparing for our tour of the LC Murals Next week. We will think About primary documents from the Gilded Age/Progressive era, and a two recent interpretations of the murals by Moore and Madsen. How do they approach their subjects, what do they use as evidence for their arguments?

READ: Blashfield, Edwin Howland. "A Word for Municipal Art." *Municipal Affairs* 3 (December 1899): 582-593. Low, Will H. "National Expression in American Art." *International Monthly* 3 (March 1901): 231-251; Shean, Charles M. "Mural Painting from the American Point of View." *Craftsman* 7 (October 1904): 18-27; Sarah J. Moore, "Our National Monument of Art: Constructing and Debating the National Body at the Library of Congress," *The Library Quarterly* 80 (October 2010) 337-355; and Annelise K. Madsen. "Civic Primer: Mural Painting's New Education at the Library of Congress." *American Art* 26 (Summer 2012): 68-97. All on BB

WEEK #4: September 19

Library Congress Tour of Murals 2:30 PM (arrive 15 minutes early)
Thomas Jefferson Building lower front entrance
Tour lasts 45 Minutes. We'll take some discussion time following

READ: Sarah J. Moore. "In Search of an American Iconography: Critical Reaction to the Murals at the Library of Congress," *Winterthur Portfolio*. 25 (Winter 1990): 231-239; Cutrer, Emily Fourmy. "Negotiating Nationalism, Representing Region: Art, History, and Ideology at the Minnesota and Texas Capitols." In *Redefining American History Painting*. Ed. Patricia M. Burnham and Lucretia Hoover Giese. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 277-293; and Weinberg, H. Barbara. "American 'High' Renaissance: Bowdoin's Walker Art Building and Its Murals." In *The Italian Presence in American Art, 1860-1920*. Ed. Irma B. Jaffe. New York: Fordham University Press, 1992. 121-132. All on BB. NOTE. The last two readings will really figure in Next Week's discussion.

WEEK #5: September 26: Gilded Age/Progressive Era Murals: Other Case Studies
This week we will examine an altogether different set of murals with new questions
About religion, mural content, the state, and the University.

READ: Sally M. Promey. *Painting Religion in Public: John Singer Sargent's Triumph of Religion at the Boston Public Library* (Princeton: 2003) and a discussion of the Cutrer and Weinberg articles.

WEEK #6: October 3: Walls in Federal Buildings I: The 1930s
United States Department of the Interior Mural Tour 3:00 PM with Diana Ziegler
Meet at the lobby inside the C Street entrance (between 18th and 19th St NW).

READ: Handout, A Guide to New Deal Art Programs (Something from the Dept. of the Interior on these Murals TBD); Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz. "New Deal for Public Art," in
Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster. *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy* (HarperCollins, 1992): 128-141; Erika Doss, "Between Modernity and the "Real Thing" Maynard Dixon's Mural for The Bureau of Indian Affairs,"
American Art 18 (Fall 2004): 8-31. All on BB

WEEK #7: October 10: Mural Process/Mural Fervor
Understanding New Deal Organizations/ Processes in Mural Decoration.
Looking at an Early Instance of Exhibiting Murals for the Public.

READ: A. Joan Saab. *For the Millions: American Art and Culture Between the Wars*, (U of Penn Press 2004): 1-53 (Intro and Ch. 1); Margaret Breuning, "Tendencies in Mural

Decoration,” International Studio 82 (Oct-Dec 1925): 173-179. Wanda Corn, “Painting Big: O’Keeffe’s Manhattan,” American Art 20 (Summer 2006): 22-25; Handout, A Guide to New Deal Art Programs; (Readings on MoMA’s Early exhibition on the Mural TBD). All on BB

WEEK #8: October 17: Post Office Murals and the 48-States Competition

READ: Karel Ann Marling: Wall to Wall America: A Cultural History of Post Office Murals in the Great Depression.
For Class Discussion: Workshopping the Internet, the Current Fate of Post Office Murals

WEEK #9: October 24: Walls in Federal Buildings II: The 1930s and Justice Tour of Murals 3:30 to 5:00 PM at the Department of Justice
More Information about where to meet will follow

READ: Handout on the Department of Justice Murals. (Critical Responses TBD)

WEEK #10: October 31: Gender and Politics in New Deal Mural Painting

READ: Andrew Hemingway “Communist Artists and the New Deal (2): From the People’s Front to The Democratic Front,” 147-176 on BB; Barbara Melosh: Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater (Read the sections in Each chapter on the murals; the rest is optional. Read the full understanding For her methodology.

WEEK #11: November 7
NO CLASS: Reading, Research, Writing

WEEK #12: November 14: Murals, Labor, the Left and Anti-Left
This week a series of readings followed by my presentation on Ernest Fiene’s “History of the Needlecraft Industry” A Historian and an Art Historian talk about the Pittsburg Murals.

READ: We will think again about some of the labor imagery we’ve read and considered.
Background: Review, Andrew Hemingway “Communist Artists and the New Deal (2): From the People’s Front to The Democratic Front,” 147-176; Case Studies: Anthony W. Lee. “Workers and Painters: Social Realism and Race in Diego Rivera’s Detroit Murals,” in *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere*, ed. Alejandro Anreus, Diana L. Linden and Jonathan Weinberg (Penn State, 2006): 201-220; Sarah Moore, “Pausing in Pittsburgh: Constructing Social Cohesion at the Carnegie Institute, 1905-1908,” 73-92 in *John White Alexander and the Construction of National Identity: Cosmopolitan American Art, 1880-1915*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003; and Edward Slavishak, “Introduction,” and Chapter 3, “The Working Body as a Civic Image,” in *Bodies of Work: Civic Display and Labor in Industrial Pittsburg* (Duke, 2008): 1-15 and 89-148.

November 21: NO CLASS (OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY CALENDAR) Thanksgiving Break

WEEK #13: November 28: FINAL PRESENTATIONS I

WEEK #14: December 5: FINAL PRESENTATIONS II

WEEK #15: December 12 (exam period) FINAL PRESENTATIONS III
With something social and celebratory attached