June 5 - 26, 2011

Three different courses will be offered during this edition.

Dwelling Between East & West: The Philosophy of Architecture

Surrounded by its labyrinth of dark, narrow, often dead-end streets, twisting at right-angles through densely built-up, separately demarcated parishes, glimpsing fragrant gardens hidden behind high, crenellated walls, sniffing the pungent odors of exotic oriental spices in the bustling, crowded markets, one might well have imagined oneself transported, as if on a magic carpet, to one of the great mercantile centers of the Middle East — to Baghdad, Cairo or Damascus — to the world of Marco Polo's travels or the Arabian Nights, yet this is the city of Venice. Once described by the great Venetian art historian Giuseppe Fiocco as a colossal suq, the city of Venice has always conveyed a distinctly Oriental atmosphere, especially in its architecture.

The purpose of this course will be to explore philosophically, through the concept of dwelling, how architecture, specifically Islamic and Venetian, can help set the conditions for a life lived more fully and thus authentically human. We will see how "in the oriental mind a peculiar seriousness is associated with the attribute of color, a seriousness rising out of repose and out of the depth and breadth of the imagination, as contrasted with the activity, and consequent capability of surprise and laughter characteristic of the western mind." (John Ruskin The Stones of Venice.)

In short, through classroom readings and visits to major Venetian architectural sites, students will come to see how Venice, a Christian city, was shaped not only by Islamic architecture but Islamic mystical ideas as well. Seeing Venice through both Christian and Islamic lenses will show the class how to dwell contemplatively between the Islamic faith of the East and the

Christian faith of the West.
Professor Brian Braman, Department of Philosophy

Highlights: 3 credits

Philosophy major/minor elective

The Imaginary City: Why Writers Love Venice

Venice occupies a unique place in the artistic imagination of the west. Rising from the lagoon in a riot of color, form, and texture, the shimmering reflections of Venice incarnate the essence of beauty. This course will study some of the most important ways modern writers have discovered in Venice an opportunity to explore and unsettle the traditional meaning that beauty holds for thought, art, and life.

Starting with the post-romantic era, we will focus on how several literary giants refashion the beauty of Venice into a paradox of great richness and complexity. For Henry James, Thomas Mann, and Marcel Proust, the beauty that is everywhere visible in Venice also possesses a hidden side of risk and peril. The course will study the specific ways that each of these writers—along with John Ruskin before and Joseph Brodsky after them—reveals Venice to be an imaginary site of powerful tensions, traversed by the competing forces of growth and decay, desire and knowledge, truth and illusion.

The course will also offer students the means for experiencing their own stay in Venice as a valuable source of self-reflection, an intellectual voyage into unfamiliar territory and waters. To encounter the beauty of Venice fully can open new perspectives on what it means to live, to love, and to understand wherever we find ourselves.

Alongside its central focus on literary masterworks from the modern European tradition, the course will also develop three complementary areas of instruction: a philosophical context stretching from Plato to Nietzsche and beyond; a cinematic dimension composed of "Summertime," "Morte a Venezia," (Death in Venice) "Don't Look Now," "The Comfort of Strangers," and "Pane e Tulipani" (Bread and Tulips); and a regular supplement of on-site visits to Venice itself—the marvel of its churches, palazzi, museums, pathways, and waterways.

Professor Kevin Newmark, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures

Highlights: 3 credits

English major/minor elective; Philosophy major/minor elective; Romance Languages

Venice: an Imperiled City in Comparative Perspective

This course focuses on the plight of cities perennially imperiled by floods comparing Venice to Amsterdam and New Orleans. It combines the study of history, ecology, public policy and political science. It examines how floods and the threat of flooding have shaped physically, politically and culturally shaped these cities. The readings for the course will include works of fiction, memoirs, journalism, and architectural history as well as ecology, political science and public policy.

Since the course will take place in Venice, students will be able to observe firsthand the variety of ways in which the flood threat has affected the city and the diverse means it has adopted to cope with that threat.

Professor Marc Landy, Department of Political Science

Highlights: 3 credits

Political Science major/minor elective