

DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY & ART CONSERVATION: ART HISTORY GRADUATE PROGRAMME

Winter 2019
ARTH 842
Studies in Italian Renaissance
Art: **Colour**

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Colour was both an idea and a commodity in the Renaissance. The same word denoted artists' paint and women's make-up, and so colour was reviled as feminine --mere surface--in contrast to the masculine, more intellectual rigours of two-dimensional design and sculptural form. At the same time, however, colour was the means by which artists brought their works to life, adding blood and flesh to skeletal designs so that their paintings and sculptures blushed and bled. Likewise, individual colours could evoke a whole host of contradictory associations, many of which were tied to the complex and often costly processes for procuring and using pigments. The whites, blacks, reds, blues, greens, and other hues used in Renaissance painting and sculpture were obtained from dirt, shells, rocks, metals, insects, and plants from local sources but also imported from such difficult to access locations as the mountains of Afghanistan and the so-called New World. Whole international industries were created for colour, battles were fought, and lives were lost. The most precious blue cost thousands of times more than the cheapest brown, but even inexpensive, locally obtainable colours have their own story to tell. White, for example, was made from a black metal, whereas the most common black was created from white bones. Complicated recipes for making and applying pigments call for spit and urine, among other ingredients. Colour is therefore the earthiest of stuff, a commodity you can weigh and price, but it is also something notoriously difficult to describe. Whereas you can measure a painting to see if the linear perspective or proportions are correct, how do you judge an artist's use of colour?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

A detailed list of readings and requirements will be available at the first class. In addition to discussion of readings and individual research projects, we will be visiting Art Conservation studios, The Agnes Etherington Art Centre, The Miller Mineralogical Museum, and other sites, and getting our hands dirty experimenting with various techniques and materials. Please note: There will be a materials fee of ca. \$30.