Tuesday, January 10th, 2017
12:30-1:30pm
Room 2339
Faculty Administration Building

It is the Sheep, Stupid!” -- From the Cotswolds to Florence and Back
Again, How the Wool Industry Shaped Early Modern Art

Kenneth Jackson, English, Professor and Chair

Kenneth Jackson is a Professor and Chair of English. He graduated from Michigan State University with a bachelor’s degree in English and Psychology. He earned his master’s from Northwestern University and his Ph.D. from Loyola University of Chicago. His most recent work is “Shakespeare and Abraham” (Notre Dame, 2015).

In our secular minded academic world the story of Genesis 22 (Abraham and Isaac) can seem “obscure” to some. It isn’t. In many respects, the narrative founds and organizes the three Abrahamic faiths, makes possible the Kantian “categorical imperative,” and, for many, stands at the center of Renaissance art and architecture. In 1401, the Florentine Cloth Guild held a competition for door panels for its important baptismry. The “competition” -- which came down to a contest between Brunelleschi (the architect of the famed Santa Maria del Fiore cathedral [“the Dome”] and Ghiberti -- was a staple of Introductions to Art History. This talk seeks to reconsider this once well known and understood competition in a modern frame. In particular, I want to discuss what we mean when we discuss history or historical “context” outside specific academic fields. As the modern world seeks to redraw the lines between humanities and science or “art” and “business,” the Renaissance and its world of sheep, religion, and big personalities has much to tell us. Appropriately enough, Kahn Academy has a nice little refresher course that is worth watching before coming to the talk: https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/early-renaissance1/sculpture-architecture-florence/v/brunelleschi-ghiberti-sacrifice-of-isaac-competition-panels-1401-2