



Introduction to American Art

Bonita Billman

Thursdays, February 20 to March 20, 2025 – 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. ET

Contact the speaker: billmanb@georgetown.edu

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VOCABULARY

alla prima—(It.)—at first attempt—painting wet in wet

animalier—(Fr.)—a painter or sculptor who specializes in realistically depicting animals

anno aetatis suae—(Lat.)—in the year of his/her age, e.g. A.E. 21

carte-de-visite—CdV—a small 2.5x4in) format photographic calling card

daguerreotype—an early form of positive photograph. Exposed in a camera obscura and developed in mercury vapors, each polished silvered copper plate is a unique photograph of extraordinary detail and three-dimensionality

direct carving—a sculptural philosophy which declares that the material should be directly approached and the inherent properties of the raw material should remain apparent in the finished work

egg tempera painting—ground pigment mixed with egg yolk binder and water

folk art—art made by untrained ordinary people for ordinary American customers

genre painting—a painting of a scene of everyday life e.g. street vendors, a Fourth of July celebration, knitting by the fireside, wheat harvest etc

genres in painting—Different types of painting were codified as a hierarchy in the 17th century as (in descending order of importance) history painting, portraits, genre scenes, landscapes, animals and still life

gouache—(Fr.)--opaque watercolor; the British term is bodycolour

Grand Manner—portraiture in the Grand Manner has an elegance, dignity and even swagger, reflecting the sitter's status and social standing, often at full-length and with classical or Old Master allusions. Sometimes also used in reference to History paintings in a "grand style" (as Reynolds put it).

grisaille—(Fr.)—a painting done in shades of grey

hispanism—the rage for all things Spanish (Bullfights! Flamenco!) and Spanish art especially Velazquez, Goya and Murillo

history painting—from the Italian istoria—that is, story—the term was introduced in the 17th century to describe paintings with subject matter drawn from classical history, religious subjects, mythology, and allegory—subjects which moralized and edified the viewer. Later, history painting included more recent historical subjects e.g. The Death of General Wolfe or Washington crossing the Delaware.

japonisme—(Fr.)—the rage for all things Japanese (Asian, really)

kit-cat—a portrait type invented by Godfrey Kneller in which the format of head, torso and one hand in a size approx. 28x36in; larger than the usual 30 x 25 inches; the size encouraged a wider variety of poses

limner—literally "drawer"—a painter, originally a painter "in small" (miniature painter); used in American art for a painter whose name is unknown; e.g. the Freake Limner

luminism—a 19th century interest in atmosphere and light effects in landscape and marine painting

magic realism—in art, realism with some fantastical element that belies the realism

marine—seascape

miniature—a painting in small, in watercolor on vellum, card or ivory

momento mori—a symbol reminding the viewer of his mortality

mourning picture—a memorial picture commemorating a deceased person, usually done in needlework or watercolor

nocturne—a night view, usually a landscape

pastel—a colored chalk used for drawing, and the resultant color drawing

pendant pair—a pair of portraits in the same scale, intended to hang together, side by side. Traditionally the female portrait was on the man's sinister (left) side

photorealism—detailed visual representation, like that obtained in a photograph, in a nonphotographic medium like painting.

Pictorialism—photography manipulated to greater resemble fine art, using soft focus effects etc

Precisionism—a style of painting marked by the abstraction of forms into planar elements

Regionalism—American painting of specific rural genre subjects. Our great regionalists include Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton

replica—a copy an artist makes of his own work, e.g. Gilbert Stuart's many replicas of George Washington

reproductive print—a print reproducing (albeit in black and white) the painting of another artist e.g. a Valentine Greene print of a Joshua Reynolds portrait

silhouette—a drawn or cut-paper representation of a person, black on white

silkscreen—a printmaking process made very famous by Andy Warhol in which stencils on silk frameworks make up the image, one screen pulled for each color

Social realism—art movement associated with the era of the Great Depression in the US (roughly the 1930s), that depicted the everyday realities of life. Social realism (in multiple mediums) was critical of the social, economic, and racial conditions that made life challenging for the working classes and poor.

stereograph—a double photograph presented so that an observer looking through a stereoscope sees a single image in three dimensions.

tenebrism—(It.)--a style of painting using very pronounced contrasts of light and shadow for dramatic effect and the darkness becomes a dominate feature of the image.

Tonalism—a style of painting landscape (usually) marked by a limited neutral palette and soft atmosphere.

trompe l'oeil—French term meaning “trick the eye”—a painting or other work of art designed to fool the viewer aka a deception.

vanitas symbol—a symbol reminding the viewer of the fragility and temporality of life and the futility of gathering wealth

wet-in-wet—technique in painting esp. watercolor where one color is painted over another while both are fluid