



UNIVERSITÀ  
CATTOLICA  
del Sacro Cuore

# Marvels of Milan: A Visual Voyage through Art, History, and Culture

PROF. ANGELICA VERDUCI

<b>Area of study:</b>	Italian Studies and Culture
<b>Area Code:</b>	CU/AR300
<b>Method of Instruction:</b>	In-person

## Description

This course invites students to uncover the rich artistic and cultural heritage of Milan—one of the most vibrant, cosmopolitan, and historically layered urban centers in Europe. Through a close examination of artworks, monuments, and architectural spaces, students will embark on a visual journey tracing Milan's evolution from Roman times to the present day. Emphasis will be placed on formal analysis, historical context, and the importance of art in expressing and shaping civic identity.

Beginning with Milan's origins in antiquity and the powerful legacy of Saint Ambrose during the early Christian period, the course explores the city's transformation across the Middle Ages, the grandeur of the Visconti and Sforza courts, and the imprint of successive foreign dominations—Spanish, Austrian, and Napoleonic. We will then turn to Milan's pivotal place in the cultural narratives of Italian unification and its emergence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as a global hub of modern and contemporary art, design, fashion, and architecture.

Blending in-class dynamic lectures and seminar discussions with site-specific field trips, Milan itself becomes our open-air and living classroom. Visits to iconic churches, world-renowned museums, and landmarks will provide an immersive learning experience, allowing students to encounter, investigate, and fully appreciate artworks and monuments in their original historical and physical settings. Whether walking the halls of the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana or standing beneath the soaring spires of the Duomo, students will not simply study Milanese art—they will fully experience it.

## Course objectives can be synthesized as follows:

- To develop a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Milan's artistic and cultural trajectory from antiquity to the present day
- To cultivate the ability to interpret and critically analyze works of art and architecture within their historical, social, and urban contexts
- To acquire firsthand insight into the ways in which art both reflects and shapes civic identity
- To foster a deeper appreciation of Milan's role in the broader history of European and world culture



UNIVERSITÀ  
CATTOLICA  
del Sacro Cuore

## COURSE CONTENTS

In the course we will investigate the following topics:

- Milan's origins under Roman rule and the city's early urban and architectural foundations
- The early Christian period, with a focus on the cultural and religious influence of Saint Ambrose, the patron of Milan
- The rise of the medieval Commune and its impact on civic art and identity
- The patronage of the Visconti and Sforza dynasties, and their role in shaping Medieval and Renaissance art and architecture in Milan
- The effects of Spanish and Austrian rule, considering their influence on Baroque and Neoclassical art and architecture developments in the city
- The transformations of the Napoleonic era, including urban reforms and the reorganization of cultural institutions and museums
- Milan's role in the Italian unification, and its cultural positioning in the newly formed nation-state
- Twentieth-century Milan, focusing on its contributions to modern art, design, architecture, and its role in industrial and political history
- The city's evolution into a contemporary cultural capital, examining recent developments in visual arts, fashion, and urbanism

We will study a broad set of iconic artworks, monuments, museums, and cultural institutions in Milan, including Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, the Duomo Cathedral, The Sforzesco Castle, Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Pinacoteca of Brera, Teatro alla Scala, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, Piazza Gae Aulenti, CityLife district, Fondazione Prada, among others.

## PREREQUISITES

None.

## METHOD OF TEACHING

Through interactive lectures, class discussions, student presentations, and field trips in Milan, the course fosters active participation, critical thinking, and intercultural dialogue among students from diverse academic backgrounds.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to regularly attend and actively participate in all lectures, discussions, and site visits to fully engage with the course material. Completion of assigned readings is required to prepare for class discussions. During the first weeks of the course, students will complete a written assignment—a short essay on one artwork in Milan—focusing on composition, technique, style, and historical significance. This assignment is designed to introduce students to formal and visual analysis while developing critical thinking skills. A midterm and a final exam will evaluate comprehension of historical context, art terminology, and key Milanese sites and artists discussed in class. Additionally, students will design a final group project on a topic related to Milan's artistic and cultural heritage, to be chosen in consultation with the professor. Possible project formats might include a mock exhibition, a virtual tour, an artist case study, or a neighborhood art and architecture survey. Throughout the semester, groups will conduct research for the final group project, culminating in both an oral presentation and a written component.



UNIVERSITÀ  
CATTOLICA  
del Sacro Cuore

## CREDITS

6 ECTS

## GRADING

Class participation and attendance (20%)  
Short visual analysis essay (10%)  
Midterm exam (20%)  
Final exam (20%)  
Final group project (30%)

## COURSE READINGS AND MATERIALS

Your primary textbook is your class notes. Active engagement and consistent note-taking during lectures and class discussions are essential for success in this course. Students are also encouraged to bring a notebook for on-site observations during field visits. Course readings will consist of a combination of scholarly articles and excerpts from art history textbooks that provide both historical context and analytical frameworks for understanding Milan's artistic and cultural heritage. All required readings, along with the syllabus, art vocabulary terms lists, assignments, and lesson slides will be available on Blackboard, organized by weekly modules.

## INSTRUCTOR BIO

Professor Angelica Verduci is an art historian and archivist. Her research explores the intersections of macabre and eschatological imagery, performance, pastoral theology, and medieval vernacular culture. She received her Ph.D. in Art History from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland (May 2023), where she taught Global Art History from Prehistory to Contemporary Art, and supported tutoring for master and graduate students. She has substantial experience in museums and archives, especially in research, curation, and preservation. Professor Verduci has presented at national and international venues, such as Harvard University, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Florida State University, International Center of Medieval Art, and Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. She has also collaborated with leading cultural institutions in Milan, including the Accademia di Brera, Capitolo Metropolitano del Duomo di Milano, Museo del Novecento, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, and Palazzo Reale.

## E-MAIL ADDRESS

[angelicaverduci@gmail.com](mailto:angelicaverduci@gmail.com)