

Review of Prof. Michael McAuliffe's Talk:  
"Mannerism and Postmodernism: A New York Story"  
*Works in the Works* Series, Humanities Department

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Prof. Michael McAuliffe delivered a compelling presentation that traced the intersection of 1980s Postmodern art and 1520s Italian Mannerism. At the beginning of his talk, Prof. McAuliffe described it as both "experimental" and grounded on his aesthetic memoirs of New York City.

Throughout the talk, Prof. McAuliffe discussed the definition of terms, such as "postmodernism" (applied to art), "kitsch," and "bad painting," presenting visual examples to the audience. His talk offered relevant insights into the work of NYC-based visual artists relevant to the East Village art scene, including Loren Munk, George Condo, Walter Robinson, and Julian Schnabel, whose work emerged in the early 1980s. Prof. McAuliffe highlighted how artists from the East Village art scene took inspiration from German artists (e.g., Sigmar Polke and Markus Lüpertz), as well as from other aesthetics previously overlooked. In addition, the influence of 1520s Mannerism on American artists was a key focus of the presentation. As Prof. McAuliffe illustrated, the distorted proportions and compositional tension practiced by Mannerist artists in Italy and northern Europe provided a new perspective to experimental and iconoclastic American painters, such as John Currin.

Overall, the public gained insight into different styles and visual artists, allowing them to establish connections between high culture and popular culture, as well as art and everyday life. The talk prompted the audience to reflect on relevant questions like: What are the distinctions between "good" and "bad" art? Is it possible to pin down the birth of "bad taste"? How have ideas around taste and style evolved over time in the Western world?

Alongside works of art and theoretical concepts, Prof. McAuliffe brought forward his personal journey navigating New York City in the 1980s and 1990s. From his studies in photography at the FIT and afterwards in art history at Hunter College-CUNY, Prof. McAuliffe added a personal vantage point, detailing his experiences working in art galleries and traversing museums. McAuliffe narrated the discovery and immersion into a vibrant city where urban art was booming with a unique, creative atmosphere.

By discussing the shift in New York City art from modern to postmodern and Italian art from the High Renaissance to the Mannerist period, the talk took a postmodern approach itself by following a non-linear analysis of art history that highlighted connections between art, politics, and social history; the limitations of using rigid definitions; as well as the importance of charting blind spots in visual arts. More broadly, the talk showcased the convergence of art and personal experience, sparking meaningful questions from the audience.

Review by Dr. Inés Corujo-Martín