



Yale-New Haven
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1986 Volume III: Topics in Western Civilization: Ideals of Community and the Development of Urban Life,
1250-1700

The Vision of the City in the Mind's Eye, 1250-1700

Guide for Curriculum Unit 86.03.07

by Michael A. Vuksta

The unit described here can be used by itself or as the core of a more extended unit on the vision of the city in the Renaissance. The two sections of this unit, "Origins" and "London: A Portrait," present complete slides, commentaries, and activities relating to the mapping of cities and to the ideas and artistic problems mapping implies. A list of topics which are relevant to developing a comprehensive image of the "Renaissance City" appears at the back of this essay.

. . . from the Renaissance on, the physical city more than any other instrument, has been the focus for activity in the many areas in which men choose to act. . . cities have been the instruments that men have built to achieve the good life and to participate in diverse activities. . . .

The citizen makes works of art, he participates in institutionalized political and religious activities, and he speculates about the nature and character of art, institutions, politics, and religion.

Carroll Willim Westfall "In This Most Perfect Paradise"

The City is a complex cultural artifact. Any discussion of its representation in words and images will prove to be equally complex. When one has selected as one's temporal parameters a span of five centuries, the task might seem impossible. Furthermore, if the selection of images and descriptions draws from such diverse cultures as the English, the Italian, and the Dutch, one might easily conclude that this essay raises more questions than it might possibly answer. But if the purpose is to expand and heighten the students' awareness of the facts that the eye and the mind are not exclusive and independent operators and that the making of objects symbolic of the broader cultural context is part of the experience of "the city," then one welcomes the variety of images encountered in this unit.

Having hinted at the difficulties that may be submerged in the unit which follows, I would propose that there is also a powerful attraction here. I have created this unit for use in a studio photography/visual arts course in which the viewing of artworks is an exercise and study in ways of seeing which precedes the creation of expressive objects by the students themselves. The appeal to the teacher is that there is a great deal of visual material reviewed and catalogued in this unit. While one might disagree with the speculations in which this essay engages, the slides, activities, and bibliography are in themselves useful for other adaptations. However, if he/she shares my curiosity for "the city," he/she may find the way partially charted.

(Recommended for Visual Art classes, grades 6-8; and Social Studies classes, grades 6-8)

Key Words

Renaissance Art History Urban European

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>