

Centering Art in the Liberal Arts: Constructing and Integrating a Relevant Art History Collection

During challenging times, it is essential to construct art collections relevant to their audiences which effectively communicate the benefit of examining original artwork through multiple lenses. Augustana College has expanded its museum collection each year through donations and purchases, integrating ancient through contemporary art, to reinforce the goals of the art history and first-year programs. Our resulting first-year textbook, *Liberal Arts through the AGES*, features published research on original art by faculty from diverse disciplines as well as students with various majors, first-year through seniors. As we complete the project's seventh year, the continuing faculty consensus acknowledges the universal relevance of art as well as the visual acuity of undergraduates. This project and recent acquisitions will be examined as to how they fit our goals. The model, strengthened through faculty/student collaboration, has successfully reinforced the college community while centering the art collection in the liberal arts curriculum.



"Study the science of art. Study the art of artists. Develop your own—especially from how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else."
Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)

One of my goals after being appointed the Paul A. Anderson Chair in the Arts was to build a **pedagogical art history** collection that could be fully embraced by the entire campus as well as the

greater community. I have thus focused on this goal, in collaboration with museum director, Sherry Maurer, fellow art historians and colleagues, and our permanent art collection committee. We pursued artwork primarily defined for pedagogical purposes, across the entire span of history, **and including many cultures.** Through creative bargain-hunting and networking with donors and dealers, the result is an effective multidisciplinary teaching collection.



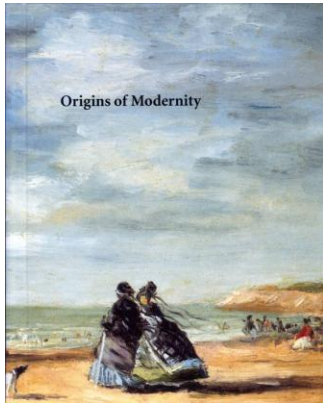
"Memento, an extract from the poetry that makes us its historical envelope, to dwell the eternal from the transient..."
Charles Boudlin, *The Painter of Modern Life* (1885)

LIBERAL ARTS THROUGH THE AGES

Seven years ago, I tested the potential for this collection. Our college had just adopted a new first-year curriculum. I agreed to teach a winter-term course that would explore the common theme of the *birth of modern times*, and curated a complementary exhibition. The Augustana College Art Museum became a classroom, and perhaps more importantly, the classroom became a forum for works of art. Each of my first-year students chose a piece to investigate toward a multi-source research paper. I also engaged my 300-level nineteenth and twentieth-century art history students in the project. As it gained momentum, many faculty members contributed who were sympathetic to collaboration, as did several administrators--our **President, a former law school dean**, wrote on Bruegel's *Justicia*, and our Academic Dean



examined **Benton's *Sunday Morning***, his specialization being African-American literary topics. The following summer, I edited 100 catalogue entries and wrote an introduction to tie it all together.

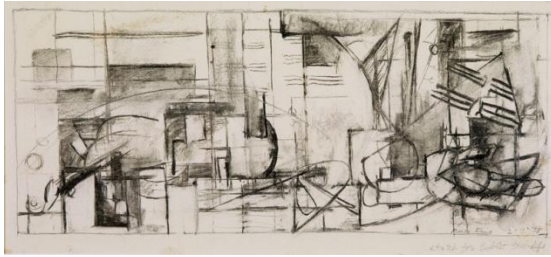


By the next winter, the ***Origins of Modernity*** was re-exhibited with a 250-page full-color catalogue, adopted as winter-term textbook for first-year students across the curriculum. And the faculty voted to continue the project for the following winter. I was gratified to know that colleagues supported the mission, and students—80 or so published for the first time—were pleased and proud. I prepared to revise the book when our dean suggested a larger vision—why not combine the catalogue with the *reader* as one textbook for the entire first year? We had two months to complete this ambitious undertaking of revising and expanding the catalogue and art collection to also encompass fall and spring-term parameters. Many donors gifted appropriate pieces as did faculty and administrators, and several dealers transitioned to donors, one even honoring me with a gift **in my**



name. The catalogue expanded from the *Origins of Modernity* to a new title: ***Liberal Arts through the AGES*** (Augustana General Education Studies).

Yet what a great experience—faculty, donors, administrators and students working together toward the greater good—freely collaborating, some within their precise fields



of expertise, others creatively stepping outside their comfort zone, such as a senior mathematician who instinctively surmised that

Fine's cubist

drawing somehow relates to Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*. Or a young chemist proudly suggesting that



Impressionists like

Boudin in ***Beach at Trouville*** would never have created such effective landscapes without chemists inventing new color formulae and portable tube oil paints that facilitated **painting en plein-air**.



Similarly the sketch for Constable's ***Boys Fishing***



The work on top of this painting should be understood, not looked at with blind wonder, was considered only as a poetic expression, but as a personal, legitimate, scientific, and mechanical one. John Constable (1798-1831)

LIBERAL ARTS THROUGH THE AGES

demonstrates the parallel **meteorological interests** of art and



science in the nineteenth century. When

I asked an associate biologist to investigate Audubon's **Whippoorwill**, I

had no idea he would delve so deeply

into his own field observation with commentary regarding

Audubon's accuracy in portraying the male and female in their



natural habitat. Perspectives on gender as to new roles for



modern women artists can also be effectively discerned as well as the complex issue of **women as artistic subjects**.



Language and literature responses through art seem second nature. For example, a Classicist who wrote on Plato's *Republic* and interpreted our engraving after Raphael's *School of Athens*, discovered a whole new



connection between the two which he presented at a national Classics conference. The

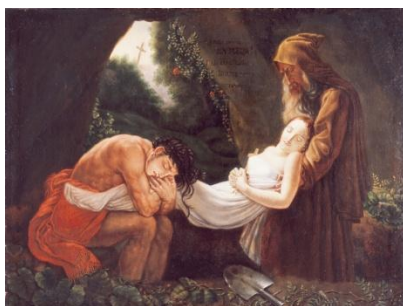


nature of his field further informed traditional art historical approaches also with the *Phiale*, interpreted within Greek cultural contexts provided by his colleague.

And a Shakespeare professor discussed Lawrence's *Portrait of John Philip*

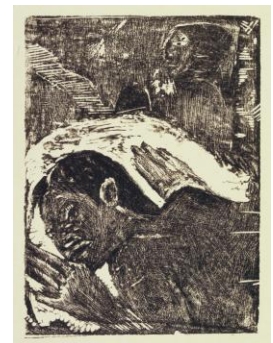


Kemble as Hamlet, framed within forty years of explicating textual analysis of *Hamlet*. Meanwhile, a French



professor who teaches the novel *Atala* by Chateaubriand, explored Girodet's

Burial of Atala, while her colleague investigated original texts related to Gauguin's *Manao Tupapau*. Spanish and German





professors advised students on contextual translations of Goya's **Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters** as well as Durer's **Death of the Virgin**,



respectively, in relation to their cultures. And Asianists contributed toward Chinese and **Japanese artwork** which inspired a recent gift of **eight further ukiyo-e** prints.



Envision the enrichment possible with the perspective offered by a political scientist explaining the *Declaration of Independence* through a hand-colored engraving of Trumbull's **Signing of the Declaration of**

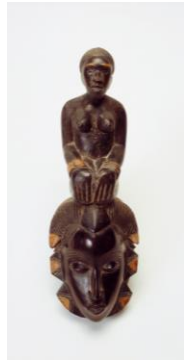
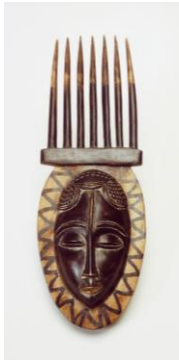
Independence. Or the analysis of a sociologist in response to Hine's photograph of a **young girl working in a factory**—



surprisingly concluding a reversed-interpretation from the usual art historical *read*. Furthermore, a Communications Studies professor discussed **Rockwell's** idealized posters in relation to mass communication and propaganda around World War II. And since the college was



recently gifted a Native American collection, one student investigated the *Olla* by Nampeyo as an anthropologist contextualized *his* further view of *The Potter*, a Curtis photograph of Nampeyo



at work. Additionally, an Old Testament scholar who provided his translation of *Genesis* alongside Chagall's *Adam and Eve and the Forbidden Fruit* provoked students



with the question, would a close reading of the original text include a serpent? And **African masks** certainly inspired Africanists and **modernists** alike—in short, what great things interdisciplinary collaboration through a relevant art history collection can achieve!



This project is therefore a **pedagogical resource** for teaching critical thinking, comparative analysis and chronological developments. And the benefit increases, as the essays of former students inform this year's undergraduates who utilize the book for their own research, creating an on-going dialogue with the work of art and with others who interpret it, designed



to facilitate both contemplation and action. Our museum director is delighted as the

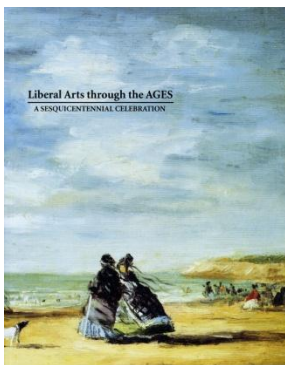


class tours and gifts, most recently including **Rembrandt**, a work attributed to **Corot** and **Matisse**,

have increased exponentially. The project's yearly re-exhibition of artwork is likely uncommon in



museology as is perhaps the focus on education, but seems appropriate for this academic project.



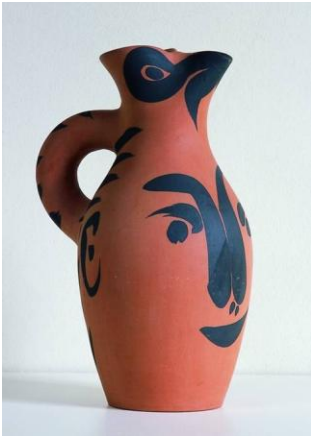
I recently completed the **fourth edition in four years**. I edited each edition to include additional contributors, readings and artwork. The current edition serves a dual purpose, through the introduction by our president, of celebrating the college's sesquicentennial. I urged printing a three-year run in order to save on costs-per-book and to additionally free me to reconnect with my primary research on **Whistler criticism**. I couldn't abandon this project as the faculty supported and valued it and it works effectively while sending a message regarding the importance of art collections and museums.



"Never combine the elements in color and form, or the technical means the means of art itself. Be the center to have to pick and choose, and group with color, then choose, that the result may be beautiful - or the result may be ugly and give the artist, with its long path from their glorious history!"
James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)

Although this is likely, historically, one of the most visually adept generations, capable of quickly assessing a variety of images, as they input and access data, we need to teach them not to settle for the immediate satisfaction of the *quick read*. Instead, they must

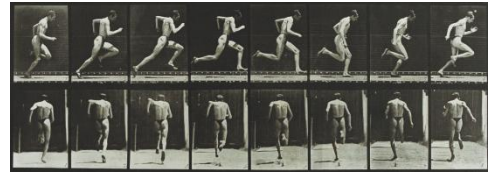
learn to carefully examine primary texts (including artwork), consult secondary sources, discuss their ideas and interpretations with other students and professors, and look for



larger patterns. Countless new ideas trace their origins in creative interpretations of the past, as explored by a double-major in Classics and art history through a comparison of a **black-figure kylix** with the modernist pitcher by **Pablo Picasso**.

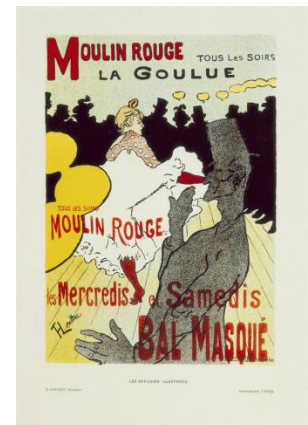


A double-major in art history and pre-medicine biology, discussed the intersection of art and science through the sequential photographs of **Edouard Muybridge** that reveal anatomy in motion.



Another explored cultural assimilation through artists like Degas who adapted their European viewpoints through *Japonisme*, a well-acknowledged linkage with **Japanese ukiyo-e prints**. And a double-major in art history and communications, interpreted **Toulouse-Lautrec's** imagery as the beginning of

modern commercial mass-media advertising, reproduced in large number through color lithography. Yet Lautrec's bold and colorful blend of the visual and written word is strangely reminiscent of





precious devotional images, one-of-a-kind **illuminated manuscripts** painted centuries earlier by pious monks in order to spread the word of God.

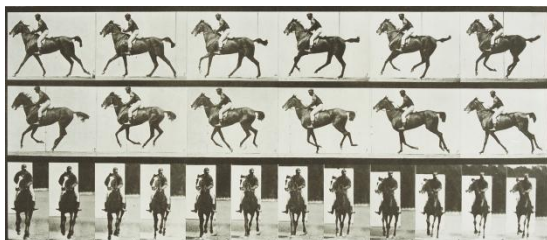
Thus within the new, vestiges of the old may be revealed through comparisons. Interactions between conceptual and perceptual viewpoints, historical revivals and rejections, as well as innovations and cultural influences can be found throughout the book.

Students might discern such renewed sources in examining the beautiful patina of an **ancient Roman glass bowl**, an accident



of nature's chemical process over time, scientifically replicated as an inkwell by Tiffany. At the same time, the bold, clean lines of a **Northern Renaissance woodcut from Holbein's *Dance of Death*** might be traced in the disillusioned

1940s German workers of **Heckel**. Or equestrians can morph from elite **Chinese tomb effigies** to American



instruments toward **scientific discovery**.



Elegant figurative patterns originally carved in ancient Roman cameo glass, lovingly



reproduced in **jasper ware** in the Neoclassical period, are masterfully simplified and reversed in tonality through Matisse's **Blue Nude 1**.



In our immediate times, we as well as our audiences are perpetually **bombarded** with photographic, computer-generated and video/film media, which have become primary

texts as well. Yet in an age dominated by *I*'s—*I-Pods*, *I-Tunes*, *I-Ms* and *I-Phones*—with communications swiftly disseminated and just as quickly eliminated, what **archaeological records**



Works in this collection used for those of their time as well as a source of inspiration. The British Library, London, UK. 2001-2002. B.C.1.1. Digitized by the British Library. History of the Photograph. Mar 2.14. LIBERAL ARTS THROUGH THE AGES

will / or you inspire



present and future generations to examine? Many I hope--liberal arts education aims to provide them with the tools they need to critically read the texts

of others, as well as to thoughtfully construct their own—and it seems that **art history** truly provides an effective bridge between collaborative cultures and audiences. By



centering the art collection in the college curriculum and by working together as a community, imagine the **heights that can be reached**.

The investment of time and resources is significant, but the benefit is

enormous, as the role of the museum and its **expanding collection** is continually validated.

