

National Identity in the Arts

Baltimore Campus,
Osher at JHU

Fall 2022, Tuesday Mornings

National Identity in the Arts

The Alps form a barrier across Europe that is difficult to cross. Languages and cultures develop differently in the North and South. It is not difficult, for instance, to distinguish 15th or 16th century art from the Netherlands from that painted in Italy. And yet the mountains were not impenetrable. Trade connections were formed, and along them flowed artists and their different ideas. The exchanges happened relatively easily in music, with a little more difficulty in the visual arts, and (for obvious reasons) the least in literature. But they did happen.

This course will look at the question of national identity in the arts, focusing primarily on the rise of nationalism throughout Europe in the 19th Century. This will be prefaced by a survey of the Middle Ages through the Baroque as a general introduction, and followed by a consideration of national identity in the modern era.

This period sees the rise of abstract painting, which begins in Europe in the first quarter of the century. Although there are almost as many movements as there are artists, what is important is the common excitement uniting their work rather than the nationalities dividing them. In the second quarter of the century, however, many of the leading artists flee to America, which is thus poised to become the world leader in the years after the War. Once more there is an international style—but many of its attributes are distinctly American. But does this mean anything in a world which is becoming increasingly Americanized in other respects, within an economy which is global rather than national? *rb.*



1. History from a Helicopter (September 20)

A rapid overview: the Romantic Nationalism of the 19th century, the development and growing influence of American art, and a selection of earlier works from the Museo del Prado, Madrid.

2. It's the Details (September 27)

In the 15th century, the arts of Northern Europe were richer, more complex, and more technically sophisticated than most painting in Italy, not least because of their extraordinary attention to detail.





3. A Tale of Three Cities (October 4)

Three cities: Florence, where the Renaissance began; Rome, where it hit its peak; and Venice, which developed mostly separately, but exerted at least equal influence on the later history of art.

4. Church and Court (October 11)

Some magnificent 17th-century masterpieces of the baroque, when courts linked by familial ties and countries linked by Catholicism came very close to achieving an international style.



5. An Urban Portrait (October 18)

The bourgeois art of 17th-century Holland, mostly espousing civic values and, with its attention to portraiture of people, places, and everyday life, creating the first truly national style.

6. A World of Fantasy (October 25)

An excursus on the French taste for decorative fantasy, traced from the grand spectacle of the Sun King's Versailles, through the rococo, the revolution, and the poetry and music of a later age.



7. Crossroads of Europe (November 1)

A close focus on late 18th-century Vienna, the city of Mozart and Joseph II, and the crossroads of influences from Italy, Germany, France, and even the Ottoman Empire.

8. Banks of a Rocky Stream (November 8)

How the Romantic movements in Britain and Germany manifested themselves in poetry, painting, and music, and did much to create the National artistic identities of the two countries.



9. From the Fringe (November 15)

The 19th-century emergence of Russian literature, music, and poetry out of a Frenchified past, and similar surges of national feeling in the arts of some other countries on the edges of the old Europe.

10. What's American Art? (November 29)

How does a new country lay the foundations for a truly national art? We look at two approaches, the first rooted in the land itself, and the second build on the realities of urban and industrial life.



11. Geography of Modernism (December 6)

Many of the movements of Modernism, though starting with specific geographical associations, became international forces overriding the national identities of their practitioners. A paradox.

12. The Shrinking World (December 13)

The final class may (or may not) address the question of national identity in a global world, the changing art market, and the privileging of less-dominant voices in pursuit of diversity.



For more detail, color illustrations, composer bios, and suggestions for further reading, see the class website:

<http://www.brunyate.com/national-identity/>

Artists shown (all details of larger pictures): 1. Tidemand & Gude; 2. Rogier van der Weyden; 3. Raphael & Giulio Romano; 4. Velázquez; 5. De Hooch; 6. Watteau; 7. Bellotto; 8. Louthembourg; 9. Pymonenko; 10. Benton; 11. Weber; 12. Sato