

Honors Colloquium: Beauty and Artistic Form [Dr. van Versendaal]

In this course we will reflect together on the gratuitous splendor of the beautiful, doing so, however, through careful study of the concrete form and style of singular works of art. Pairing the most important philosophical accounts of beauty with representative works of painting and music from antiquity to our present age, we will attend to how beauty comes to expression precisely *in* the artwork's embodied structure. This task will involve examining the disciplined technique of the artist as it is revealed in the work that incarnates his idea. Beyond this focus on the integrity of the artwork and the practice of making, our larger effort will be to delight in the perception of art more fruitfully, and also to speak about this experience of beauty more meaningfully.

As we become acquainted with an array of artistic styles in several genres, we'll gradually begin to ask such larger order questions as:

- Why does the human person have a desire to make something in the first place, and what are the marks of good making?
- Does art imitate the beauty of nature or does it express the soul of the artist? Perhaps both?
- How are the concerns of the good artist different from and related to those of the moral agent or, say, the saint? Does one need to be virtuous in order to be a good artist?
- How can we judge whether one work of art is more beautiful than another? Can ugliness or discord have a place within the beautiful work?
- Can art be glorious if it is not strictly speaking "sacred?" How does aesthetic contemplation prepare for or detract from spiritual contemplation?

Our philosophical sources will range from Plato & Augustine to Kant & Goethe to Nietzsche & Balthasar, while special attention will be given to the aesthetics of Etienne Gilson.