

When I meet my English classes in the museum, I am not primarily teaching them art history or visual analysis. Yes, I do use those tools to engage students with the material. . . but my primary goal is to get students to think about literary texts more deeply by moving away from texts for a moment—to read, for example, Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” more vitally after spending time with Joseph Wright’s *Dovedale by Moonlight*.

— Nicholas Jones,
Professor of English



A M A M



A painting of a landscape with a river, mountains, and a full moon. The scene is rendered in a dark, moody palette with a strong greenish-yellow tint. In the foreground, a river flows through a rocky, forested valley. The middle ground shows a steep, rocky mountain slope covered in dense trees. The background features a large, billowing white cloud formation against a dark sky. A full moon is visible in the upper right corner, partially framed by dark tree branches. The overall style is reminiscent of 19th-century landscape painting.

Allen Memorial Art Museum
Oberlin College

Academic Programs

Teaching at the Allen Memorial Art Museum

The Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM) is founded on the belief that the study and appreciation of high-quality original works of art is an indispensable part of an excellent liberal arts education. The museum's encyclopedic holdings chronicle almost the entire history of art in a wide variety of cultures, allowing faculty and students from many disciplines to study and learn from originals. Our 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, and curriculum development grants.

This brochure seeks to encourage fluidity between disciplines and to experiment with new ways of using the collection by presenting a few examples of productive collaborations between museum staff and Oberlin faculty and students. It also provides an overview of the models developed by the AMAM for teaching with art.

Academic Programs

The Office of Academic Programs was established in the late 1990s when the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's College and University Art Museum Program awarded the museum a grant to foster stronger relationships across the College and its Conservatory of Music. Although the AMAM



has always used its holdings in broad interdisciplinary ways, designating a museum staff member to provide faculty and students with greater access to the collections changed the culture and scope of the museum's outreach. In 2008, the AMAM received a \$1 million challenge grant from the Mellon Foundation to permanently endow its academic programs.

Scope of Outreach

Each semester, the AMAM welcomes more than 2,000 students in conjunction with 100 or more class visits to the galleries and the Wolfgang Stechow Print Study Room.

The museum hosts almost all College departments, from African American Studies, Biology, Cinema Studies, and Classics to Neuroscience, Religion, Russian, and Theater and Dance. In the Conservatory, faculty from Historical Performance, Musicology, Music Theory, and Technology in Music and the Related Arts have all used the collection as a key component of their teaching.

These class visits place students in first-hand conversations with objects, an especially valuable opportunity that complements other ways in which Oberlin students learn from primary sources in laboratories, textual analysis, and guided research projects. One-on-one encounters with original works of art offer an immediacy of experience and new perspectives for both teaching and learning.

Each class visit to the museum aims to strengthen students' visual literacy skills through visual analysis exercises, which do not require previous familiarity with specific objects. Instead, they create a fresh learning environment in which artworks offer new ways to engage all students, even those who rarely participate in classroom discussions.



I remember [students'] 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

Teaching Models

While AMAM collections are utilized for learning in many ways, faculty and museum staff frequently use five distinct models for teaching with art—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 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, for 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 examines Albrecht Dürer’s 1516 etching *Abduction of Proserpina* (fig. 1) 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.



fig. 1

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. By introducing students to visual culture as part of a social and historical moment, this approach further aids understanding of the course material.

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 *Landscape* (fig. 2)—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. An 18th-century German ivory lamp screen depicting the power of music (fig. 3) is an important work for the discussion of the arts of Germany.



fig. 2



fig. 3

As a student of the sciences, [my] trying to understand important scientific concepts (from evolution to quantum mechanics), more often than not relies on effective communication of concepts by visual means. A single well-crafted composition can emphasize the relationships between objects, convey a wealth of meaning, and crystallize a large body of information in no time. At times, an image is all we can claim to understand. Careful observation can give us clues, and careful experiments can confirm what one sees.

— Kevin Hu (OC '11), biochemistry major

Model 3: Art as Conceptual Framework

Faculty use AMAM collections to illustrate, expand on, reinforce, or test the understanding of ideas and conceptual frameworks encountered in class. This model has the widest application across disciplines and accommodates the visual learning style that many students share.

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 (*fig. 4*), Thomas Cole, and Joseph Wright of Derby (*cover*), helps students 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 animal physiology studies artistic representations of love from lust to pair-bonding. The class considers how strong emotions are portrayed in the East and the West and whether these depictions align with emerging scientific understanding of the biology of love.



fig. 4

A Closer Look: *“Wits, Rakes, Madmen, and Jane: A Survey of 18th-century Literature”*

Professor Laura Baudot’s class explores modes of literary production in 18th-century Britain, following four character types across different literary genres and traditions, including the novel, poetry, satire, and drama. For one of their six museum visits, students in the class viewed William Hogarth’s satirical modern moral series, *The Rake’s Progress* (fig. 5), along with works that depict a relationship between debauchery and scientific inquiry. In another visit, students examined parallels between different styles of portraiture and novelistic approaches to individual subjectivity.

I wanted students to gain a better sense of 18th-century culture. Visual art 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, Assistant Professor of English



fig. 5

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 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 towards death and the human body. These often address the year 1500—and the popular belief that the world might end—as well as the newly-emerging Renaissance humanist movement and its interest in human anatomy.

An introductory class on the politics of the Middle East and Northern Africa discusses Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism*. Photographs such as Gustave de Beaucorps's *Harem Slave, Algeria* (fig. 6) serve as vivid examples of how the visual arts were simultaneously shaped by and enacted the agendas of Western imperialism and colonial expansion.



fig. 6

The viewing of the wooden Heian-period Buddha in the [AMAM's] ambulatory was of particular use in helping students 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, Assistant Professor of History and East Asian Studies

A Closer Look: “*The Mexican Revolution: Birth, Life, Death*”

Professor of History Steve Volk collaborated with the AMAM to organize an exhibition of post-revolutionary Mexican prints and paintings. These works served as primary materials for his class on the Mexican revolution. “I’ve long enjoyed the look on the faces of students in my Mexican Revolution seminar when they stand in front of the AMAM’s superb collection of prints by Rivera (*fig. 7*), Orozco, and Siqueiros,” he says. “What they see in a flash is what I have been working toward for most of the semester: the Revolution, one of the 20th century’s most dramatic political upheavals, was also intensely personal, with each individual experiencing it in a different way.”

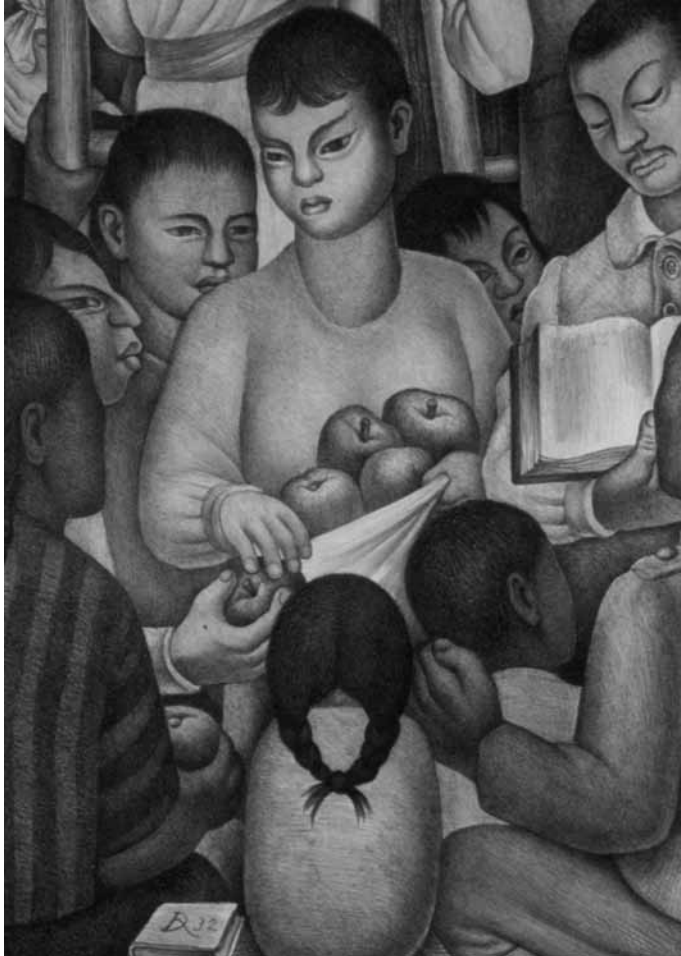


fig. 7

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 (fig. 8), and Ernst Kirchner (fig. 10) in preparation for writing their own verbal self-portraits.

Students in a class on advanced electro-acoustic 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.

It’s been great to give my students a way to forget what they know, to get them to backtrack. There are a number of student composers whom I take to the museum, and it’s the experience of talking about visual art that opens them up in their composition process. Even though their outcomes may tend towards 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, Assistant Professor of Computer Music and Digital Arts

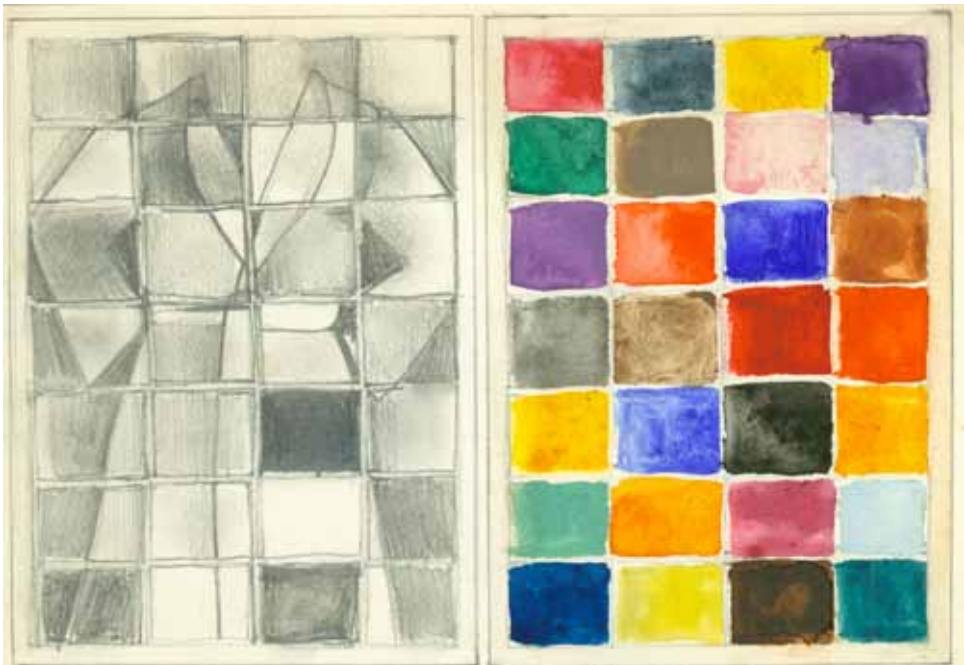


fig. 8

self portrait next to a colored window, Jim Dine 1969



fig. 9

A Closer Look: “Cross-Cultural Communication”

Dr. Maia Solovieva’s Russian culture class 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 (*fig. 9*), which offers a visual key to the Russians’ distinctive understanding of concepts like time, space, family, home, and history.

A Closer Look: “Wallscapes”

The inter-divisional class “Landscape/Soundscape/Wordscape” was team-taught by Professors Nicholas Jones, Peter Swendsen, and museum curators. The course explored ways in which places become texts through the work of composers, writers, and visual artists, who attempt to codify the experience of nature in tangible form. Students used the AMAM collection for academic writing and creative assignments. One project was to assemble a virtual “wallscape” on some aspect of the themes discussed in class. Inspired by the museum walls where works engage in formal and conceptual dialogues, the students’ “walls” focused on a particular subject matter through the relational links between sound, text, and image.



fig. 10

Interdivisional/Cross-disciplinary Courses

The AMAM facilitates cross-disciplinary courses such as “Conservation Examination of the Painted Surface,” designed to bridge art history, chemistry, and studio art. Taught by Heather Galloway, Paintings Conservator at the Intermuseum Conservation Association in Cleveland, the course explored the technology of paint media, its relationship to artistic expression, issues of alterations and degradation, and the ethics of conservators’ intervention.



A Closer Look: “Starry Dome”

Anna-Claire Stinebring (OC '09) curated the exhibition *Starry Dome: Astronomy in Art and the Imagination* with guidance from the Curator of Academic Programs. It was designed in collaboration with the Oberlin College Observatory to support the introductory astronomy course and museum programs honoring 2009 as the Year of Science. Oberlin College Library’s Special Collections loaned rare illustrated scientific texts and maps, which were combined with AMAM paintings, prints, sculpture, and scientific instruments. Objects on view included a Persian astrolabe, woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer, photographs by Ansel Adams, and Japanese woodblock prints. Astronomy students made multiple visits to the museum for class sessions led by the exhibition curator and the head of the Observatory.

Crossing the Street

In partnership with the College's Center for Teaching Innovation and Excellence, the museum organizes workshops for faculty to develop and share effective, innovative teaching approaches that



incorporate the museum collection and utilize the galleries as a learning environment. Faculty describe how teaching with art has enhanced student learning through the integration of multiple texts (aural, visual, literary, historical, scientific, or mathematical), as well as their own teaching practices. Faculty from many different departments also incorporate works from the AMAM collection in their research and publications.

Curriculum Development Grants

The AMAM invites faculty to apply for curriculum development grants to introduce or expand the use of artworks in their teaching. Summer and winter term 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 tours and discussions in the galleries or in the Print Study Room. These grants strengthen the museum's curricular impact, deepen interdisciplinary collection use, and help cultivate students' visual literacy skills and critical thinking.

Interdisciplinary Teaching Exhibitions

The AMAM encourages faculty to propose ideas for exhibitions, which bring fresh perspectives and multiple voices to the galleries. These installations may highlight new directions in scholarship, and offer the opportunity to share ideas with a wide audience. They are often accompanied by lectures, symposia, or other events relevant to the topic.

Resources for Faculty and Students

Getting Started

In an initial meeting with the Curator of Academic Programs, faculty can discuss their learning goals for a museum visit and establish potential approaches and criteria for the selection of artworks to be viewed. Faculty can prepare for the museum visit by consulting the AMAM's online collection database (*eMuseum*) prior to meeting with the curator. Working together, the faculty and curator will compile a list of approximately 15 relevant works and develop a lesson plan.

Bringing Your Class to the AMAM

The Office of Academic Programs offers visits to the galleries to see works on view, as well as visits to 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 and students can closely examine and discuss works. Curatorial staff and student assistants often help with the development and leading of class visits.

Viewing Sessions

Separate “drop-in hours,” or viewing sessions, can 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.

Online Access

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

Collection Database via eMuseum: [//rubens.cc.oberlin.edu/emuseum](http://rubens.cc.oberlin.edu/emuseum).

Images for Courses: Museum staff can provide high-resolution images of AMAM works for use in PowerPoint presentations or on Blackboard. They can also create a course-specific resource page on the museum's website to enable students to revisit the art objects they have viewed in person.

For more information, contact: Dr. Liliana Milkova, Curator of Academic Programs, at lmilkova@oberlin.edu or (440) 775-8645.



Founded in 1917, the Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM) at Oberlin College is recognized today as one of the five best college and university art museums in the United States. Since its beginning, the museum has always been free for everyone.

Numbering more than 14,000 works, the AMAM collection is encyclopedic, with works from the cultures of the ancient Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Rome; European and American paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts from the medieval period to today; important holdings of Asian paintings, scrolls, sculpture, and decorative art, including almost 2,000 very fine Japanese prints; excellent African, Native American, and pre-Columbian works; a large collection of prints, drawings, and photographs; and the archives of artist Eva Hesse. The museum continually adds to its collections, which are visited by more than 40,000 people each year.

cover: Joseph Wright of Derby (English, 1734-97); *Dovedale by Moonlight* (detail), 1784-85; oil on canvas; R.T. Miller, Jr. Fund, 1951.30

1. Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471-1528); *Abduction of Proserpina* (detail), 1516; etching; gift of the Max Kade Foundation, 1968.81

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

3. German; *Lamp Screen Depicting the Power of Music* (detail), 18th c.; ivory; gift of Charles F. Olney, 1904.208a-b

4. John Martin (English, 1789-1854); *Cadmus and the Dragon*, 1813; oil on canvas; R.T. Miller, Jr. and Friends of Art Endowment Funds, 1976.42

5. William Hogarth (English, 1697-1764); *The Rake's Progress (Plate 3)* (detail), 1735; etching and engraving; Annie A. Wager Bequest, 1975.205

6. Gustave de Beaucorps (French, 1825-1906); *Harem Slave, Algeria*, 1859; albumen print from wet collodion negative; Young-Hunter Art Museum Acquisition Fund, 1977.26

7. Diego Rivera (Mexican, 1886-1957); *The Fruits of Labor*, 1932; lithograph; gift of Leone E. Prasse from the Mr. and Mrs. Charles G. Prasse Collection in honor of Ellen H. Johnson, 1978.50

8. 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

9. Marc Chagall (French, b. Russia, 1887-1985); *Self-Portrait, no. 17* from the series *Mein Leben*, 1922; etching; gift of Hazel B. King, 1951.32

10. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (German, 1880-1938); *Self-Portrait as a Soldier* (detail), 1915; oil on canvas; Charles F. Olney Fund, 1950.29

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