

Making Light Visible revised 2nd draft

This is a 10-week seminar on light in the visual arts. Introductory topics on Art in the West and its fascination with light and California Light and Space Artists of the '60s will be given by the moderators followed by presentations by participants.

Participants can choose from the topics listed below. Most of the topics are paired so you would be presenting on both. These pairings are suggested to offer an opportunity to compare and contrast different approaches to the same intention. For example, in light as drama and theater you might choose to discuss two Baroque artists, Caravaggio an Italian artist with Rembrandt an artist from the north, and consider how each creates drama through using light but in different ways. Other topic pairs offer a comparison between works from different periods. Each participant will give a 20-30-minute presentation allowing time for discussion. Two participants will present each week.

Light as Symbol of God. From Early Christian times light has symbolized the presence of god.

In order to suggest that they had to transform our normal experiences of light into something rare and unusual. Artists did that through either changing light into color through stained glass or using reflective surfaces and rare, expensive material like gold and gems.

Reflected light

Early Christian Mosaics in Ravenna, The mausoleum of Galla Placidia
Gold Medieval liturgical objects, chalices, reliquaries
Here you would discuss how the use of these materials produced feelings of the divine presence.

Transparent light

Stained glass: Ste. Chapelle, Paris/Chartres Cathedral
Corbusier, Ronchamp Chapel
Two different uses of stained glass one medieval and one from the twentieth century and two very different statements about light and architecture.

Light as Reality, the creation of three-dimensional space

Artists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries became increasingly interested to how to capture the appearance of real light and space in their paintings. In choosing one of these topics you would consider how the artists mentioned dealt with the challenges of using paint on a two-dimensional surface to create the illusion of light and space.

Leonardo da Vinci, Italy
Masaccio, light and perspective, Italy
Jan van Eyck, Netherlands
Here you would discuss how Leonard and Masaccio use light and shade to create space in contrast to van Eyck from the north, who creates a different kind of reality using oil paint.

Johannes Vermeer, Dutch, 16th century
Claude Lorrain, French, 16th century
In this pair you would discuss how Vermeer uses light to create intimate domestic spaces in contrast to Lorrain who focuses on spacious landscapes.

Light as Drama and Theater

In the seventeenth century many artists and architects became interested in using light to create works that expressed drama, movement and emotional excitement.

Caravaggio, Italy, Rembrandt, Holland

In this comparison you would discuss the theatrical dramas of Caravaggio in contrast to the subdued and subtle, yet dramatic use of shadows and light Rembrandt's paintings and etchings.

Bernini, the Cornaro Chapel and the Colonnade at St. Peters

Here you would be dealing with two architectural and sculptural works by the one artist. The Cornaro chapel is a complex work combining sculpture, architecture and light into a dramatic, and erotic representation of St. Theresa in Ecstasy. The St Peter's Colonnade incorporates the movement of the viewer to produce drama and surprise.

The science of color and light, color theory. Those who choose either of these two topics might want to consider the impact of photography on 19th century painting.

Monet and impressionism

Seurat, Pissarro, Color theory and pointillism

Monet and other Impressionists incorporated in an informal way some of the ideas of the color theorists while Seurat and the pointillists formalized the concepts of the theorists, such as Chevrueil.

Constable, English, meteorological cloud studies

JMW Turner, English, Goethe's Theory of Color.

These two English artists, whose works are very different, were however, very interested in scientific theories regarding our perceptions of light and color.

Creation of light, light as medium, light as subject, manipulation of light

Annie Leibovitz/Dawoud Bey: *Both are portrait photographers.*

Dan Flavin/Teamlab (Japan) *Both Flavin and Teamlab use light to create environments, Flavin's are made from commercially available fluorescent tubes.*

Robert Irwin/James Turrell: *Both artists create immersive installations using light as subject and medium.*

Jenny Holzer/Krzysztof Wodiczko: *Holzer uses light to deliver words and ideas in public spaces. Wodiczko's projections on buildings deal with war, conflict, trauma, memory and communication. Compare and contrast them.*

Yayoi Kusama/Bruce Nauman. *Kusama's mirrored rooms are infused with autobiographical, psychological and sexual content. In Nauman's videos he uses his own body to complete repetitive tasks. He also plays with words in neon and in large scale installations.*

Final Project on photography