

## **'From Caesar to Corbusier': The history of Switzerland through its art and architecture**

**Instructor: Carla Rachman, [crachman@bu.edu](mailto:crachman@bu.edu)**

### **Introduction**

At the confluence of three major European cultures, French, German, and Italian, Switzerland is a small country which has managed to gain and guard its independence both politically and culturally. Despite the strength of its powerful neighbors and the great material poverty of a country with little arable land and no natural resources, it has managed to forge a distinct national character combining 4 language groups and two major religions to produce one of the wealthiest and most stable of all nations. Centuries of peaceful coexistence have produced an architectural heritage which is uniquely varied and also uniquely preserved. Not coincidentally, Switzerland also has nearly a thousand museums.

### **Course overview**

This course covers the history of Switzerland through its art and architecture. It will give a through chronological grounding in the development of the Swiss confederation, from the Roman period to the early twentieth century, setting the country's development in a wider European context. At the end of the course students should have a wide-ranging knowledge of the major events in Swiss history and a critical appreciation of the way in which they have shaped the built environment of the country and its artistic heritage. They should also have a general grasp of the main currents of Western art from the Romanesque period to the early twentieth century.

**There are no prerequisites for this class, but a background in history, philosophy, literature or religion will be useful. The ability to read in French and/or German will also aid with the research paper.**

### **Methodology**

In order to make the most of the many museums and historic monuments in the vicinity of Geneva, this class will be taught mainly on site, in museums, galleries, and historic buildings. All entrance fees and fares will be covered by the program.

As this class is based on first-hand observation, the exact content will vary from one semester to the next depending on what is currently available in terms of temporary exhibitions, museum display (and closures), special seasonal events and so on. Sometimes trips will be changed at short notice, but only in consultation with the group.

All site visits are a mandatory part of the course, which will consist of at least 40 contact hours over 6 weeks. Punctual attendance at all sessions is required. Students will lose 1% for every late arrival and 5% for any unexcused absence.

### **Assessment**

Assessment will take the form of a quiz in the third week (10%), a research paper (30%) in week 4, a presentation in week 5 (30%), and a final exam in the last week (30%).

### **Reading**

Students will be loaned textbooks and other material will be on Blackboard. There is required reading after each class, with suggested reading marked with an asterisk. For their research, students are able to use the wonderful resources of the specialised Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie, as well as the University of Geneva library at Unibastion.

### **Plagiarism**

All students are responsible for having read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Students are advised that the penalty against students on a Boston University program for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be "expulsion from the program or the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on Student Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the dean."

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

### **WEEK ONE**

#### **Introduction to the class: Looking at national history *Thursday 14 Jan***

Meet Vollandes 10: end Parc des Eaux-Vives, 12.30

The class will finish with a walk around the local Parc des Eaux-Vives and its buildings, including two Neo-Classical manors, a three hundred year old chalet, and the site of a Roman villa.

#### **Reading**

Aldo Benini, Modern Switzerland, chapter 1, *History and Geography*, pp 7 – 16

Joelle Kuntz Switzerland: How an Alpine Pass became a country Chapter 1 *How we were Born*

Grégoire Nappey Swiss History in a Nutshell Bern 2010 Chapter 1, *Before Switzerland*, pp 1-17

Jonathan Steinberg, Why Switzerland? Introduction (pp 1-7)

Chapter 1 *History*, pp 8 - 73, to be read over the duration of the course

#### **Looking at styles: from Romanesque to Renaissance *Friday 15 Jan***

Vollandes 10.00-12.30

#### **Reading**

Claude, Stefanon and Zaballos, Principles and Elements of Medieval Church Architecture in Western Europe, text and diagrams, pages 6, 16, 17, 20, 21

**On Saturday 16 Jan (afternoon), all students in this class will also be required to take a tour of the Old Town of Geneva with a guide from the City tourist board.**

### **WEEK TWO**

#### **Looking at urban history *Tuesday 19 Jan***

Meet Muzy, 10.00: end Maison Tavel, 12.30

Walk around the Old Town of Geneva and visit to the Maison Tavel, a fourteenth century house which is now the museum of the History of Geneva.

#### **Reading**

Louis Binz A Brief History of Geneva Geneva 1985 pp. 1-36

Kuntz *Geneva: A republic plugged into the world*, pp.115 – 135

Nappey ch.2, pp 20-27

#### **Looking at architecture *Wednesday 20 Jan***

Meet St Pierre, 10.00-12.30

Visit to Cathedral, where we will look at the Gothic structure of the building, the neoclassical façade, and the archeological dig in the basement. Weather permitting we will also climb the tower.

#### **Reading**

Michael Camille, Gothic Art, Everyman 1996, Chapter 1, *New Ways of Seeing Gothic Art* pp9-25

Ville de Genève 2005 *St Peter's Cathedral* pp.1– 20

#### **Looking at the artefacts of the past *Thursday 21 Jan***

MAH 11.00-13.00

Visit to the Geneva museum of art and history

#### **Reading**

Wolf Scott, Chapter 1, *The Original Swiss*, pp11-26

Museum of Art and History, Geneva Annelise Nicoud *Domestic Furnishings*, José Gonod  
*Arms and Armour*  
Nappey Ch.3, *An Independent Country* pp 30-39

### **WEEK THREE**

#### **Looking at beliefs 1: the visual cultures of Catholicism and the Reformation Tuesday 26 January**

Meet at Museum of the Reformation, 10.00-12.30

##### **Reading**

Jonathan Steinberg, *Why Switzerland?* Chapter 6, Religion, pp 206 - 234, to be read over the fourth week

Isabell Graesllé *Reminiscences* International Museum of the Reformation, 2006 *Introduction* pp 5-17

Wolf Scott, *Pictures at an Exhibition: An Introduction to Swiss History and Art*, Geneva 2007 ch.3, *The Reforming Swiss*, pp 51-66

#### **Looking at Styles: Renaissance to Rococo Wednesday 27 January**

Vollandes 10-12.30

Quick quiz (10%), followed by lecture

##### **Reading**

Anna Jackson, *Period Styles*, *Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassicism*

#### **Looking at People: figure painting Thursday 28 Jan**

MAH 11.00-13.00

Visit to the Museum of Art and History

##### **Reading**

Alexander Sturgis *A Closer Look: Faces* pp13-20, *How Painters Paint Faces*

### **WEEK FOUR**

Research papers to be given in by midnight on Monday 1 Feb

#### **Looking at beliefs 2: Enlightenment to Revolution Tuesday 2 February**

Vollandes, 10.00-12.30

##### **Reading**

Nappey ch.4, *Transition to Modern Switzerland*, pp42-50

*Lake Geneva as Shelley and Byron knew it*

*Romanticism: Problem Child of the Enlightenment'*

#### **Looking at Nature: landscape painting Thursday 4 Feb**

MAH 11.00-13.00

Visit to the Museum of Art and History

##### **Reading**

Eighteenth century reading, MAH

Wolff Scott, *Chapter 5, The Alpine Swiss*, pp89 - 115

#### **Looking at Mechanisation 1: Clockmaking Friday 5 Feb**

Meet Musée Patek Philippe, 2.30pm

**Reading:** Olivier Fatio, *Triumph over Tragedy*

## WEEK FIVE

**Student presentations** *Monday 08 February* Vollandes 10.00 - 12.30

**Student presentations** *Wednesday 10 February* Vollandes 10.00 - 12.30

Please arrive with your presentation on a key, and come in early to set it up if you are the first presenters.

## **Mechanisation and Modernism** *Friday 12 February*

Meet Place des Nations, 2pm

### **Reading**

Aldo Benini Modern Switzerland, chapter 1, *Switzerland in the World Economy*, pp.98-114

Le Corbusier Towards an Architecture 1927 pp. 4-28

The City of Tomorrow 1929 Chapter 2, *Order*, pp15-26

Naphey ch.6 The 20<sup>th</sup> Century pp66-80

## WEEK SIX

**Looking at Industry: Mechanisation** *Tuesday 16 February*

Vollandes 10-12.30

### **Reading**

Wolf Scott Chapter 6, *The Homely Swiss*, pp117 – 122

Naphey ch.5 *The establishment of the federal state*, pp54-62

**Final exam** *Thursday 18 February* Vollandes, 10.00 – 12.30

## READING

Students will be loaned copies of:

Louis Bintz, A Brief History of Geneva (Geneva 1985)

Grégoire Nappey, Swiss History in a Nutshell

Joelle Kunz Switzerland: How an Alpine Pass became a Country.

There will be one copy each of Jonathan Steinberg, Why Switzerland, and one of Wolf Scott, Pictures at an Exhibition: An Introduction to Swiss History and Art, between 2 or 3 students.

On Blackboard, or as handouts, there will also be extracts from among the following sources, all available to borrow in hard copy.

Aldo Benini, Modern Switzerland McGraw Hill, 1999

Roland Blaettler, The Ariana Museum, Geneva The Swiss Institute for Art Research, 1995

Michael Camille, Gothic Art, Everyman, 1996

Claude, Stefanon and Zabaloos, Principles and Elements of Medieval Church Architecture in Western Europe, Paris 2007

Le Corbusier Towards an Architecture 1927 Francis Lincoln edn., 2008  
The City of Tomorrow 1929 Dover edn., 1987

Mathew Craske Art in Europe 1700 – 1830 Oxford, 1997

Davies and Kennedy Medieval and Renaissance Art, V&A publications, 2009

Adrian Forty Objects of Desire, Thames and Hudson, 1987

Isabell Graesllé Reminiscences International Museum of the Reformation, 2006

Mavis Guinard Petit Guide de la Suisse Insolite /Made in Switzerland Editions Insolite 2007

Peter Hall Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century City Wiley Blackwell, 2002

Spiro Kostof The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History Thames and Hudson 2006 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

Kunstmuseum Bern The Museum of Fine Arts Bern, 2002

Kunstmuseum Luzern Swiss Masters Benteli 2008

Joelle Kuntz Switzerland: How an Alpine Pass became a country Historiator, 2005

Claude Lapaire Museum of Art and History, Geneva The Swiss Institute for Art Research, 1991

Musée Suisse, Prangins, Discovering History Swiss Federal Office of Culture, 1988

Wolf Scott, Pictures at an Exhibition: An Introduction to Swiss History and Art Geneva, 2007

William Vaughan Romanticism Thames and Hudson, 1978

Ville de Genève St Peter's Cathedral Geneva, 2005

Zetrum Paul Klee In the Enchanted Garden, exhibition catalogue Bern, 2008

## **ASSIGNMENTS AH 308**

### **QUIZ**

The quiz will consist of 30 short questions requiring answers of one to three lines, mainly definitions, including technical terms. There will also be a timeline. It will cover only what we have studied in class and what is in your readings and handouts, including the glossary.

The aim is to see if you are doing the reading and absorbing the material thoroughly.

It carries 10% of the grade.

### **RESEARCH PAPER**

For this paper, you should choose a work of art or architecture that interests you **and that you have seen first-hand.**

It may date from any period but it must have been made in present-day Switzerland and be on view in this country.

The paper should have the following components:

A precise and close description of the object itself, covering material, techniques, size, condition, date if known, place where it was originally housed, where it is now, an illustration (drawing, postcard, photograph if allowed by the museum) – 7.5 %

A brief description and critique of the way in which the object is displayed, including, if appropriate, a comparison with its original setting - 5%

The history of the object ('provenance'), including how it came to be in the museum – 5%

The context of the object, both historical and artistic – 7.5 %

This is an invented example .....

'This tiled stove from the seventeenth century shows the adaption of Oriental ceramics to the Northern European climate during the period of Bernese dominance. Luxury objects such as this were produced essentially for the fortified manors of the Catholic overlords who were able to employ Italian artisans trained in faience techniques originating in China, and local workers familiar with the technique of stone construction normal in mountain regions ...'

Finally, you should say why you chose this subject. 2%

The paper should have footnotes and a bibliography, including **at least** two references to sources in the reading-book, two references to other books, and if wished two references to internet sources. 3%

It will count for 30% of your grade and should be at least 1,500 words long, double-spaced. There is no upper limit. You may use any font you wish and any system of references as long as it is clear and consistent.

## **PRESENTATION**

For this assignment you must give a ten-minute presentation of a city, town or village that you have visited in Switzerland. It must be illustrated with your own photos, drawings, or models. You may use PowerPoint but it is not essential. If you are using PP the 'setup time' is counted towards your assignment, to make sure you are ready to go.

This presentation counts for 30% of your grade. You will be marked on a sheet like this which will be returned to you.

You should cover the following points:

The location - give a *through* account of where it is (2), including a map (1), and describe the way in which the location has influenced the growth and evolution of the city, town or village - 4 %

**Mark out of 7**

The salient points of its history – include the last 100 years, don't get stuck on the Romans, and show how the history has developed up to the present day

**Mark out of 8**

How it fits in with what you have learnt on this course

This is the most important section, I am looking for evidence of further reading (3) and imaginative thinking here (3) - you should be drawing parallels (2) and making comparisons (2).

**Mark out of 10**

Presentation and defence

- 1 mark will be assigned for the quality of the pictures and other visual aids
- 1 mark or part of a mark will be assigned for explaining why you chose it
- 1 marks will be assigned for a fluent and elegant presentation
- 2 marks for answering questions from other students (and maybe from me too).



## **Mark out of 5**

Once you have given the presentation you will be asked to submit the presentation to me for re-reading before I assign a grade. There will be 5 minutes for questions afterwards: you will be graded on how well you answer

## **Total**

Please make sure that you time your presentation correctly, **you will be stopped after 15 minutes (20 if a pair), and will lose the potential question-time.**

**Please note that if this exercise is done in pairs, the time is extended to 15 minutes (20 with questions), and there will be one grade for both students.**

## **FINAL EXAM AH 308**

This exam will last 150 minutes and will have three sections.

First there will be at least 10 slides with structured short answers. The items shown will be a mix of familiar and unfamiliar images. You will be tested on what you have retained from the classes and what you can make of it.

Secondly there will be short questions, some of them multiple choice, drawn from the presentations of the other students and from the reading, visits, and handouts. There will also be a map of Switzerland where you will be asked to locate certain towns and cantons.

Lastly there will be an essay section where you will be asked to write on two topics, chosen from a list which I will give you the weekend before the exam. You can choose any two of them. You must use sources and examples other than those covered in the classes and visits.