**RELIGION AND ART Prof. Ann Birkelbach**

**Religion 237 (Section 2) Email:** [**abirkelb@gmu.edu**](mailto:abirkelb@gmu.edu)

**Mon & Wed: 10:30-11:45pm Office Hours: After class/by appt.**

**SPRING 2022 3 Credits**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is an introduction to the visual arts of the world’s religions. Our study will focus on the visual arts of the five major living faith traditions, with a brief survey of Asian indigenous philosophies. We will endeavor to ask and answer a number of vital questions. What is the function of art in a religious tradition? Do the arts support religious practices and worship? Does religious art serve as a form of visual communication? What makes a work of art religious and/or sacred? Is all art with a religious theme- sacred art? Do the arts of world religions have the same aim? Do all religious arts use imagery? We will explore the works of arts through lectures, class discussions, video clips, films, articles and- time permitting-fieldtrips. This course has no prerequisites and presumes no prior knowledge of Religion or Art History.

**This course fulfills the Mason Core Exploration requirement for Arts (3 credits)**

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**. Upon completion of this course students will learn how to:

\*Identify major works of art and architecture present in living world religions

\*Distinguish between religious art, art with a religious theme, and sacred art

\*Explore how the arts can reflect and be identified with the central ideas/tenets/beliefs of religious traditions

\*Learn terms and vocabulary relating to Religion and Art

\*Understand the underlying symbolism, iconography and meaning in the arts as viewed from within religious traditions

\*Develop an appreciation, understanding, and cultural literacy of art forms found in today’s world religions

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**. There will be a midterm, final exam, quizzes, and a museum assignment. Attendance and class participation are also essential for success in this course.

**REQUIRED BOOK:**

Experiencing the World’s Religions by Michael Malloy, Eighth Edition. You may buy the looseleaf filler textbook at the GMU Bookstore; buy an e-copy through McGraw Hill Books or purchase or rent any edition, 3rd edition onwards from an online distributor such as Thriftbooks, Amazon, or Betterworldbooks.

**REQUIRED ARTICLES:** Copied articles from the Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts and other sources will be available on Blackboard.

**IMPORTANT DATES:**

**Monday, January 23:** First day of class

**Monday, January 30:** Last day to add a class

**Monday, February 20:** Presidents’ Day (No Class)

**Monday, March 6:** Midterm Exam (paper exam in-class)

**Monday, March 13-Sunday, March 19:** Spring Recess (No Classes)

**Wednesday, May 3:** Last Day of Class

**Monday, May 8- Tuesday, May 9:** Reading Days (2)

**Wednesday, May 10:** **FINAL EXAM- 10:30-1:15PM**

**CLASS POLICIES**

**Cell Phones & Electronic Devices:** Please leave cell phones on vibrate or silence and put other non-course devices away. Going on your phone during class is disrespectful to your instructor, your classmates, and ultimately only hurts you. This is your education, please invest in yourself.

**Accommodations:** If you are a student that requires any accommodations please contact me by email @ [abirkelb@gmu.edu](mailto:abirkelb@gmu.edu) or by scheduling an appointment.

**Honor Code & Academic Integrity:** I expect all students to abide by the GMU honor code with all academic work. See the full GMU honor code here- <https://oai.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/George-Mason-University-Honor-Code-2022-2023-Academic-Year.pdf>. Any student caught plagiarizing or cheating will be subject to academic penalty and fail the course.

**GRADING POLICIES**

**EXAMS** must be taken within the dates scheduled. A make-up exam will be given only in cases of emergencies. If there is a medical emergency, a doctor’s note is required.

**Letter grades will be calculated as follows:**

**A+** =100% to 98% **B+** =89% to 87% **C+** =79% to 77%

**A =**97% to 94% **B =**86%-84%  **C =**76%-74%

**A- =**93%-90%  **B- =**83%-80%  **C- =**73%-70%

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**D+** =69% to 67%

**D** =66%-64%

**D-** =63%-60%

**F** =below 60%

**FINAL GRADES** will be based on midterm, final exam, museum assignment, quizzes, attendance, and participation.

**ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION 15%**

**QUIZZES 10%**

**MIDTERM EXAM 20%**

**MUSEUM ASSIGNMENT 25%**

**FINAL EXAM 30%**

**LECTURE AND COURSE SCHEDULE | RELIGION AND ART (REL 237)**

**PART I (Introduction to the Study of Religion and Art)**

**WEEK 1 of 15**

**JANUARY 23- JANUARY 29**

***Monday, January 23***

**Introduction to the Course**

***Wednesday, January 25***

**Weekly Topic: Foundations and Concepts of the Study of Religion and Art**

**Readings:** The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts, “Visual Arts as Ways of Being Religious”, Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, scanned copy, page 1

**Discussion Groups**

**WEEK 2 of 15**

**JANUARY 30- FEBRUARY 5**

***Monday, January 30***

**Weekly Topic: Foundations and Concepts of the Study of Religion and Art Cont’d**

**Readings:** Experiencing the World’s Religions, Molloy textbook, Chapter 1 – Understanding Religion.

***Wednesday, February 1***

**Discussion Groups**

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**PART II (Religions United to a Land and a People)**

**WEEK 3 of 15**

***Monday, February 6***

**Weekly Topic: Judaism and the Visual Arts**

**Readings:** Experiencing the World’s Religions, Molloy textbook, Chapter 8 – Judaism

Article: “Judaism and Art,” David Altshuler and Linda Altshuler, scanned copy.

The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts, “Judaism-Visual Art and Architecture,” scanned copy

***Wednesday, February 8***

**Discussion Groups**

**WEEK 4 of 15**

***Monday, February 13***

**Weekly Topic: Hinduism and the Visual Arts**

**Readings:** Experiencing the World’s Religions, Molloy textbook, Chapter 3 – Hinduism

Hindu Art and Architecture, George Michell, Chapter 1 –Introduction: Hinduism and its Visual Expression

Article: “The Origin and Use of Images in India,” Ananda Coomaraswamy, scanned copy.

***Wednesday, February 15***

***Discussion Groups***

**WEEK 5 of 15**

***Monday, February 20***

**Presidents’ Day – NO CLASS**

***Wednesday, February 22***

**Weekly Topic: Hinduism and the Visual Arts, Conclude**

**Discussion Groups**

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**PART III (Ways of East Asia)**

**WEEK 6 of 15**

***Monday, February 27***

**Weekly Topic: Taoism and Confucianism and the Arts**

**Readings:** Experiencing the World’s Religions, Molloy textbook, Chapter 6 – Taoism and Confucianism

The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts, “Taoism and the Arts” & “Confucianism and the Arts”, scanned copies

***Wednesday, March 1***

**Weekly Topic: Shintoism and the Arts**

**Readings:** Experiencing the World’s Religions, Molloy textbook, Chapter 7 – Shinto

The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts, “Shinto and the Arts,” scanned copy

**Discussion Groups**

**WEEK 7 of 15**

***Monday, March 6***

**Review for Midterm Exam**

***Wednesday, March 8***

**Midterm Exam (in class) Parts I, II, III**

**Monday, March 13-Sunday, March 19:** Spring Recess (No Classes)

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**PART IV (Universal Paths and Missional Religions)**

**WEEK 9 of 15**

***Monday, March 20***

**Weekly Topic: Buddhism and the Visual Arts**

**Readings:** Experiencing the World’s Religions, Molloy textbook, Chapter 4 – Buddhism

Buddhist Art & Architecture, Robert E. Fischer, selected chapter, scanned copy

Article: “The Image of the Buddha,” Titus Burckhardt, scanned copy. Sacred Art, East, and West

The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts, “Buddhism-Image as Icon, Image as Art”.

***Wednesday, March 22***

**Discussion Groups**

**WEEK 10 of 15**

***Monday, March 27***

**Weekly Topic: Buddhism and the Visual Arts, Cont’d**

***Wednesday, March 29***

**Weekly Topic: Buddhism and the Visual Arts, Conclude**

**WEEK 11 of 15**

***Monday, April 3***

**Weekly Topic: Christianity and the Visual Arts**

**Readings:** Experiencing the World’s Religions, Molloy textbook, Chapter 9 – Christianity

Article: “Sources for the Study of Christianity and the Arts,” John W. Cook, scanned copy.

The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts, “Christianity and Visual Art”, scanned copy

Article: “The Foundations of Christian Art, Titus Burckhardt, scanned copy. Sacred Art, East, and West.

***Wednesday, April 5***

**Discussion Groups**

**WEEK 12 of 15**

***Monday, April 10***

**Easter Monday – NO CLASS**

***Wednesday, April 12***

**Christianity and the Visual Arts, Conclude**

**WEEK 13 of 15**

***Monday, April 17***

**Weekly Topic: Islam and the Visual Arts**

**Readings:** Experiencing the World’s Religions, Molloy textbook, Chapter 10 – Islam

Article: “An Islamic Perspective on Symbolism in the Arts,” Louis Ibsen al-Faruqi, scanned copy

The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts, Brown, Chapter 22– “Islam and Visual Art”, scanned copy

Article: “The Foundations of Islamic Art”, Titus Burckhardt, scanned copy. Sacred Art, East and West.

Islamic Arts, Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair. Skim, browse, enjoy.

***Wednesday, April 19***

**Discussion Groups**

**WEEK 14 of 15**

***Monday, April 24***

**Weekly Topic: Islam and the Visual Arts, Cont’d**

***Wednesday, April 26***

**Islam and the Visual Arts, Conclude**

**WEEK 15 of 15**

***Monday, May 1***

**TBD**

***Wednesday, May 3 (Last class before Final Exam week)***

**TBD**

**Monday, May 8-Tuesday, May 9:** Reading Days (2)

**Wednesday, May 10: FINAL EXAM- 10:30am-1:15pm**