BAM 70500 / GEMS 83100: The Lives and Loves and the Artists
Professor Clare Carroll, clare.carroll@qc.cuny.edu
Wednesdays, 4:15-6:15 PM, and in person GC Room 3308
Office hours: Wednesday, Comp Lit Dept. 4th floor GC, 3:00-4:00 PM, and by appointment on Zoom

Syllabus

Key concerns: Reading early modern biographies of important Italian early modern painters (including Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, and Artemisia Gentileschi) and their interpretations by 20th and 21st century art historians and biographers, we will examine how these narratives function as life writing, art criticism, fiction, and at times even as memoir. We will consider the interpretation of visual art as a source for biography in both early modern and 20th and 21st century accounts. We will also question to what extent the biography of the sitter illuminates not just the life of the artist but also the meaning of the work of art. How do the historical contextual details of the making of a work of art play a role not just in the understanding of the artist’s life but also the work of art? How do the artist’s, sitter’s, and patron’s life circumstances come into play with iconographical readings and/or formalist interpretations of these works of art?

Primary Texts for this Class (all available on Blackboard):


Assignments and evaluation
one oral report of 20 minutes; 20 points
a short (c. 6 pages) paper or essay (based on your oral report due two weeks after you give your report) 20 points
An annotated bibliography 20 points
a seminar paper, which can be a longer version of your short paper.
Session 1: August 30: Introduction

Session 2: September 6: Vasari’s Botticelli, the Anecdote, and the “Art of Biography”

Session 3: September 13: “La Primavera,” Context, Iconography, and Historical Fiction
Sandro Botticelli, La Primavera, c. 1580. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.
https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/botticelli-spring
https://smarthistory.org/sandro-botticelli-la-primavera-spring/
Session 4: September 20: Leonardo da Vinci and the Mona Lisa


https://smarthistory.org/leonardo-mona-lisa/

Session 5: September 27: Leonardo, Salai, and the Nude Mona Lisa
https://smarthistory.org/leonardo-mona-lisa/


Also recommended but not required:

Session 6: October 4: Raphael and the Stanza della Segnatura


Great Art Ep.4: The School of Athens (Raphael) | NTD Arts & Culture with David Rosand [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61VY0J07xOw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61VY0J07xOw)

Session 7: October 11: Raphael and His Female Models: Galatea, the Virgin Mary, La Fornarina

Letter purported to have been written by Raphael to Baldassare Castiglione, edited by L. Dolce in *Lettere di diversi uomini eccellenti*. (1554), translation by K. Christian. (1 page)
Excerpt from Castiglione, *The Courtier*, on “sprezzatura” (1 ½ pages).


Session 8: October 18: Michelangelo: The Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and the Last Judgement


Michelangelo, Sibyls, 1509. Sistine Chapel, Vatican. [https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/michelan/3sistina/4sibyls/index.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/michelan/3sistina/4sibyls/index.html)

Raphael, Sibyls, 1511-1513. Santa Maria della Pace, Rome


Session 9: October 25: Michelangelo’s Relationships with Vittoria Colonna and Tommaso dei Cavalieri, and his gifts of art to them


Session 10: November 1: Caravaggio Then and Now: The Young Artist in Rome


Caravaggio, David with the Head of Goliath. 1610. Galleria Nazionale Barberini, Rome.  

Session 11: November 8: Caravaggio’s Brushes with the Law: Crimes and Rejected Paintings


Caravaggio, The Death of the Virgin. 1602-1606. Musée du Louvre, Paris  


Session 12: November 15: Artemisia Gentileschi: From the Trial of Her Rapist to the First Biographies of Her


November 22: No Classes Scheduled


also recommended:


**Session 14: December 6: The First Modern Biographer of Artemisia: Anna Banti’s Autobiographical Biography**


December 12 – 13: Reading Days

Seminar Paper or Essay Due: December 20