ARH 316: American Art

Discussion Questions for Frances Pohl, *Framing America*

Part 2: Defining America

* What is “Grand Manner” painting, and why was it popular during this period?
* How was George Washington represented in art, and why were there so many images of him at this time? What does this say about the larger way art functioned during the Federal Period?
* How were Native Americans depicted in art during this period, and how did these depictions reify stereotypes and reinforce power relations?
* In what ways did art of this period reflect Enlightenment philosophy and principles? Give two specific examples.
* Which past architectural styles did American architects draw on during this period, and why?

Part 3: Nature and Nation

On Landscape Painting (for W 9.7.22):

* Why was landscape painting so popular during this period? What are the broader cultural ideas about the landscape that are reflected in painting?
* What did landscape painters include or not include in their images of the American landscape and why?
* Reflect on the above two questions as related to the work of: Thomas Cole; Frederic Church and Luminism; Albert Bierstadt and other painters of the West.
* Define the “picturesque” and the “sublime” and give examples.
* How did depictions of Native Americans reflect and reinforce European American attitudes?

On Genre Painting (for M 9.12.22):

* What is genre painting, and why was it popular during this period?
* How did genre paintings reflect or subvert broader cultural attitudes about their subjects? Reflect on this question as related to the works of: Mount, Bingham, and Spencer.

Part 4: A Nation at War

* How did art at mid-century represent war, and how did this convey different attitudes than in the art of the past?
* In what ways did representations of African Americans change during this period, and how did they remain the same? How did art reflect or reinforce broader attitudes in this?
* How were both sculptors and painters moving away from genre scenes in their art? How did the gender and/or race of some female sculptors influence the themes they chose to portray?
* How did images of Native Americans change by the late nineteenth-century and why?

Part 5: Art, Labor, and the Gilded Age

Chapters 15 and 16:

* How did art at this time depict labor and workers and how does this reflect changes in the nature of work during the Industrial Revolution?
* How were women and men represented in Gilded Age art, and how does this reflect larger thoughts about gender during this period?
* How did chromolithograph prints function during this period?

Chapters 17 and 18:

* What was Aestheticism and how did its aims differ from that of Realist artists such as Eakins and Homer? What gendered meanings are present in Aestheticist art.
* What was trompe l’oeil painting and what larger cultural meanings are embedded in it?
* What were the main trends in architecture at the end of the 19c? What are some general characteristics of Modernism in architecture? (combine Parts 5 and 6 discussions of architecture)
* Compare and contrast the exhibitions and embedded meanings of the “White City” and the Midway at the World’s Columbian Exposition?
* How do Tanner’s representations of African-American life differ from previous artists?

Part 6: The Machine, the Primitive, and the Modern

On Ashcan:

* What subject matter did the Ashcan artists portray and why? What formal qualities characterize their works? What new/shifting ideas about art and its function form the basis for their works? How is this different from ideas about art at the end of the 19c?
* How was the criticism surrounding Ashcan artwork gendered?
* What were some of the larger historical issues/events of the early 20c and how are some of those reflected in Ashcan art?
* What views of the urban working classes are reflected in late 19c imagery? In early 20c imagery? (combine content from ch. 5 and 6)

On Modernism and Stieglitz circle:

* How were both the Ashcan artists and the Stieglitz circle “avant-garde” in their opposition to the Academy and Academic art?
* Explain the significance of Stieglitz and his gallery 291 on the development of Modernism in the U.S. What style and concept of art did he help to promote? Which artists were associated with Stieglitz?
* What was the Armory show and what was its impact on Modernism in the U.S.?
* What was Marcel Duchamp’s relation to the U.S. artworld and how was his concept of art different from that of the Stieglitz circle?
* Discuss the modernism of Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley. How do the works of these two artists and other modernists bring up issues of gender and sexuality?

On the Harlem Renaissance:

* What was the Harlem Renaissance and who were the artists associated with it? How was it related to the evolution of the “New Negro”?
* What subject matter did they favor and why? What were some of the larger aims of their work?
* How did their art challenge or reclaim past representations of African Americans in visual culture?

Part 7: Art for the People, Art Against Fascism

On government sponsored art:

* What subjects and styles were favored in govt. funded public murals? Why? What were the general messages of these works? How were gender and race portrayed?
* What subjects were portrayed in govt. funded (FSA) photography? What was the aim and purpose of these works?

On Regionalism, etc.:

* Who were the Regionalist painters? What themes did they focus on and why? How were their works tied to nationalistic sentiment at the time, both in terms of subject and style?
* How can Grant Wood’s *American Gothic* be considered both a celebration and critique of rural America?
* How could much of the art produced during this period be seen as reassuring in light of the Great Depression and its aftermath?
* What other artworks produced during the period signaled a more pointed or political critique of rural America?

On urban realism:

* How did some artists in the 1930s use their art as a political critique of urban America?
* What images of women in the city were typical of this period? How does the depiction of women at work in the city differ from images of men at work in the city?
* Discuss corporate commissions of artwork during these years. Why did corporations patronize artists during this period and what messages were conveyed in these images? What style was preferred for these corporate commissions and why?