

Module 2

For FLCL 271H (Classical Mythology: Honors Section)

Studying the Influence of Classical Mythology on Art

Class Project

As a class project, assign each student to do a study of the influence of a mythological character on postclassical works of art and to share the results of his or her research with the class. Require the student to find at least five works of art featuring the character and to compare the scene represented in each work of art to the description of the same scene in the piece of Ancient Greek or Roman literature that inspired it. In addition, the student should be asked to give a thumbnail sketch of each artist and comment briefly on the style of each work of art. Much of the required information can be found by means of online searches. Websites helpful in locating works of art and information about artists include museum sites and sites such as the following:

- <http://www.artcyclopedia.com/>
- <http://geocities.com/Athens/Forum/6946/images/>

The search engines Google and AltaVista feature image searching. The teacher should provide a written list of useful websites, which he or she has tested, using mythological figures. The teacher should also be prepared to help students choose mythological characters and to identify the literary work or works that inspired a particular work of art. Good translations of Ancient Greek and Roman works of literature can be found online (see Module 1).

If the students lack searching skills, the teacher, using a document camera, an LCD projector, and overhead screen, should do a sample search (e.g., an image search), using the search engine Google. For the benefit of the inexperienced and the forgetful, written instructions, such as the following, should be handed out:

1. Open Google.com.
2. Click on the image tab of Google.
3. Type in the name of the mythological character.
4. Click on search button.
5. Click on the desired image to see the original context of the image. Often there is the option of clicking to see the full-size image.
6. Right-click and select "Save picture as" to save the picture on disk OR Right-click and select Copy to copy the picture to the clipboard. Open *PowerPoint* or *Microsoft Word*. Right-click and paste the picture into *PowerPoint* or *Microsoft Word*.
7. Copy the source:
 - Click on the address bar (the address will be highlighted).
 - Right-click on the highlighted address and select Copy.

- Return to the *PowerPoint* or *Word* document and paste the address in the document under the picture.

The search engine AltaVista (<http://altavista.com/>) has a similar image search, but there are a few differences from Google.

Some problems the students may encounter while searching include the following:

- An inability to print a copy of an artwork
- An inability to enlarge an image (Many sites do give directions for enlarging and/or zooming in.)
- Limited searching ability (e.g., the ability to search by title or artist but not by subject)
- An inability to access a site previously accessed (The site may have moved or become a commercial site, e.g., www.groveart.com.)

After their research has been completed, the students should hold a seminar both to give oral presentations of their findings and to discuss their problems and reactions. For their presentations, students with enough technological skill may wish to prepare *PowerPoint* presentations; others can use an overhead projector to show the works of art. Each student should hand out a summary/outline of his or her findings to the other members of the class. Most of the students will use a computer software program such as *WordPerfect*, to produce the handouts. In studying the influence of the literature on the art, the students will find that sometimes . . .

- the artist reproduces very closely a scene found in a piece of literature.
- the artist changes details, even significant ones, of the scene and/or the characters.
- the artist portrays the mythological figures with their proper attributes, but puts them in a new, quite often contemporary, setting.
- the artist confuses or blends myths.

Field Trip

There could be a field trip in connection with the project. For example, students in the Chicago area could visit the Art Institute of Chicago. Before the trip, have each student do an online search of the Art Institute of Chicago's website (www.artic.edu/) to find works of art of interest to him or her. Insist that the students complete the research on the works of art, the artists, and the pieces of ancient literature before the field trip. Having become familiar with the mythological figures that appear in works of art at the museum, the teacher can provide research guidelines to the students. The teacher should provide written directions for accessing the site as well as for searching for works of art on it and preferably should demonstrate the process, using a document camera, an LCD projector, and screen.

Some challenges that the students may face are as follows:

- Since there is no subject searching, the student must search by entering the character name in the title search.
- Sometimes the Greek name of a mythological character is used; sometimes the Latin name is used (e.g., Zeus [Greek], Jupiter or Jove [Latin]).

- Since there is no way to enlarge images, some images are too small to see clearly.
- Since the website may not indicate whether a piece of art is currently on display, the student, when he or she visits the museum, may find that the work of art is not on display.
- Since works of art featuring characters from Ancient Greek and Roman mythology are scattered throughout the museum, finding a particular work may prove challenging.

After the field trip, arrange a time for the students to meet to give their presentations and to discuss their reactions to seeing the actual works of art.