

Academic Programs

*Teaching and learning with collections
of the Allen Memorial Art Museum*



Allen Memorial
Art Museum

Oberlin College



Teaching in the galleries

TEACHING AT THE ALLEN MEMORIAL ART MUSEUM

The Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM) is founded on the belief that the study and appreciation of original works of art is an indispensable part of an Oberlin education. The museum's encyclopedic holdings chronicle virtually the entire history of art in a wide variety of cultures, allowing faculty members and students from many disciplines to learn from high-quality, original artworks.

This active educational role on campus is supported by the Office of Academic Programs, which facilitates the use of the collection as a teaching tool and the galleries as a learning site. The museum maximizes its capacity to engage deeply and effectively with the curriculum through a vibrant program of teaching exhibitions, class visits, museum-based courses, student assistantships, faculty workshops, publications, and curriculum development grants.

This brochure presents examples of productive collaboration between art museum staff members and the faculty and students at Oberlin College to encourage fluidity between disciplines and lead to new ways of using the collection. Also provided is an overview of models developed by the AMAM for teaching with art.

I remember engagement being affected by the actual material presence of the artwork in front of them. Those works "spoke back" to them and almost became animate beings in front of their eyes. I like to bring students out of the classroom and into other venues so that they can think about other places that can function like classrooms.

— Grace An, Associate Professor of French/ Cinema Studies

Academic Programs

Recognizing the relevance of the collection to all academic disciplines, in 1990 the museum established a curatorial position to conduct faculty outreach. Not long after, the AMAM received two substantial grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's College and University Art Museum Program, enhancing its commitment to providing greater access to the collection. Having a staff member in this role has changed the culture and scope of museum outreach, as well as the way faculty members from non-art disciplines approach their subjects, syllabi, and class assignments. In 2008, the museum received a third grant from the Mellon Foundation, this one to permanently endow academic programs at the AMAM.



YEVHEN GULENKO

Scope of Outreach

Each semester, the AMAM welcomes approximately 3,000 students in conjunction with 150 or more class visits to the galleries and the Wolfgang Stechow Print Study Room. The museum hosts almost all college departments, from Africana studies, biology, cinema studies, and classics to neuroscience, religion, Russian, theater, and dance. In the conservatory, faculty members from historical performance, musicology, music theory, and TIMARA (technology in music and related arts) have all used the collection as a key component of their teaching.

Class visits place students in firsthand conversations with objects—a valuable opportunity that complements other ways in which Oberlin students learn from primary sources, such as lab sessions, textual analysis, and guided research projects. Encounters with original works of art need no previous knowledge or experience; rather, they allow faculty members and students to slow down, cue into their emotions, practice deep attention, and discover new perspectives and modalities for both teaching and learning.

Each class visit to the museum aims to strengthen students' visual literacy skills through exercises in close looking and visual analysis. The museum fosters a fresh learning environment in which artworks offer new ways to engage all students, even those who rarely participate in classroom discussions.

Associate Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry Catherine Oertel (right) and two students discuss a small bronze sculpture by Henry Moore in the museum's Wolfgang Stechow Print Study Room.



Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471–1528), *Abduction of Proserpina* (detail), 1516, etching. Gift of the Max Kade Foundation, 1968.81

TEACHING MODELS

While AMAM collections are utilized for learning in many ways, faculty members and museum staff frequently use five distinct models for teaching with art and for encouraging specific thinking dispositions. Often, two or three are combined in a single visit.

Model 1: Visual Literacy

Learning how to look actively and critically enhances understanding and prepares students to better navigate the complex visual environment of the 21st century. Faculty members often request sessions that focus exclusively on teaching students how to observe, describe, analyze, and interpret images. Exercises in active seeing can teach students that their individual insights are valid when supported by concrete visual details. This model also encourages students to use visual forms of evidence in learning and research beyond the museum, such as in papers, oral presentations, other course assignments, or in their extracurricular activities.

English and comparative literature classes that engage in close readings of texts—stressing the importance of form and structure in the construction of meaning—use AMAM artworks to learn and practice not only how to “read” art, but also how to transform a private, visual experience into a verbal one that can be readily communicated.

A class on the poetry of love and seduction in the Renaissance examined Albrecht Dürer’s 1516 etching *Abduction of Proserpina* not only for subject matter but also to establish that the drama is conveyed stylistically through agitated, swirling, and densely hatched lines that heighten the ominous atmosphere and tension of this forceful encounter.



A Closer Look: Topics in Medicine and Health Care

Professor of Neuroscience Lynne Bianchi's course *Topics in Medicine and Health Care*, which enrolls juniors and seniors interested in medical careers, visits the museum to hone students' ability to interpret visual data and to encourage them to think about the medical profession and its rich historical, cultural, and religious dimensions. In one museum activity, students work in small groups to examine Chinese photographer Hai Bo's diptych *Three Sisters*, which comprises two photographs (above) of the sisters taken several decades apart. Students are asked to identify, using only visual clues, which sister is missing in the later photograph. This exercise typically yields more than one hypothesis; each group defends their ideas and challenges the findings of other groups by posing questions or pointing out inaccuracies and ambiguities. The exercise increases a student's awareness of how often assumptions, not facts, guide understanding or interpretation.

Three Sisters, a 1999 work by Chinese artist Hai Bo, is often the focus of exercises that sharpen students' visual acuity and evidential reasoning. Ruth C. Roush Contemporary Art Fund, 2001.6 A-B

Much like working in a lab, museum visits are hands on. They require active problem solving and teamwork. They push students of any discipline to consider the importance of continually asking questions, of approaching questions from different angles, and of understanding the interconnectivity of everything we do.

— Lodewijk Kuijpers '15, double major, neuroscience and studio art



Gaspard Dughet (French, 1615–75), *Classical Landscape with Waterfalls*, ca. 1655, oil on canvas. R. T. Miller Jr. Fund, 1945.34

Model 2: Art as Cultural Context

Art is often integrated into a course to provide a broader cultural context for a particular period or a specific locale. Introducing students to visual culture as part of a social or historical moment can aid understanding of the course material. For example, a French seminar on the culture of Louis XIV's Versailles as seen through contemporary literature is supplemented by key artworks, such as Gaspard Dughet's *Classical Landscape with Waterfalls* (above), which illustrate contemporary artistic genres, including political propaganda and royal portraiture.

Conservatory classes that study the music of different countries often focus on the intersections between musical and visual artistic expression, as well as issues of patronage, display, and social and political influences. Courses in historical performance utilize the collection to develop a comprehensive understanding of these disparate topics.

I wanted students to gain a better sense of 18th-century culture. Visual art—for example works by Hogarth—conveys all kinds of information about a historical period that literature conveys with more difficulty: how people dressed, what domestic interiors looked like, how social class was written into bodily appearance, the nature of public and private spaces, how people thought about “nature.”

— Laura Baudot, Associate Professor of English



Model 3: Art as Conceptual Framework

Faculty members use AMAM collections to illustrate, expand upon, reinforce, or test the understanding of ideas and conceptual frameworks encountered in class. This model has the widest application across disciplines and enhances student learning by introducing a visual component.

A class on 18th and 19th century British literature regularly visits the museum to study landscapes that embody the aesthetic categories of the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque. An encounter with visual manifestations of these categories, exemplified by the works of John Martin, Thomas Cole, and Joseph Wright of Derby (*see cover*), helps students to better understand these otherwise abstract concepts.

A first-year seminar on the symphony in cultural thought and practice looks at works that provide visual metaphors or pictorial equivalents for musical concepts such as the grotesque, the exotic, and the nostalgic. A course on human physiology studies artistic representations of love, from lust to pair-bonding. The class considers how strong emotions are portrayed in the East and West and whether these depictions align with emerging scientific understanding of the biology of love.

William Hogarth (English 1697–1764), *The Rake's Progress* (detail), Plate 3, 1735, etching and engraving. Anne E. Wager Bequest, 1975.205



Gustave de Beaucorps
(French, 1825–1906),
Harem Slave, Algeria,
1859, albumen print
from wet collodion
negative. Young-Hunter
Art Museum Acquisition
Fund, 1997.26

Model 4: Art as Primary Text

Using art as a primary text introduces students to the concept of art as a cultural document. This approach is extensively utilized by scholars who rely largely on textual primary sources. Faculty members from the history and politics departments describe how images often shed invaluable light on their larger political, social, economic, or cultural contexts.

A course on the history of medieval and early modern Europe uses 15th- and 16th-century prints to trace changing attitudes toward death and the human body. These often address the year 1500—characterized by the popular belief that the world might end—as well as the newly emerging Renaissance humanist movement and its emphasis on human anatomy.

An introductory class on the politics of the Middle East and North Africa discusses Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism*. Photographs such as Gustave de Beaucorps's *Harem Slave, Algeria* serve as vivid examples of how the visual arts were simultaneously shaped by and enacted the agendas of Western imperialism and colonial expansion.



A Closer Look: Lead in/and Art

Students in a senior neurotoxicology seminar spend one of their three-hour laboratory sessions in the museum to explore how and why lead, a dangerous neurotoxin, has been utilized extensively for centuries by artists working in oil paint, bronze, glass, or ceramics, even though they were fully aware of its harmful effects. Students also engage in a series of close looking activities designed to improve their critical observation skills but also to discover how art can serve as a primary text, shedding light, or offering an alternative perspective, on course themes such as pollution, drug abuse, addiction, and the effects of radiation.

Korean artist Koo Kyung Sook was undergoing cancer treatment when she created this print, *Invisible Torso #2* (2004). Oberlin Friends of Art Fund, 2006.14



Amitabha Buddha,
10th century, Japanese,
wood with traces of
gilding. Gift of Robert
Lehman, 1943.244

The viewing of a wooden Heian-period Buddha was of particular use in helping students to visualize and imagine the appeal of faith-based Buddhism during Japan's early medieval period. It can be a remote topic for students to grasp—why did meditation before Buddhist statuary hold such broad appeal for elites and commoners alike?—but when confronted with the peaceful and sublime expression on the face of the AMAM's Buddha, concepts of faith and transcendence become more alive and comprehensible.

— Emer O'Dwyer, Associate Professor of History and
East Asian Studies

Below: Jim Dine
(American, b. 1935),
*Self-Portrait Next to
a Colored Window*,
1964, watercolor and
graphite on paper. Ellen
H. Johnson Bequest,
1998.7.28

Opposite: Detail of Marc
Chagall (French, b. Russia,
1887–1985), *Self-Portrait*,
1922, etching. Gift of
Hazel B. King, 1951.32

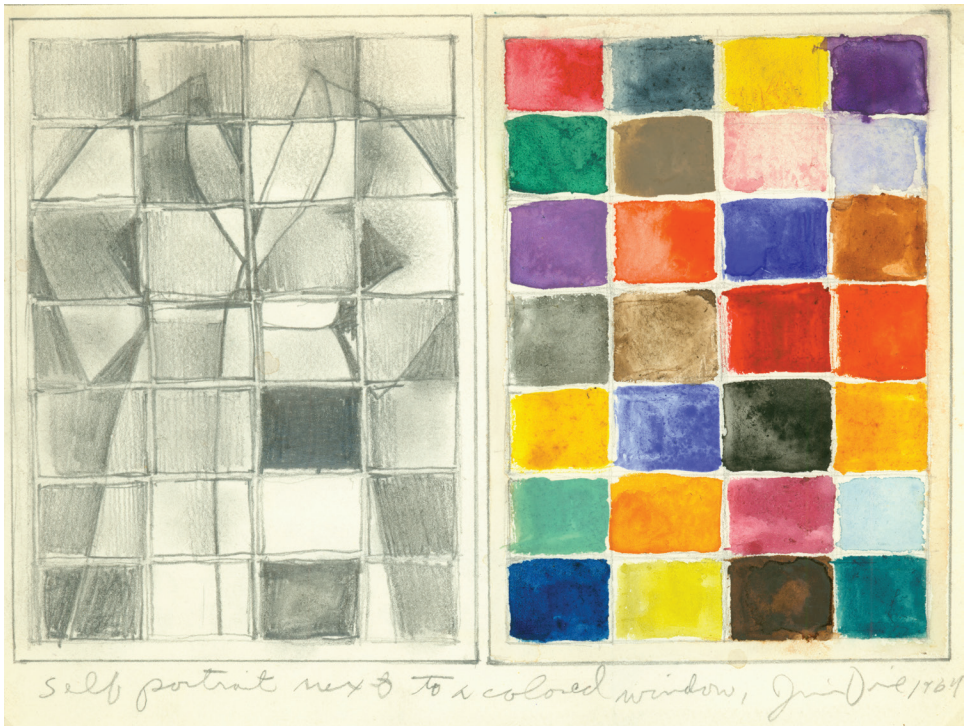
Lower right: Hendrick
ter Brugghen (Dutch, ca.
1588–1629) *St. Sebastian
Tended by Irene*, 1625, oil
on canvas. R.T. Miller Jr.
Fund, 1953.256

Model 5: Art as Creative Focal Point

There are many ways in which art serves as a creative focal point or inspiration for class assignments. Research papers, visual analysis exercises, creative writing, musical compositions, student presentations, blog posts, and oral language exams can all be designed around one or more artworks.

Russian and Spanish language faculty ask their students “Are you the same person when you speak in a language other than your mother tongue?” These classes then visit the museum to discuss identity and likeness in self-portraits by artists such as Claude Cahun, Jim Dine, and Ernst Kirchner in preparation for writing their own verbal “self-portraits.”

Students in a class on advanced electroacoustic music study images of literal and metaphorical storms; the visual depictions serve as a resonant approach to a musical composition assignment based on the concept of a storm.



A Closer Look: Intercultural Communication

A Russian culture class taught by lecturer in Russian Maia Solovieva prepares students for meaningful interactions with native Russians by exploring, in her words, “new ways to teach the ‘unspoken’ idiom of the deep cultural symbols that communicate a given people’s values, beliefs, and attitudes.” Instead of representing culture as a mix of facts unrelated to one’s own personal experiences, she seeks to offer more challenging means of obtaining cultural knowledge, based on self-reflective class assignments. Drawing parallels between “reading” art and interpreting cultural signs, her students reflect on a self-portrait by Marc Chagall (right), which presents a visual key to the Russians’ distinct understanding of concepts like time, space, family, home, and history.



A Closer Look: Art and Physical Illness

Classes across the curriculum view Hendrick ter Brugghen’s painting *St. Sebastian Tended by Irene* (right) as a powerful representation of suffering and compassion, as well as a fascinating display of 17th-century attitudes toward the plague. St. Sebastian was invoked for protection against the plague, and the painting throws light on medical knowledge and practices in early modern Europe. Namely, the painting may be seen as an illustration of beliefs about causes of the plague (astrological phenomena, meteorological conditions, and polluted air), symptoms (swollen armpits, bumps, bruising, oozing wounds, gangrene and hemorrhages), and spiritual remedies (prayer, charity, gazing at depictions of St. Sebastian).



It’s been great to give my (music) students a way to forget what they know... the experience of talking about visual art opens them up in their composition process. Even though their outcomes may tend toward the sonic, it’s that experience of unpacking something that they see with their eyes that gets them to another level in their work.

— Peter Swendsen, Associate Professor of Computer Music and Digital Arts



LILIANA MILKOVA

Curriculum Development Grants

The AMAM invites faculty to introduce or expand the use of artworks in their teaching by applying for curriculum development grants. Summer residencies at the museum provide recipients with opportunities to work with curatorial staff to identify relevant works, carry out research on the collection, and develop a plan for class sessions and discussions in the galleries or the Wolfgang Stechow Print Study Room. These grants strengthen the museum's curricular impact, deepen interdisciplinary collection use, and help cultivate students' visual literacy skills and critical and creative thinking.

Crossing the Street

In partnership with the college's Center for Teaching Innovation and Excellence (CTIE), the museum organizes workshops for the faculty to develop and share effective, innovative teaching approaches that incorporate the museum collection and utilize the galleries as a learning environment. Faculty members share their experiences in teaching with art and how it has enhanced learning through the integration of multiple texts (aural, visual, literary, historical, scientific, or mathematical), as well as their own teaching practices. In addition, professors from many disciplines incorporate works from the AMAM collection in their research and publications.

In collaboration with CTIE, the museum has developed and published an art-centered pedagogy—applicable to any course subject—called *Crossing the Street* (CTS). The name refers to the fact that the humanities, sciences, Conservatory of Music, and museum are all located just across the street from one another. In CTS, the visual arts are employed to elevate student learning, and need not always be tied to course content. Rather, rooted in learning theory, CTS emphasizes interactive encounters in the museum space to defamiliarize both the site and manner of learning. Each CTS museum visit is shaped by course goals and involves conversations between the instructor and academic curator at every step of the planning process. The process requires that faculty members actively participate in preparing for, conducting, and following up on their class visit to the museum.



YEVHEN GULENKO

A Closer Look: African Art at the Allen

Fifteen students in the fall 2016 seminar “African Art in Museums: From Collection to Display” curated an installation of African art in the AMAM’s east ambulatory. Under the direction of Matthew Rarey, assistant professor of the arts of Africa and the Black Atlantic, the class worked on every aspect of this expanded presentation, which emphasizes the great diversity of African and diaspora cultures.

Assistant Professor Matthew Rarey (above) taught a seminar that involved students in curating an expanded installation of African art.

Teaching Exhibitions

Faculty members are encouraged to propose ideas for exhibitions, which bring fresh perspectives and multiple voices to the galleries. Often highlighting new directions in scholarship, these installations also offer opportunities to share ideas with a wide audience. For example, Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies Chie Sakakibara curated the exhibition *Exploring Reciprocity: The Power of Animals in Non-Western Art* in conjunction with her courses “Indigenous Environmentalism” and “Nature, Culture and Interpretation.” In a written assignment, students prepared entries on selected objects, which were then printed in a brochure that supplemented the exhibition. Teaching exhibitions also are often accompanied by lectures, symposia, or other events relevant to the topic.



JOHN SEYFRIED

A faculty-curated exhibition, *Exploring Reciprocity*, in the Ripin Gallery.



FACULTY AND STUDENT RESOURCES

Getting Started

In an initial meeting with the Curator of Academic Programs, faculty members discuss their learning goals for a museum visit and establish potential approaches and criteria for the selection of artworks to be viewed. Instructors are encouraged to prepare for the museum visit by consulting the AMAM's online collection database prior to meeting with the curator. Working together, the faculty member and curator will compile a list of approximately 10 relevant works and develop a lesson plan. All faculty members are expected to take an active role in preparing for, conducting, and following up on their museum sessions.



YEVHEN GULENKO

Bringing Your Class to the Art Museum

The Office of Academic Programs facilitates visits to the galleries to see works on view, as well as sessions in the Wolfgang Stechow Print Study Room to look at prints, paintings, or small art objects not currently on display. Print Study Room visits are comparable to a lab session in the sciences: a private setting where faculty members and students can closely examine and discuss works. Curatorial staff and student assistants often help to develop and lead class visits.

Viewing Sessions

Separate “drop-in hours,” or viewing sessions, may be arranged to supplement class visits and support student assignments. Viewing sessions, usually two hours long, allow students to return to the Print Study Room outside of class time to deepen their understanding of works used during their class visit.

Digital Resources

Visit the AMAM website at: www.oberlin.edu/amam.

Search the collection at: allenartcollection.oberlin.edu/emuseum.

Images for courses: Faculty members may request high-resolution images of AMAM works for use in PowerPoint presentations or on Blackboard.



Founded in 1917, the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College is recognized today among the leading college and university art museums in the United States. Since its beginning more than a century ago, the museum has always been free for everyone.

Numbering more than 15,000 works, the AMAM collection is encyclopedic. Visitors will find artworks spanning the ancient cultures of the Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Rome to today. The AMAM has strong holdings of European and American paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts from the medieval period to the present, as well as Asian paintings, scrolls, sculpture, decorative art, and more than 2,000 Japanese prints. In addition, the museum has growing collections of African, Latin American, and Native American art. Modern and contemporary art is very well represented at the AMAM, which also holds the archives of artist Eva Hesse.

During the academic year, the museum offers educational programs for the campus and the wider public, including guest lectures, curator tours, and gallery talks led by Oberlin students.

For further information, please contact the Office of Academic Programs at acadprog.amam@oberlin.edu, or call (440) 775-8645.

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TANYA ROSEN JONES

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The realm of ideas is always interwoven with the material world. When we analyze creative forms comparatively (my favorite pairing is the soliloquy and the self-portrait), there is a synergistic effect.

Analyzing visual art grants my literature students the freedom of the beginner, but it also enables them to ask a sophisticated question: how do representational concerns translate across media?

By thinking about paintings alongside poems, students become producers as well as consumers of knowledge.

— Wendy Hyman, Associate Professor of English

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Allen Memorial Art Museum
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Cover: Detail of Joseph Wright of Derby (English, 1734–1797), *Dovedale by Moonlight*, 1784–85, oil on canvas. R.T. Miller Jr. Fund, 1951.30