

AHIS 453: Topic in Baroque Art (12012)
Art, Politics, and Power in the Age of Magnificence

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T TH 9:30 am – 10:50 am, VKC 258

In the centuries between the Reformation and the Enlightenment, European monarchs sought total control over the state: unrestricted by earthly law, they claimed to answer only to God. The splendid palaces and art commissioned by the era's absolutist regimes played a critical role in shaping and legitimating these claims. But how exactly did early modern rulers use painting, sculpture, architecture, ceremonies, and spectacles to reinforce their power and instill obedience in their subjects? How effective were visual media as tools of government? This course examines these questions by looking at key examples created in Italy, France, Spain, Flanders, England, and the German states between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Readings will expose students to a variety of art-historical methodologies—iconographic, semiotic, anthropological, and feminist, among others—while encouraging them to think more broadly about art's status as historical evidence. Attention will also be paid to the ways in which this period can shed light on the political uses of art in our own day.

