Tableaux Vivants—French for “living pictures”—describe a practice of reenacting art objects that rose to popularity in the 18th and 19th centuries, but whose origins can be traced to antique pantomime and early modern royal pageantry. Performed in private homes and public theaters, on the stage and in the parlor, these live stagings of well-known paintings and sculptures were not only foundational to early photography and film, but also presaged developments in modern and contemporary art, cinema, and photography. Through a series of historical case studies and key theoretical texts, we will explore the aesthetic and social dimensions of tableaux vivants and their legacies, including such topics as: performance and immateriality, media interaction, exchange and transformation, temporality, corporeality, spatiality, and the politics of gender, race, sexuality, and class.

Visual Intersections is an interdisciplinary graduate seminar in visual culture and theory, taught in the Department of Art and Art History with a changing theme each semester. Visual Intersections explores scholarly approaches to the production, use, interpretation, and experience of images and visual representations, connecting the study of diverse media and genres of the arts, performance, design, film, television, video, and digital and web technologies.