

Crisis and Representation 1740-1850: Re-considering Vision and the Visual

FINA539

Instructor: Maureen Ryan

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Description

This seminar takes as its focus the complex ways in which different categories of visual culture and particular modes of seeing, intersected with the social and political transformations that characterized the years between 1740 and 1850 in France, England and the Americas. The period was one of ongoing crisis. The challenges posed by Enlightenment critiques of existing paradigms of knowledge, and the upheavals associated with the American and French Revolutions, emerged in tandem with industrialization, rapid urban growth, and expanding colonial empires. Together these factors forced a constantly shifting redefinition of boundaries—whether those used to demarcate class, gender, ethnicity and race; or to articulate nations and communities; or to classify differences between art and non-art.

Over the two terms of this seminar, course readings, class discussion, presentations by visiting scholars, and a major assigned research topic will provide an opportunity to examine how vision as a social practice and the visual (high art and popular art forms, and the built or imagined environment), responded to this new modern world. Weekly seminar classes will assess recent theoretical and historical scholarship in the field. Individual term research projects will allow the issues raised in readings and in class discussions, to be worked out in relation to particular historical and visual problems. The research projects will be developed over the course of the 2 term and presented in an oral seminar at the end of the Spring Term. The oral seminar will be further developed into a written research paper 20-35 pages in length.