

INTG0001: Slow Looking/Slow Reading: Art and Religion Up Close

ISP Fall 2023

The average American university student spends nearly seven hours online every day. Much of this time is looking at a screen 4-16 inches in diameter. The world is sped up and scattered with many students having multiple windows open at once, having at least nine apps visited in one day, and watching videos that last less than three minutes or reading text of less than 200 words. Ironically, their experience is reduced with the same sites, same videos, and same stories being viewed and shared by the same interconnected groups of people. News streams, political sources, and content producers become homogenized as they curate sources of information that cater to their own desires. Undergraduates are consuming more content, but that content lacks diversity and it is designed to align with instead of challenge their received and rehearsed positions. On a diverse and dynamic campus like the University of Pennsylvania, students may find their screen lives siloed. This course is designed to give students the opportunity to be both challenged and to slow down; to expand the range of experiences, but also to offer space and time to contemplate seriously on those experiences by studying the art of single-tasking through the lenses of art and religion.

Artists working on cloth, with stone, still film, or even on a stage have to spend hours, weeks, years slowly developing ideas, mixing pigments, working in studios, modeling and carving, sketching movements, preparing surfaces, etc. They are never fully in control of their art either. They need to depend on the availability of materials, the light in a room, the relative humidity in relation to the way paint dries or marble cracks; not to mention the difficulty of finding gallery space and access, the potential danger of political and religious attacks on artistic expression, and the pressure of families to “do something practical with your life.” Art takes time, it takes a deep attentiveness to the world; how colors change in relation to each other, how viewers with different life experiences and cultural backgrounds may view the same piece of art quite differently, and how culturally-loaded symbols can trigger unexpected responses in different contexts. Artists must learn how to look and look slowly; to be patient and adaptable. So too must respectful and engaged viewers.

The devoutly religious also know this need to slow down and pay attention. Nuns, monks, sadhus, swamis, yogis, contemplatives from various traditions like Buddhism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, and Taoism for example have developed long-term ascetic methods. They pray, meditate, chant, read scripture, copy manuscripts, cultivate gardens, make and perform musical instruments, engage in martial arts, produce unique cuisine, hallucinogens, and alcohol, practice archery and flower-arrangement, as well as write poetry, commentaries on sacred texts, and undergo physical austerities like celibacy, fasting, cutting, sleep-deprivation, and self-flagellation. Reducing themselves to nothing, they either seek to become vessels of divine wisdom or gain access to the oneness or emptiness of existence. Like artists they learn how to read sacred texts slowly, discipline their bodies and mind, and listen with devotion and care. Concepts such as the Buddhist non-self and nonattachment, Islamic devotion and miraj, and Catholic ideas of the suffering servant will be examined in this class. We will not be limited to religion though; we will compare how the supposedly secular practices of psychedelic drug use, alcohol abuse, heartache, and loneliness displayed in modern music, art, and literature often mimic art and poetry of religious longing and emptiness.

This course will be a deep exercise in learning how to see and how to hear, how to write and how to speak deliberately and with focus.

We will ask ourselves: “In our quest to live life well, how will we apply the lessons we learn from an artistic practice or a form of religious devotion?”

To do this, we will not only look closely at various works of art in different mediums and read religious poetry and scripture, but also have opportunities to practice slow looking, drawing, writing, music playing, and speaking/reading. No previous skills in art, photography, filmmaking, chanting, music, or oration are required. We will see films and visit local museums as well.

Teaching Team: Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw and Justin McDaniel: Julio Tuma, David Dunning and Kristian Taketomo

Class meeting times: M 8:30-11:45 am; W 8:30am-10am (you should reserve time in your Wednesday schedules up until 11:45am to allow for various site visits; Wednesday meetings will be every other week)

To ensure equitable access to this course, we may record some class sessions and make recordings available to all members of the class. Your use of these recordings is limited to this class; you should not share these recordings with anyone outside the class or otherwise reproduce their content. This policy exists to ensure the confidentiality of our classroom discussion and thereby facilitate the free exchange of ideas. It also honors the creativity and labor that we have invested in creating the course content.

Course Aims & Requirements: The course will take place in three streams: Art History, Religious Studies, and Integration. Each stream contributes 30% to your overall grade. The Integration Symposia (participation and attendance) make up the remaining 10% of your overall grade.

Art History Stream Requirements: (30% of overall INTG0001 grade)

Participation, experiential exercises, and mini-assignments linked to the readings: due throughout the semester

AH Assignment #1: 30% due October 3rd at 10am by submission to Canvas

Photograph your Penn Museum object from multiple viewpoints and write a 1,000-word visual analysis. The purpose of your visual analysis is to show that you recognize and understand the visual choices the artist made in creating the artwork. By observing and writing about separate parts of the art object, you will come to a better understanding of the art object as both a complex record of the artist's decisions and the ways in which the object appears to you. Your visual analysis will address the object's formal elements—its visual and physical attributes such as color, line, texture, and size. This visual analysis assignment does not require research into the topic or theme of the work, the commission of the work, or the life of the artist. It is all about what you are seeing.

AH Assignment #2: Monument Lab Field Trip to Museums: 10% due Monday, October 9 at 8:30am

Begin the handout during the class visit to the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA) on Monday, September 25; use your membership to return to the PMA on your own to complete your work.

AH Assignment #3: 30% due November 5 at 10am by submission to CANVAS

Sit for a minimum of two hours with a mural or a work of outdoor public sculpture and journal about what you see and what happens in your vicinity while you are there. Make a drawing of your chosen mural including the building that it is painted on – or make a drawing of your chosen sculpture, including the location in which it is installed. Then write a 1,000-word narrative of your experience, including your drawing process, and any relevant experiences you had during the process.

AH Assignment #4: 30% due December 10 at 5pm by submission to CANVAS

Work in groups of two or three to produce a *tableau vivant* (*tableau vivant* is a French term meaning “living picture”) of your assigned representational painting from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Photograph the tableau and write 1,000 words about the process of creating it and the suggestions you brought to the group and decisions that you made together about how to mount the tableau. The essays are individual, but the tableau is a group activity. Upload the picture of your tableau with your essay.

Religious Studies Stream Requirements: (30% of overall INTG0001 grade)

Note: All assignments for the Religious Studies Stream should be handwritten (in as clear handwriting – slow down – as possible) and in a journal. Each student will be given two journals with black covers (“Paperage” Lined Journal in Black (5.7 inches by 8 inches, hardcover). Your name and email must be written on the inside cover of the journals. No cell phones or computers will be permitted during Religious Studies Stream lectures and so you will use your black journals/notebooks to take lecture notes as well. The lectures will not be recorded and there will not be slides available online after.

There will be no assigned reading for the Religious Studies Stream except for the individual stories, poems, passages of scripture, etc. you will be given at the beginning of the semester. I highly encourage asking your instructor for scholarly readings in the field of Religious Studies and he will provide them and encourage you to discuss them with him over zoom or in office hours if you are interested in the field of study.

RS Assignment #1: 15% due September 18th in person in class in your journal.

On the first day of class you will be given a piece of writing. Each student will have a different piece. No trading. On September 18th you will be required to hand in your journal with the piece of writing rewritten in your own handwriting. Some will be longer than others (luck of the draw). Write a 1,113-word reflection on the writing (no more, no less, exactly 1,113 words). First you must identify the piece. Do some research, what is this? Where is it from? What could be the identity of the author(s)? Ask yourself: what was the purpose of writing this? What does it tell us about the author(s)? Then ask yourself how it makes you feel? Angry? Confused? Sad? Jealous? Hopeless? Isolated? Inspired? A Combination of all many feelings? Can you articulate that feeling? Does it make you feel that there is meaning in existence or meaninglessness? Does it make you feel spiritual or connected with something metaphysical or greater than yourself? You can be creative in this response and don't worry about creating an argument, using theoretical approaches, etc. You are welcome to, but this essay should be reactionary and speculative. Handwrite this essay after you manually copy your piece of writing in your notebook. Feel free to use the internet, Wikipedia, google stuff, whatever. However, it must be handwritten and based on your reaction informed by whatever research you decide.

RS Assignment #2: 15% due October 2nd in person in class (use your second notebook/journal for this assignment; you will get your first one back at the end of class this day as well).

For this assignment, you have to recreate your written piece either visually or musically. Therefore, you can draw (pencil, charcoal, oil, acrylic, watercolor, crayon, marker, carve, etc.) your piece OR you can compose it musically if you play an instrument or can create electronic music. If you draw (in any medium) you can bring it to class and then also submit and photo of it to CANVAS. If you recreate it musically, you can upload the recording to CANVAS or perform it in class. You can base your drawing/composition on the way the piece makes you feel or narratively, can you tell the story

visually/musically? Does it require lyrics? Is it a conceptual rendering? A more literal one? Please create a short (exactly 57 words) title and caption for your piece, but don't over explain it, let the visual or the auditory speak for the piece of writing. Although, not expected, you can also sculpt your piece or even recreate it/interpret it through flower arrangement in any medium (please let me know if you decide to take on that challenge). What does the visual or musical do that the textual can't? What is lost? What is gained? How does it speak to different audiences?

RS Assignment #3: 15% due October 16th in person in class (use your first notebook/journal).

For this assignment you will need to rewrite your piece in one 15-word sentence. If your original piece is less than 15 words, you must expand it into 250 words.

RS Assignment #4: 15% due October 29th by 5 pm.

For this assignment you must record yourself and three other classmates acting out your piece (film it and upload it to Canvas). Each of your four pieces must be acted out in a two minute play/performance art piece. Two minutes maximum. One minute minimum. Each group then must decide which of the four pieces they want to act out live/in-person in class on October 30th. Each group of four must act out one of their pieces. All four students must be involved in all four performances recorded for CANVAS and the one piece live in class. Costumes, props, etc. are not necessary, but are permitted. The plays do not have to be in English or even involve speech (i.e. they can be silent or set to music).

RS Assignment #5: 15% takes place December 4th in class.

This will be a final quiz for the Religious Studies section. It will be ten identifications and one essay taken in class. You will receive a study guide for the exam. It will be based entirely on Religious Studies Stream in-class lectures.

RS Assignment #6: 15% due December 6th in class (use yours second notebook/journal).

For this assignment you must pick a 100 word section of your piece (if your piece is shorter than 100 words, that is fine). You must memorize the section you choose. No notes permitted. You must orate/speak out loud that piece in class live/in-person. It also must be written in your notebook/journal. It must be memorized and you cannot check your notes. Any mistakes and you lose full credit for the assignment. You will hand your notebook/journal to the teaching staff before you orate it with the passage you memorized highlighted and book/notebook marked.

Participation, experiential exercises, and mini-assignments linked to the readings: 10%, due throughout the semester.

Integration Stream Requirements: (30% of overall INTG0001 grade)

Assignment #1 (personal reflection), due Sunday, September 10:

Describe in your own words (500 words maximum) your way of seeing, hearing, and in general, perceiving. Discuss some cultural, historical, or personal factors that may have shaped this way of observing. Has this way of observing/perceiving changed over the course of the last year? 5 years? 10 years? If so, how so? And . . . why? If not, how, and why not?

Assignment #2 (comparative essay), due Sunday, October 22:

Choose any two readings from the seminar stream. Compare them in a 1,000-word essay using one or more of the modes of attention we have been practicing in the other two streams. What similarities, differences, resonances, or tensions emerge through your chosen lens(es)?

Assignment #3 (personal essay), due Sunday, November 19:

Rewrite the personal reflection you wrote for Assignment #1 as a 1,200-word academic essay. Your essay should incorporate materials (texts, objects, etc.) and arguments from both streams.

On the Friday (17th) before the assignment is due, we will have a conversation in seminars reflecting on the writing/rewriting process; you should be far enough along by then to comment on your experience.

Assignment #4 (meditation on an artifact), due Friday, December 8:

Choose an artifact or text that is interesting or important to you. What would it mean to view it as sacred? What would it mean to view it as a work of art? How do these lenses change the meaning of this object? What is at stake?

You will want to describe your object in detail, but your paper should also devote considerable space (more than half) to discussing methods and arguments from Art History and Religious Studies.

Please include the object as part of your submission and be sure to keep it manageable and concise, i.e., a sound file, jpeg, or short text file at the beginning of your essay. The words for your example are not included in your essay word count.

Schedule

Wednesday, August 30th: Welcome to the Course by all Instructors – ARCH 208

JMcD distributes readings – on Friday students discuss finding their reading

Monday, September 4, Labor Day

Wednesday, September 6, Integration Session #1 by GDS: Penn Museum Visit Prep – Introduction to Close Looking

Make sure to visit the Penn Museum between August 30 and September 6 to find your object. Following the directions from Professor Shaw's introductory comments on August 30. Make notes on its material properties, photograph it and its place in the gallery, transcribe the label, transcribe the gallery/wall text near the object. Journal, journal, journal.

Sunday, September 10, Integrative Assignment 1 (Personal Reflection) Due at 11:59pm

Monday, September 11, GDS: Major Theories of Visual and Material Culture

We explore methodological approaches to understanding the visual and material world around us, from founding studies in art history in the 19th c. to the rise of visual and material culture theory in the late 20th c.

Prown, Jules David. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method." *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (1982): 1–19.

Wednesday, September 13 – No Class

Monday, September 18, JM: Majors Thinkers in the Study of Religion (Meditation Exercise and Learning How to Write One Sentence)

This week we explore the foundational ideas on religion by Marx, Freud, and Durkheim and explore how politics, power, dreams, and emotions (and the desire to just "fit in") generate religion. We also read a wonderful story by Langston Hughes and a poem by Mary Oliver. We also learn to write one sentence.

Wednesday, September 20 – Integration Session #2 – JMcD

Monday, September 25, GDS: Themes in the Study of Art – Yom Kippur

We consider the kinds of art that one may find in museums in the Philadelphia area and contemplate where art may also be found, in both public and private spaces. We discuss possible topics and themes of works of art.

Panofsky, Erwin. "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art." In *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History*. By Erwin Panofsky, 26–54. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955. (PDF)

Lecture, 8:30- 9:30am; 9:30am, leave to walk to Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA) - Complete the Monument Lab Fieldtrip Booklet and upload to canvas by Monday, October 9 at 5pm

Wednesday, September 27: No Class

Monday, October 2, JM: Major Themes in the Study of Religion (Poetry Exercise)

Here we expand our notion of what religion can be by looking at the work of Fritz Staal, Stanley Tambiah, Talad Asad, and Jane Bennet – is religion really about control or power, could it actually be a way we articulate existence? Could "god" be the better story? The poetry of Peter Gizzi and Basho is featured.

Wednesday, October 4: Integration Session #3 - JRT

Monday, October 9, GDS: Dimensionalities and Scale (Close Looking Exercise - Outdoor Sculpture on Campus)

Outdoor sculpture and architectural decoration come in many different styles and sizes. This week, we consider how sculpture is a part of the campus, from the landscaped islands to the facades of buildings, we explore and absorb the art around us at Penn.

Krauss, Rosalind. "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." *October* 8 (1979): 31–44.

Divide into; spend 120 minutes looking at a pair of works of public sculpture on campus:

Wednesday, October 11: No Class

Fall Break (October 12-15)

Monday, October 16, JM: Asceticism: Reading at Cira Green

This week we do something different – we think about religion and despair, religion and struggle. After a lecture on asceticism and monasticism in Religious Studies we will and read “Signs and Symbols” by Vladimir Nabokov together in person outside at Cira Green.

Wednesday, October 18: Integration Session #4 - KT

Sunday, October 22, Integrative Assignment #2 (Comparative Essay) Due at 11:59p.m.

Monday, October 23, GDS: Representation and Mimesis (Close Looking Exercise (outdoors) – Mural Arts Tours)

Art that tries to show the world as it is perceived by the artist so that it is also recognizable to others is called representational. This week we will focus on art that has mimetic qualities; in that it is attempting to look like (copy/mime) the thing it represents to communicate community histories and individual biographies.

[Petronienè, Saulè and Saulutè Juzelèniènè. "Community Engagement Via Mural Art to Foster a Sustainable Urban Environment." *Sustainability* 14, no. 16 \(2022\): 10063.](#)

Wednesday, October 25: No Class

Monday, October 30, JM: Monasticism

This week we go over major theories and histories of monasticism. *Performances in class for Religious Studies Stream.*

Wednesday, November 1: Integration Session #5 - GDS

Monday, November 6, GDS: Abstraction and Expression at the Barnes Foundation

We explore abstract representational art and non-objective creations that lack referents, paying special attention to their emotive and phenomenological qualities.

[John House, “Between Modernity and Tradition”
Renoir’s Rise, Barnes’ Celebrity](#)

Lecture from 8:30-9:15am; **Walk to Barnes Foundation.** Walk through the collection for 30 minutes; then choose a work of art that you like and spend 30 minutes with it, noting everything that comes to mind in your journal.

Wednesday, November 8: No Class

Monday, November 13, JM: Religious Reading Cultures

We look at the ways nuns and monks in various traditions “read” and chant sacred texts and we also get to see wonderful examples of monastic art at the Penn Museum.

Wednesday, November 15: Integration Session #6 Visit to Kislak Center - JM

Sunday, November 19, Integrative Assignment #3 (Personal Essay) due at 11:59p.m.

Monday, November 20, JM: Religious Chanting and Gardening Cultures: Visit to Woodland Cemetery

This week is a field trip to think about the ways in which religion and the fear of death go hand in hand. We will learn about funerary, death rituals, and end of life issues in the study of religion.

Wednesday, November 22: No Class

Thanksgiving Break, November 23-26

Monday, November 27, GDS: Temporalities – Philadelphia Museum of Art - “The Shape of Time: Korean Art after 1989.”

By this point in the semester, we will have begun to recognize the differing qualities in passage of time while we look at art in a close and slow way. This week we will explore art forms that are time based and require specific time commitments to be even minimally engaged.

Lecture, 8:30- 9:15am; walk to PMA; Spend 30 minutes walking through the exhibition; choose a work of art and spend 30 minutes with it noting everything you see. Spend any remaining time with your assigned group visiting your assigned painting for the *tableaux vivant*.

Wednesday, November 29: Integration Session #7 - DD

Monday, December 4, JM: Film: “Into Great Silence” and quiz in class

Wednesday, December 6: JMCD: Oral Performances

Friday, December 8, Integrative Assignment #4 (meditation on an artifact) due at 11:59p.m.

Monday, December 11, GDS: Group Tableaux Vivant Presentations

The ultimate art experience may be one of total sensory immersion – sight, sound, touch, taste, hearing. We will try to manifest the appearance of all of this as we close by presenting our *tableaux vivant* with our classmates. While the tableaux are being held, the audience will write about what they see.

Reading Days, December 12-13

Finals, December 14-21