Access the abstracts of the Individual Independent Study Projects below. See more examples and the full texts at The College of Wooster Openworks site.

- **Mycenae and Cultural Memory 150 to 2015 CE**
  – Elora Agsten ’15

- **The Queen’s Serpent: An Examination of the Serpent Vessel from Burial 61 from El Perú-Waka’**
  – Sarah Van Oss ’16

- **Custom Framing: An Analysis of Camille Pissarro’s “Les Turpitudes Sociales” within a Base-Superstructure Model**
  – Robin S. Klaus ’16

- **Plays with Words: Understanding Visual Interpretation through Ed Ruscha’s Text Works**
  – Claire E. Ilersich ’17

- **Wine, Women and Woodcuts: The Maintenance of the Isolated Landsknechte Marginalized Society in Sixteenth Century Germany, as Shown through the Dissemination of Military Genre Prints**
  – Kathryn T. Connors ’18

- **The Role of Children in Seventeenth -Century Dutch Paintings: Social Distinction and National Identity**
  – Helena Jackson Enders ’18
**Abstract**

This study examines the afterlife of the history, art, and artifacts of the Mycenaeans. For centuries, individuals and institutions—including the travel writer Pausanias, the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, and the National Archaeological Museum of Athens—used the Mycenaeans in order to create a glorified vision of Homeric Greece. In order to thoroughly explicate this notion, my research examines key primary sources such as the second-century CE *Descriptions of Greece* of Pausanias, the nineteenth-century *Mycenae Diary and Mycenae Narrative* of Schliemann, and the twenty-first-century display cases and presentations of the Mycenaean Gallery of the National Archaeological Museum of Athens. I also use crucial secondary sources, including work from scholars Carol Duncan, Stephen Greenblatt, Christian Habicht, and Kathrin Maurer. This study examines the impact of romanticized visions of Homeric Greece on historical interpretations of the Mycenaeans, which enabled Western Europeans to attempt to claim ownership of aspects of Greek cultural heritage on behalf of “Western Civilization.” Simultaneously, the Greeks used the Mycenaeans and their artifacts to build a sense of Hellenic identity. While this study could be applicable to a number of Greek heritage sites, Mycenae is a unique and powerful example because of its continued cultural relevance throughout the past four millennia.

**Excerpt**

Curiously, given his love of Homer and his trust in the texts’ historical veracity, Schliemann chose not to name the culture he discovered the Achaeans, the name Homer gave to the Greek invaders of Troy.3 However, Homeric monikers are consistently associated with the Mycenaeans. *From Mycenae rich in gold*, to the second-century CE writer Pausanias’ mention of the tholos tomb known as the Treasury of Atreus, to the Mask of Agamemnon named by Schliemann himself, Homer and Mycenae are linked throughout popular history and literature (fig. 1, fig. 2)4

– Elora Agsten ’15

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3 Ibid., 9.
The Queen’s Serpent: An Examination of the Serpent Vessel from Burial 61 from El Perú-Waka’

Abstract
In 2012, Dr. Olivia Navarro-Farr and her team uncovered the tomb of a Maya ruler in a large ceremonial structure at the site of El Perú-Waka’ in the Petén region of Guatemala. Specialists, subsequently, identified these remains as those of Lady K’abel, a queen already well known from texts associated with the ancient city. This study will explore one of the artifacts found in the tomb, called the War Serpent Vessel, found at the Kaloompte’s feet. I will propose that the iconographic depictions on this artifact represent a supernatural Serpent that emerges from this vessel. I suggest that this vessel acted as a cave through which this Serpent would have emerged during ritual activities. Its position at the feet of the interred emphasizes its interpretation as a metaphorical cave that emerges from the sacred mountain, on which rulers often stand in royal portraiture, as seen in Waka’ Stela 34.

Excerpt
The present study examines one of the artifacts found within the mortuary assemblage, a polychrome vessel designated Artefacto de Registro #2, Hllazgo Especial #918. For simplicity’s sake, I refer to this artifact as H.E. #918 or as the Serpent vessel due to its painted decoration. Located at the feet of the interred ruler, this vessel remains intact and depicts an intricate example of iconography representing the War or Vision Serpent [Fig. A.1], so interpreted by scholars like Taube (1992) and Schele and Miller (1986). In this study, I first present a reading of the iconographic motif on the plate itself, comparing iconographic examples present in published sources (for example: Schele and Miller 1986 etc.). I also posit an interpretation regarding the significance of the physical location of H.E. #918 with the mortuary context of Burial 61.

– Sarah Van Oss ’16

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Custom Framing: An Analysis of Camille Pissarro’s “Les Turpitudes Sociales” within a Base-Superstructure Model

Introduction

Narrate for us in your vivid style or in your fervent pictures the titanic struggles of the masses against their aggressors; enflame young hearts with the beautiful breath of revolution. — Peter Kropotkin, “Paroles d’un Révolté” (1885)

Though Camille Pissarro (1830–1903) is best known for his avant impressionist paintings of the French rural countryside, his knowledge of social philosophy was more profound than any other notable writer or painter of the period.¹ He is considered to be the first artist with “a consistent and lifelong devotion” to anarchist politics, proselytizing for the cause decades before its eventual popularity and continuing his financial and artistic support of the movement until his death.² Even so, Pissarro’s political radicalism is all but absent from his artistic oeuvre, with the exception of a single album of drawings titled Les Turpitudes Sociales (1890).

Created for the personal use of Pissarro’s two English nieces, Alice and Esther Isaacson, Les Turpitudes Sociales is a bound work of twenty-eight pen-and-ink drawings intended to convert its owners to the artist’s own anarchist orientation. Though the women were in their early-to-mid-thirties when they received the work, Pissarro felt that a visual approach to the topic—rather than lengthy political writings by leading anarchist thinkers—was most effective; he thus created the Turpitudes as an extensive artistic account of the social ills of nineteenth-century France. The album address es the multifaceted misery of the working poor in twenty-eight separate visual accounts, though—in contrast with Pissarro’s larger oeuvre—it focuses solely on the urban industrial plight.

Les Turpitudes Sociales is a collective work of anarchist social commentary, yet its nearly thirty drawings lack a cohesive narrative thread beyond a general impression of urban misery. Thus, it initially reads more like a pictorial laundry list of social ills than a clearly anarchist analysis of contemporary society intended for political persuasion. However, closer inspection of the album’s seemingly arbitrary organization, combined with understandings of anarchist social theory, reveals a framework of analysis that is useful in eliciting a more comprehensive anarchist worldview from the album and its artist.

Specifically, I contend that a Marxist base-superstructure model is a valuable lens through which to analyze Les Turpitudes Sociales, as supported by the album’s own physical arrangement as well as anarchism’s shared conception of historical materialism. The ontological clarity of a base-superstructure analytical model provides a novel ideological clarity within the Turpitudes album; considered within an explicit framework of political thought, the Turpitudes images more comprehensively reflect the complexity of anarchist philosophy, as well as the problematic structure and function of nineteenth-century French economy and society.

Applying a base-superstructure framework of analysis specifically to Les Turpitudes Sociales also uncovers four thematic categories within which to further understand the album and characterize society as a whole. As evidenced by the album’s first group of drawings, these categories include: institutions, worth, relationships, and class conflict. The majority of the album’s drawings align with one or more of these themes, which contributes to a more exhaustive analysis of French society.

Though the political radicalism of Pissarro’s Les Turpitudes Sociales is undeniable, the intelligibility of anarchist philosophy within the album is less immediately obvious. What follows is an analysis of the work within specific political and thematic models in order to render the album a more coherent work of anarchist art. The first chapter will provide biographical context to the development of Pissarro’s anarchist philosophy, arguing that specific conditions of his youth and adult life lent themselves to the adoption of leftist politics. The second chapter more extensively introduces the Turpitudes album, and also details the thematic categories within which to further understand the album and characterize society as a whole. As evidenced by the album’s first group of drawings, these categories include: institutions, worth, relationships, and class conflict. The majority of the album’s drawings align with one or more of these themes, which contributes to a more exhaustive analysis of French society.

The third and fourth chapters are visual investigations of the Turpitudes images within the framework of a base-superstructure model and thematic categories. The third chapter focuses specifically on the nature of the base and superstructure, as visually characterized by capitalism and the misery of the human condition, respectively. The fourth chapter delves into a deeper analysis of the superstructure in relation to artistic depictions of institutions, worth, relationships, and class conflict. Though certainly not a definitive interpretation of Les Turpitudes Sociales, the analytical framework outlined and applied by this thesis provides novel means for an insightful investigation into the work, so as to better understand the anarchist worldview of Pissarro and his Turpitudes album.

— Robin S. Klaus ’16

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Plays with Words: Understanding Visual Interpretation through Ed Ruscha’s Text Works

Abstract
The purpose of this project is to examine Ed Ruscha and his use of language in his text works. After providing a formal analysis and biographical information, I ask the questions: What are the implications of using words rather than images? How are we to interpret these works? Furthermore, what ought one consider when interpreting a visual work? By combining both art history and philosophy, I plan to create a theory of interpretation that accounts for the visual qualities of the work, the artist and his intention, and the context of the work. I posit that a rich interpretation includes these categories: the visual, the artist’s intention, and the context (biography, art historical, and historical information).

I begin by including a formal analysis of Heavy Industry (1962) and I Think There is Something Dangerous Going on Here (1976) as a way to explicate the works’ formal characteristics before diving into the implications.

Chapter one includes an examination of Ruscha’s biography, starting from early childhood. In this, I look at significant experiences that impacted both his artworks and views on art. I find it necessary to include biographical information as a way to solidify a base before discussing the implications of his artworks.

Chapter two marks a transition from his biography to discussing his art. I identify his reasoning for an interest in both the printed page and books. This helps to establish his fondness for words and serves as an explication for this interest. In this chapter I discuss the physicality he gifts to his language.

Chapter three discusses numerous theories of art. I introduce Leo Tolstoy’s transmitter theory of art alongside Noel Carroll’s theory. From this, I compare the two and argue for favoring Carroll’s. In this chapter I investigate the concept and problems of intention, the context, personal attachment to a work, and finally participation. These subsections serve to support my thesis, in that a rich interpretation requires a look at multiple factions, as opposed to a singular category.

Lastly, chapter four includes revisit of Heavy Industry (1962) as a way to boast that interpretation is richer when one deeply interacts with the work. I end by concluding that interpretation is complex. It does not necessitate a singular static meaning, but rather changes and shifts.

– Claire E. Ilersich ’17

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Wine, Women and Woodcuts:  
The Maintenance of the Isolated Landsknechte Marginalized Society in Sixteenth Century Germany, as Shown through the Dissemination of Military Genre Prints

Abstract
Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century warfare in Europe was essentially solely fought by mercenaries, the most notable of which were the Germanic Landsknechte, ruthless foot soldiers that dominated the battlefields for nearly a century. While lauded in military scholarship for their innovations and contributions to the Military Revolution, the social impact of the Landsknechte often goes unnoticed, their status and influence ignored, despite the evident obsession civilian society had with the mercenaries’ lives, as seen through the tremendous production and consumption of military genre woodcuts. To understand the civilian perception of Landsknechte at the beginning of the sixteenth century, this Independent Study focuses on the ostracization of the mercenaries, as the Landsknechte were forced to operate on the margins of society, eventually leading to the celebration of alienation by the Landsknechte as a source of personal identity and pride. This ostracization can be seen through popular woodcuts that society, enamored and repulsed by the brutish Landsknechte, wildly consumed prints detailing enlistment process of the soldiers, the regulations of mercenary domestic life, and allegorical woodcuts that further served to isolate the Landsknechte. The study of the mass dissemination of woodcuts glorifying the Landsknechte through various styles of the military genre allows and understanding of both the active alienation of the Landsknechte based on their liminal status and how fickle public mentality was shown through popular styles within the military genre of woodcuts.

– Kathryn T. Connors ’18

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The Role of Children in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Paintings: Social Distinction and National Identity

Introduction

All that we see here on the ground
Are children’s toys and nothing else.
The man plays with what he finds there,
Just like a child.
He is amused for a short time only
Then he easily throws it away.
So the man therefore, as we find,
Is not twice, but forever a child.

This quote from the popular Dutch author, Johan de Brune, uses children as a metaphor, speaking to their symbolic virtue in art from the Dutch seventeenth century and gesturing in particular to their function as passive props. Children are ubiquitous in seventeenth century paintings from the Dutch Republic, yet they are scarcely discussed. They appear in countless images, manuals, stories, proverbs, and prints from the century, but there is a significant gap in research on Dutch children in art. In my research, I strive to fill this gap. I argue that children in paintings participate in a kind of social regulation of the Dutch upper and middle classes, reinforcing a national identity of morality, nationalistic enterprise, and class distinction. As indicators of Dutch values and social norms, the children in images from the Dutch seventeenth century serve as objects of empire as well as reflections of an existing national Dutch identity.

– Helena Jackson Enders ’18

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