

**ARTH 207: Introduction to Early Modern Art
Transcultural Encounter and Exchange (1300-1600)**



Fall 2023 / Tuesday–Thursday, 10:05-11:25pm, Arts W-215

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Office hours: Arts W-240, Wednesdays 2:30-3:30pm or by appointment via email

TA: Emily Silbergeld, Email: emily.silbergeld@mail.mcgill.ca

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Office hours by appointment via email

Course Description:

By the end of the 16th century, Africa, Asia, and Europe were connected to North and South America via a vast network of complex trade routes. This course tracks the dynamic forms of material and cultural exchange that accompanied this vast expansion of connectivity and increase in shared knowledge across the late medieval early modern periods. Art and other objects of material and visual culture played a crucial role in the migration of images, ideas, beliefs, and power structures across geographic boundaries. This introductory lecture course explores human mobility and the circulation of artistic materials, objects, styles, and techniques between Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, 1300 to 1600. While this period was marked by increasingly complex interactions between world societies driven by scientific curiosity, diplomacy, trade, and voyages of exploration, it also witnessed the advent of Transatlantic slavery, the spread of contagious disease, and the conquest, forced religious conversion, colonization, and exploitation of multiple indigenous populations. This course presents a selective survey of the art and visual culture that embody these interconnected dynamics and express ambivalent historical realities across a wide variety of media from maps, illustrated manuscripts, and prints to textiles, ceramics, murals, stone sculpture, metalwork, and architecture.

Learning outcomes:

1. Develop essential art historical skills including the visual analysis of a diverse array of artworks and objects of material culture; knowledge of different artistic materials, media, and techniques; acquisition of library and web-based research skills including those specific to art history; the ability to situate art and visual and material culture in specific social and historical contexts.
2. Gain facility in critical understanding a range of historical and theoretical concepts in the history of art, many of which apply in the contingent fields of history, anthropology, and literary studies.
3. Synthesize and apply content and concepts from lectures and assigned readings with your own original ideas in writing well-structured, argument-driven essays on exams.

Method of Evaluation:

Object biography	10%	Sunday October 8
In-class midterm exam	25%	Thursday October 26
Annotated Bibliography	30%	Sunday November 26
In-class final exam	35%	TBD

Exams:

Both exams will be taken in class unless you register with the Student Accessibility and Achievement Exam Center **at least 14 days prior** to the exam. Exams require students to discuss works of art and visual and material culture addressed in lectures, course readings, and class discussions in short essay format. Rather than memorization, the exams require students to draw on the visual and/or technical and material analysis of objects in relation to historical themes, information, and theoretical concepts covered in class and the required course readings. Students should expect to write 2–3 short essays about specific images, image comparisons, or structured responses to a specific textual prompt using images of their own choice.

Students must write both exams to pass the course. Makeup midterms can be scheduled if students with a valid excuse make a request in advance of the midterm or provides documentation of a medical problem/emergency within 48-72 hours of the exam date.

Note: having 3 or more midterm exams scheduled on the same day represents a conflict. Let Prof. Henry know early in the semester if you have a midterm conflict, not 1 week before the exam! Final exam conflicts are handled by the Faculty of Arts Student Affairs Office. According to McGill regulations, “Instructors are not permitted to grant any special treatment regarding examinations to any student.” Therefore, it is critical that you do not plan travel prior to the end of the final exam period.

Written Work (Object Biography and Annotated Bibliography):

You will find detailed instructions for these linked assignments under the Assignments tab on MyCourses by Week 2. Read these instructions carefully; we will discuss both assignments in class before the end of add/drop period. The “object biography” is a short (3-page) document similar in form to a museum or exhibition catalogue entry, in which you will demonstrate understanding of key information about a chosen object of study and describe it in terms of course themes and concepts. The annotated bibliography instead demonstrates your ability to perform sustained and in-depth library and web-based research about the same object of study by

compiling a rich, diverse, and well-rounded bibliography of 7-10 high-quality scholarly sources. The 5 annotations you write must reflect your ability to read critically, evaluate argument, evidence, and content, and to synthesize key information from your written sources. The AHCS liaison librarian will hold an in-class library orientation session focused on course specific research strategies and library resources relevant on Sept. 21. Attendance is essential for students new to Art History and/or using the McGill library system.

AI:

The use of generative artificial intelligence (e.g., ChatGPT) to write your assignments (the object biography and annotated bibliography) is prohibited. AI cannot deliver the kind of original visual analysis, specific research, critical thinking, and information synthesis expected of your work in this course. Please see Professor Henry in office hours if you have questions or concerns about this policy.

Late assignments will be graded down 5% per day. *You must do the annotated bibliography in order to pass the course.* Extensions will be considered only if requested in advance of the due date or when medical documentation is provided within 48 hours of the due date.

Attendance:

Regular class attendance is expected (although not monitored) and is essential to strong course performance. Being in class provides an essential opportunity to participate in discussion, ask questions, test your critical reading and visual analysis skills, assess intersections between the assigned readings and lecture content, and check in with your professor and/or TA about course matters.

MyCourses:

All class lectures will be recorded and available on MyCourses, although there are occasional technical issues in the lecture hall that prevent this. Recordings are intended as a supplement not a replacement for in person class attendance. Additionally, the PowerPoint slide presentations for each lecture will be posted to MyCourses by date under the Content tab for use in exam preparation. PDFs of the required weekly readings, detailed assignment and exam instructions, and important announcements will also be posted on MyCourses. Students are expected to use this platform as a “home base” for all coursework. Email your TA immediately if you have any difficulty in accessing or navigating MyCourses.

Course reading:

Required assigned readings are listed by class session under “Course Lectures and Reading Assignments” below and should be read *in advance* of the class session for which they are assigned. There will be around 25-40 pages per week (including illustrations). You should budget 45 minutes–1.5 hrs per reading depending on your familiarity with the historical period, geography, and art historical vocabulary. Visit office hours if you have difficulty with the readings or need strategies for synthesizing information from the readings and lectures. You need to keep up with the readings on a weekly basis in conjunction with attending the lectures they are assigned for if you want to succeed on the midterm and final exams. Cramming does not work for this course.

Unless otherwise indicated on the syllabus, all assigned readings are available as downloadable PDFs on the MyCourses website. They are organized by lecture date under the Content tab. Additionally, the course uses several exhibition catalogues generously made available as free, downloadable PDFs by various museums on their websites. I have provided links to these publications below. ***Please check that you can access the required readings and let your TA know ASAP if you encounter any technical problems. Report broken links to websites and any other issues to your TA or the library immediately through the interface provided.***

Additional resources:

There is no required textbook for this course, however for your individual research assignments this exhaustive exhibition catalogue is an excellent source of ideas and information:

Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration, ed. Jay A. Levenson (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991).

Download the free PDF here:

<https://www.nga.gov/research/publications/pdf-library/circa-1492.html>

A large section of this course focuses on 16th century Latin American colonial art. Art historians Dana Leibsohn and Barbara Mundy are co-curators of an online collection, which features images, thematic essays, and a collection of primary sources. You can visit this prize-winning website, *Vistas: Visual Culture in Spanish America, 1520–1820*, here:

<http://www.smith.edu/vistas/>. Click by themes or search galleries by time period. The essays, glossaries, and bibliographies are extremely useful. There are multiple course readings assigned from the site.

Other digital resources:

ArtStor (www.artstor.org - you can access this through the McGill library website) is useful for finding images/objects and information about them through keyword and other search functions.

The Metropolitan Museum website contains many short but excellent essays in the **Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History** on various aspects of medieval and early modern world art with further references and links to objects in the collection: <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/>

Oxford Art Online is an invaluable source for information about individual artists, artistic media (e.g., “engraving”) and materials (e.g., “ivory”), concepts (e.g., “Mestizo”), object types (e.g., “altarpiece”), subject matter, historic sites, and cities: <http://www.oxfordartonline.com>.

It is available on campus through the McGill library website and via VPN off-site. However, it does not offer comprehensive, up-to-date bibliographies for your research subjects as most entries have not been updated in 10-20 years.

1492: An Ongoing Voyage [website]

Smarthistory is a web-based collaborative of art historians, curators, archaeologists, and artists that publishes open access essays and videos on a range of subjects relevant to this course:

<https://smarthistory.org/>

To better understand the complex relationship between the Mediterranean World and what came to be called “the Americas” following the pivotal year of 1492, visit the online exhibit “**1492: An Ongoing Voyage**,” from the Library of Congress, which features a number of detailed essays on various topics: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/1492/>

Laptop, Mobile Computing, and Communication Devices Policy:

Mobile phones are prohibited during class time and should be silenced and stored where they cannot be seen or heard. Students who distract others (including the professor) with their phones will receive a verbal warning before being asked to leave the lecture. Other computing or communications devices such as laptops are not permitted in class without the explicit permission of the instructor (given with those for a special need to use them for note taking). Students allowed laptops will sit together in the first two rows. If granted permission to use a laptop you must disable wi-fi capability.

Note: numerous scientific studies have shown that learners process and retain information far better through taking handwritten notes.

University Notices:

Plagiarism is a serious offence, and could result in a failing grade. McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me via email or in office hours. You may also contact the Office for Student Accessibility & Achievement. For more information, see their website: <https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/>

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté. In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

McGill University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka or Mohawk Nation are recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather; and Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future of Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

COURSE LECTURES AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK ONE: Introduction

Thursday, August 31: Syllabus and course overview

WEEK TWO: Views of the World, ca. 1300–1500

Tuesday, September 5: Concepts, Methods, Terms

Reading:

Familiarize yourself with the format and content of museum object records:

1. The Fonthill Vase, ca. 1300–1400, National Museum of Ireland:
<https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Collection/Resilience/Artefact/Sponge/54194ae6-5acb-43c1-b2e8-e7c13feb508c>
2. The Salting Carpet, late 16th century, Victoria & Albert Museum:
<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O54294/the-salting-carpet-carpet-unknown/>

Thursday, September 7: Divergent Perspectives

Required reading:

Jerry Brotton, “World Views and the Mapmakers’ Craft,” in *Toward a Global Middle Ages: Encountering the World through Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. Bryan Keene (J. Paul Getty Museum, 2019), pp. 50–59.

Website:

Explore the Hereford Cathedral world map, made ca. 1300:

<https://www.themappamundi.co.uk/mappa-mundi/>

Navigate all tabs: Myths and Legends; Bible Stories; Beasts of the World; Strange Peoples of the World; Towns and Cities

WEEK THREE: Trade in and beyond Europe, 1300–1500

Tuesday, September 12: The *Catalan Atlas* and Jewish Culture in Spain

Required reading:

Jean Michel Massing, “Observations and Beliefs: The World of the *Catalan Atlas*,” in *Studies in Imagery Vol. II: The World Discovered* (Pindar Press, 2007), pp. 1-22.

Suggested reading:

Ariel Fein, “The Catalan Atlas,” in *Smarthistory* (2022):

<https://smarthistory.org/catalan-atlas/>

Ariel Fein, “Elisha ben Abraham Cresques and the Fahri Bible,” in *Smarthistory* (2022):

<https://smarthistory.org/elisha-ben-abraham-cresques-and-the-farhi-bible/>

Thursday, September 14: Material Voyages and Meanings

Required Reading:

Anne Dunlop, “On the origins of European painting materials, real and imagined,” in *The Matter of Art: Materials, Practices, Cultural Logics, 1250-1650*, eds. P. Smith, C. Anderson, and A. Dunlop (Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 68–96.

Suggested reading:

Ariel Fein, "Medieval Materiality across the Mediterranean, 900–1500 C.E.,"

Reframing Art History digital textbook:

<https://smarthistory.org/reframing-art-history/medieval-materiality-mediterranean/>

WEEK FOUR: Italy and the Islamic World

Tuesday, September 19: Ornament, Narrative, and Diplomacy

Reading:

Rosamond Mack, "Trade, Travel and Diplomacy," in *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (University of California, 2002), pp. 15–26.

Thursday, September 21: In-class annotated bibliography research session with AHCS liaison librarian Emily Jaeger-McEnroe

WEEK FIVE: Ethnographic Imagery in Maps and Travelogues

Tuesday, September 26: The Portuguese in Africa and Goa

Reading:

Ashley West, "Global Encounters: Conventions and Invention in Hans Burgkmair's Images of Natives of Africa, India, and the New World," in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence. The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Melbourne University Publishing, 2009), pp. 272–78.

Thursday, September 28: Columbus in the Caribbean

Reading:

Jean Michel Massing, "Early European Images of America: An Ethnographic Approach," in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, edited by Jay A. Levenson (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), pp. 515–520.

Margarita Zamora, "Christopher Columbus's 'Letter to the Sovereigns': Announcing the Discovery," in Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *New World Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 1–11.

WEEK SIX: European-African Connections, 1500–1550

Tuesday, October 3: Afro-Portuguese Ivories

Reading:

Suzanne Preston Blier, "Imaging Otherness in Ivory: African Portrayals of the Portuguese ca. 1492," *The Art Bulletin* 75/3 (1993): 375–96.

Thursday, October 5: Race, Gender, and Power in European Portraiture

No reading

Object biography assignment due by on MyCourses before midnight on Sunday October 8 (Assignment tab)

WEEK SEVEN: FALL BREAK (OCT. 6–11)

Thursday, October 12: The Spanish Conquest of Mexico

Reading:

Diana Magaloni Kerpel, “History Under the Rainbow: The Conquest of Mexico in the Florentine Codex,” in *Contested Visions in the Spanish Colonial World*, ed. Ilona Katzew (Los Angeles: Getty, 2011), pp. 79–95.

WEEK EIGHT: Early Colonial New Spain

Tuesday, October 17: Catholic Conversion

Reading:

Leibsohn and Mundy, Vistas website: “Surveying otherworldly visions”:

<https://vistas.ace.fordham.edu/themes/visions-surveying/>

Bartolomé de las Casas protests the seizing of idols (16th c.):

<https://vistas.ace.fordham.edu/lib/16th/idols/>

Thursday, October 19: Urban Planning and Tribute

Reading:

Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, *Life in the Imperial and Loyal City of Mexico* [1554], pp. 37–67.

Leibsohn and Mundy, Vistas website: “Surveying the political force of images”:

<https://vistas.ace.fordham.edu/themes/political-surveying/>

“Map of Cholula”:

<https://vistas.ace.fordham.edu/themes/political-images-02/>

“King Phillip II dictates the layout of new towns, 1573”:

<https://vistas.ace.fordham.edu/lib/16th/layout/>

Object biography assignment returned in MyCourses

WEEK NINE: Midterm exam

Tuesday, October 24: In class midterm review session

Thursday, October 26: In class midterm exam

WEEK TEN: The Early *Conventos* in New Spain

Tuesday, October 31: Mission Architecture and Ideology

Reading:

Samuel Edgerton, “The Cross and the Tree: The Christian *Convento* as Indian Cosmos,” in *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico* (University of New Mexico, 2001), 35–72. [for the week]

Thursday, November 2: Teaching the *Rhetórica Christiana*

Reading:

Finish Edgerton chapter on early *conventos* from Tuesday.

WEEK ELEVEN: *Convento* Murals

Tuesday, November 7: Penitence and Judgment

Reading:

Vistas website, “Surveying mechanics of the artworld”:

<https://vistas.ace.fordham.edu/themes/art-world-surveying/>

Midterm exams returned

Thursday, November 9: Survivals of Indigenous Imagery

Reading:

Gauvin Alexander Bailey, “Eying the Other: The Indigenous Response,” in *Art of Colonial Latin America* (Phaidon, 2005), pp. 91-108.

WEEK TWELVE: The Conversion of Featherwork

Tuesday, November 14: Mexica Featherwork

Reading:

Claire Farago, “The Mass of St. Gregory,” in *Painting a New World*, exh. cat., ed. Donna Pierce, Denver Art Museum (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), pp. 98–102.

Thursday, November 16: Materiality and Meaning

Reading:

Alessandra Russo, “Plumes of Sacrifice: Transformations in Sixteenth-Century Mexican Feather Art,” *RES* 42 (2002): 226-250.

Vistas website, “Otherworldly Visions,” Christ as Salvator Mundi, Image 3:

<https://vistas.ace.fordham.edu/themes/visions-images-03/>

WEEK THIRTEEN: Asian-European Trade

Tuesday, November 21: Chinese Textiles for European Export

Reading:

Maria João Pacheco Ferreira, “Chinese Textiles for Portuguese Tastes,” in *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500–1800*, ed. Amelia Peck. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013, pp. 46-55.

Thursday, November 23: The Circulation of Islamic Carpets

Annotated bibliography due on MyCourses before midnight on Sunday November 26

WEEK FOURTEEN: The World in a Room?

Tuesday, November 28: Collecting Foreign Artifacts in Europe

Reading:

Isabel Yaya, “Wonders of America: The Curiosity Cabinet as a Site of Representation and Knowledge,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 20/2 (2008): 173–188.

Thursday, November 30: No class (follows a Monday schedule)

Tuesday, December 5: In class review session for the final exam

Final exam date TBA (Dec. 7–21)

***Do not plan travel prior to Dec. 22 until the final exam schedule is posted!**