ART HISTORY/RELIGION 205  
RELIGIOUS ART & MATERIAL CULTURE  
A SOPHOMORE SEMINAR  
TIMES – TTH 12:30-2:40PM  
LOCATION – TBA

Instructor: Dr. Shreena N. Gandhi
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Course Description
This course is an exploration of the relationship between religion and art. The arts, whether in the form of painting, sculpture, architecture or kitsch, are a vehicle for religious devotion and expression. At the same time devotion to a divine figure has inspired some of the world’s most beautiful pieces of art. Together religion and art form a symbiotic relationship, which at times can be in tension and/or cohesion with each other. Looking at various primary and secondary sources from a variety of religious traditions we will explore this tension and cohesion, which can be a window into larger societal and cultural issues. Given that we live in a mechanical age, special attention will be paid to the reproduction of images, the formation of religious kitsch and the place of religious art in the market. Further, this class will look at art and material culture across international, cultural, economic and political borders.

Knowledge, Skills & Values
- To have a basic understanding of religion, material culture and art and how the three are related.
- To be able to appreciate and understand a religious tradition via their arts, architecture and material culture.
- To be able to view and analyze art, not only for its “beauty”, but also for what it says about religion, culture and society.
- To be able to observe and analyze art and material culture in a variety of settings, from a museum to a supermarket.
- To be able to lead and contribute to a class discussion.
- To be able to do primary research on a topic and write a focused paper on that topic.
- To gain an understanding and appreciation for why communities build churches, mosques, temples and synagogues.
- To have some respect for religious art, in all its forms.

College-wide Goals for Sophomore Seminars
- To study a topic or issue from multiple perspectives. In this course, we will examine the intersections between material culture, art, and religion and will discuss different kinds of analysis and interpretation from these different kinds of analysis.
Students acquire skills in separating observations from interpretations of those observations.

Develop effective communication and information literacy, emphasizing Tier 2 writing skills. In this class, students will be responsible for writing a substantial research paper as outlined in this syllabus.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- Reading Summaries for every class - 20%
- Material Culture Analysis Paper - 15%
- Religion and Art/Architecture in Kalamazoo/Chicago Paper - 15%
- In-Class Exam - 15%
- Research Paper - 25%
- Class Participation - 10%

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

- *Religion and Material Culture*, Edited by David Morgan, 2010
- *Religion, Art and Visual Culture*, Edited by S. Brent Plate, 2002
- Class Reader to be bought in Humphrey House

**CLASS ASSIGNMENTS**

- Papers and assignments are to be turned in on time. I do not accept papers via e-mail. I accept papers printed on white paper with black ink. The paper should be double spaced, with one-inch margins, stapled and written in Times 12 font. If papers are turned in late, the assignment will be lowered by a third of a grade for every day late.
- I am more than happy to look at rough drafts – If you would like for me to look at a rough draft, please bring a hard copy of your paper to office hours and we will read over your draft together.
- If you are going to miss an exam for a pre-scheduled reason (ie sporting event or concert), you must inform me of this by the end of the first week. The only other excuses for missing an exam are family emergencies or extreme sickness. In these cases contact me as soon as possible, so that we may make other arrangements.
- All assignments performed for this course are to be carried out under the Kalamazoo College Honor System. Please know this system and follow it. Any infractions thereof will result in appropriate and potentially serious action. The following website should provide information regarding plagiarism and cheating: [http://www.kzoo.edu/studev/acadPol/handbookregs.html](http://www.kzoo.edu/studev/acadPol/handbookregs.html). For further guidance on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION**

- Attendance and active participation in class is expected and required for success in the class. Classes will be a combination of lectures, discussions and in-class activities. In class we will be covering topics that are not always addressed in the
reading, thus it is important that you attend, listen and participate. Your presence and/or absence in class will be noted and will figure into your final grade, as will your willingness to participate.

- You are expected to pay attention and be respectful of others in class – this includes silencing cell phones and refraining from text messaging, reading extraneous material, playing computer games, etc… Please see http://www.kzoo.edu/studev/acadPol/classbehav.htm for further information.

**ONLINE RESOURCES**

- I will be post the syllabus, all handouts, and the powerpoint slides of my lectures on Moodle, the Kalamazoo College courses website. You can access it at https://moodle.kzoo.edu/. You will have to log on using your intranet alias and password. All files on Moodle will be in PDF format, so make sure that you have software that can read and/or print them if you are accessing from a personal computer.

- I expect you to read your kzoo.edu email account regularly (daily at an absolutely minimum). I will often use that email to communicate class information

- The readings with an “*” will also be available online, through moodle.

**OUTLINE OF COURSE**

**Week One - What is Art and Material Culture, and how are they related to Religion?**

Reading
- Selections from *The DaVinci Code*, 2000*

**Week Two – Theory on Religion and Material Culture**

Reading

**Week Three – Fetish and the Birth of the Icon**

Reading
- Sections II & V, *Religion, Art and Visual Culture*, Edited by S. Brent Plate, 2002
- Chapter 14, *Religion and Material Culture*, 2010

**Week Four - Fit for Divinities and Divinity: Representations, and Architecture**

Reading
- Chapters 1, 2, & 3 *The Body Adorned*, 2009
- Section IV, *Religion and Material Culture*, 2010

**Week Five - Is it possible to represent Divinity?**

Reading
Section III, Religion, Art and Visual Culture, Edited by S. Brent Plate, 2002

Week Six - Impact of Religion on Material Cultures around the Globe
Reading
- Chapter 5, Material Christianity, 1995
- Sections II & III, Religion and Material Culture, 2010

Week Seven – Religious Art and the Museum
Reading
- Selections from Richard Davis, Lives of Indian Images, 1999*
- Selections from Godly Things: Museums, Objects, Religion, 2000*
- Section VI, Religion, Art and Visual Culture, Edited by S. Brent Plate, 2002

Week Eight – Religious Clothing and Kitsch
Reading
- Chapters 6, 7 & 8, Material Christianity, 1995
- Chapters 12 & 13, Religion and Material Culture, 2010

Week Nine - Religion or Art? Theories – Theirs and Yours
Reading
- Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 1936*
- Section I, Religion, Art and Visual Culture, Edited by S. Brent Plate, 2002

Week Ten – Art-Scapes: Being, Seeing, and Appreciating Abroad
Reading
- TBA