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Milan in a Global Perspective: Art, Architecture, Design, and Urban Transformation

PROF. ANGELICA VERDUCI

Area of study:	Italian Studies and Culture
Area Code:	CU/AR310
Method of Instruction:	In-person

Description

Milan is a city built through layers of history, where each historical period has left visible traces that continue to shape its urban identity. From the Roman origins of the city—whose remains were gradually incorporated into the medieval urban fabric—to the medieval architecture characterized by the use of local brick, and later to monumental marble-clad buildings and modern structures in reinforced concrete, iron, and glass, Milan presents an extraordinary stratification of materials, styles, and cultural influences.

Throughout the course, students will explore how the city's urban fabric and skyline continuously evolved across the centuries, progressively opening to modernity through the emergence of increasingly vertical architecture and contemporary skyscrapers, while never losing their connection to local traditions, historical memory, and Milanese cultural heritage.

Designed specifically for international students, the course offers a historical, artistic, and cultural exploration of Milan through the analysis of its most iconic architecture and urban spaces, constantly placing the city in dialogue with broader global developments. Milan will therefore be examined not only through its distinctive trajectory of urban growth, but also through comparisons with international architectural, artistic, and design traditions, highlighting how Milanese architecture evolved alongside parallel global trends.

Combining dynamic in-class lectures with discussions conducted during site-specific field trips, the city of Milan itself becomes an open-air living classroom. Visits to iconic landmarks will offer students an immersive learning experience, allowing them to encounter, analyze, and fully appreciate artworks, architecture, and urban spaces within their original historical and physical contexts. Rather than studying Milanese art and architecture solely through images, students will experience the city directly through its streets, monuments, and evolving urban landscape.

Course objectives can be synthesized as follows:

- To develop a comprehensive understanding of Milan's artistic, architectural, and urban evolution from antiquity to the contemporary era, examining how historical layers continue to shape the city's identity
- To cultivate the ability to critically analyze artworks, architecture, public spaces, and urban environments within their historical, social, political, and cultural contexts
- To encourage comparative and interdisciplinary perspectives by placing Milan in dialogue with major international artistic, architectural, and urban developments, while exploring the relationship between architecture, design, public art, civic identity, and collective memory



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- To acquire firsthand experience in observing and interpreting artworks and buildings within their original urban settings through site-specific visits and field-based learning, fostering a deeper appreciation of Milan as a global center of art, architecture, design, innovation, and cultural exchange

COURSE CONTENTS

Topics explored in the course will include:

- The persistence of classical Roman and Greek culture within Milan's urban fabric, as well as the legacy of Fascist and Rationalist architecture in shaping the city's twentieth-century identity. Students will examine sites such as the *Roman Columns of San Lorenzo*, decorative elements including the telamons that articulate the façade of *Palazzo degli Omenoni* and the caryatids in *Palazzo Reale*, alongside Rationalist landmarks such as *Milano Centrale Station* and the *Palazzo dell'Arte*, reflecting the coexistence of classical memory, monumentality, political ideology, and modernist architectural language within Milan's evolving urban landscape
- Sacred architecture and urban stratification during the medieval and Renaissance periods through the *Duomo di Milano*, examined in dialogue with the *Sagrada Família* and Japanese pagodas in order to highlight different expressions of identity, spirituality, monumentality, and verticality
- Civic and defensive architecture of the *Castello Sforzesco* in comparison with the *Forbidden City* in Beijing, exploring contrasting models of political power, spatial hierarchy, and controlled urban environments
- The relationship between architecture, performance, and cultural identity through the study of *Teatro alla Scala*, examined in dialogue with the *Opéra Garnier* in Paris and the *Sydney Opera House* as emblematic examples of how theatrical architecture reflects different historical periods, artistic traditions, and urban representations of prestige and modernity
- The emergence of modernity and the Industrial Age through Milan's Liberty architecture, including buildings such as *Casa Galimberti* and *Palazzo Castiglioni*, examined alongside Art Nouveau developments in Brussels, Paris, and Barcelona
- The evolution of infrastructure and urban life through the Navigli canal system in relation to Amsterdam's canals, as well as through the *Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II*, one of the earliest prototypes of modern commercial architecture
- Twentieth-century and contemporary architecture through key Milanese landmarks such as the *Pirelli Tower*, *Torre Velasca*, *Piazza Gae Aulenti*, and *CityLife*, placed in dialogue with experimental forms of vertical urbanism and global skylines in cities such as New York, Tokyo, and Shanghai
- International models of sustainable and organic architecture such as *Bosco Verticale*, discussed in relation to the *Trudo Vertical Forest* in Eindhoven and Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater*
- Urban regeneration projects such as *Porta Garibaldi* and *Fondazione Prada*, compared with international case studies including the *Musée d'Orsay* in Paris, in order to reflect on adaptive reuse and the transformation of industrial heritage into contemporary cultural spaces
- The relationship between public art, sculpture, and urban architecture through influential works such as Maurizio Cattelan's *L.O.V.E.* and Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Mela Reintegrata*, compared to other world-renowned examples such as Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* and Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, in order to reflect on the role of art in shaping public space, collective identity and contemporary urban experience

PREREQUISITES

None.



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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 and site visits to fully engage with the course material. 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 landmarks, artworks and artists discussed in class. Additionally, students will design a final group project on a topic related to the course, 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.

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. All course materials, 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. 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

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