

# Religion and Modern Art

## RELST/ARTH 313

Instructor: Prof. S Brent Rodríguez Plate

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Office hours: 10.15-11.30am TTR, or by appt. Room 108 Benedict Hall

### **Course Overview:**

This course investigates the ways religious traditions have continued to influence the visual arts into the modern and postmodern periods, but also the ways art becomes religious in modern, secular life.

### **Course Materials:**

Students will need to purchase the following books, available in the bookstore:

- *Reenchantment*, James Elkins and David Morgan, eds. (Routledge)
  - *Postmodern Heretics*, by Eleanor Heartney (Midmarch Press)
- Other texts will be made available online through Blackboard (BB)

### **Course Requirements and Grade Distribution:**

There are 1000 points possible in this class. The breakdown is as follows...

**Presence**: (15% of the final grade=150points) This grade includes attendance and participation, but entails a more general sense of bringing both body and mind to the classroom for discussions. Come to class prepared to discuss the readings/viewings. "Presence" means listening to the others in the classroom; "presence" means, to use the title of a great religious film, "being there."

The course is a seminar and therefore relies on informed comments by students on a regular basis. The grade for presence includes attendance. Plus, you will be graded on your ability to analyze and synthesize readings; on the frequency, relevance and insights of your comments; and on your ability to present your ideas coherently to the class. Presence grades will be calculated from: 1) my own notes from class sessions, in which I note who was significantly involved in discussion, 2) your own self-assessment of your contributions to class discussion.

Finally: You are expected to treat this classroom as if you were on an airline flight: That is, all electronic devices must be

turned off and safely stowed away for the duration of our flights. Cell phones will not be tolerated in this classroom, and laptops are not allowed. A ringing phone during class will result in that student being marked absent for the day.

### **Two Questions, Two Comments (2Q2C)**: (10%=100pts)

As noted on the Course Schedule below, on several days during the term you will bring in two questions and two comments about the assigned readings/viewings for the day. These will be handed to Prof Plate at the **beginning** of class, and will serve as discussion starters for the day's class. The comments need only be a couple sentences, and no more than a simple paragraph. The days these are due are marked "2Q2C" below.

Also included in this grade will be "one question/one comment" in response to the oral presentations of your classmates in the first weeks of class. More info forthcoming.

### **Oral Presentation** (5%= 50points)

In the first few weeks of class, you will make a 10min presentation on one specific artwork visited in New York. This will be on the same topic as your first short paper. More info forthcoming.

### **Short Papers**: (25% of final grade; 125pts each)

**Two** of these are due through the term. 1500 words each. More info forthcoming.

### **Long Paper**: (25%=250pts)

One substantial research paper of 2800-3000 words. More info forthcoming.

### **Final Project**: (20%=200pts)

An Exhibition. Set up an exhibition where you design the space, the art objects, and the wall texts. This is an exhibition related in some way to "religion and modern art." You may want to work chronologically, or thematically, by media, or focus on one specific aspect of modern religious art.

This will be done in groups of three. Because Prof Plate believes the process of negotiation and working together is an important learning experience for life in general, he will assign the groups. You will be graded individually based on: 1) the overall final "product"; 2) on your own 1-2 page analysis of the project (what you

contributed to the product, how you feel your partners contributed-- or didn't); 3) Final oral presentation on the exhibition (25% of the final project grade; all three people should be involved in one way or other with the presentation).

### **Blackboard**

I will be making use of Blackboard through the semester to post readings, links to websites, etc. Also, if I have to send an update to the syllabus or assignments, I will send it to your Hamilton email address. You will therefore need to check that on a regular basis.

### **Statement on Disabilities**

Prof Plate will work with any students with disabilities as need be. Students should contact Prof Plate **in the first two weeks of class** to discuss any specific needs, and should have already spoken with Dean Harrison ([aharriso@hamilton.edu](mailto:aharriso@hamilton.edu)) about this. If in question, feel free to contact Prof Plate.

### **Course Schedule**

<b><u>Origins and Modernism through mid-20th century</u></b>
TR 26 Aug - Introductions, syllabus, etc. Discuss readings on "Religion"
T 31 Aug - Modernity/Modernism. Readings: Taylor, "Iconoclasm" BB.
TR 2 Sept - Modernity/Modernism. Readings: Taylor, "Iconoclasm" (cont)
Fri/Sat 3/4 Sept - Trip to NYC: Visit MoMA and Guggenheim
T 7 Sept - Discussion based on NYC visit. Oral presentations and responses Readings: David Morgan, "Art and Religion in the Modern Age," from <i>Reenchantment</i> , pp. 25-45

TR 9 Sept - Oral presentations and responses Readings: Morgan (cont)
T 14 Sept - Oral presentations and responses Readings: James Elkins, "How some scholars deal with the question" <i>Reenchantment</i> , pp. 69-78; Recommended, "The Art Seminar" conversation in <i>Reenchantment</i> , 107-183.
TR 16 Sept - Oral presentations and responses Readings: Elkins and Art Seminar conversation (cont) <b>First short paper due Mon 20 Sept by noon, as email to Prof Plate</b>
<b><u>Contemporary/Postmodern</u></b>

T 21 Sept - <b>Meet in Graves room</b> , library (room 217) for look at artist books and religion, including Kandinsky, et al. Readings: @ BB
TR 23 Sept. Contemporary art: installation, performance, body, earth Readings: Lynn Herbert, "Regarding Spirituality" from <i>Art: 21</i> BB In Class: <i>ART 21: Spirituality</i> . Submit <b>2Q2C</b> to Prof Plate via email.
T 28 Sept - Readings, Heartney, <i>Pomo Heretics</i> , "Body and Soul," 1-25 Viewings @ BB Submit <b>2Q2C</b> at <b>beginning</b> of class.
TR 30 Sept - <b>Meet in Emerson Gallery</b> Readings: "Iconomash" by Plate in <i>Reenchantment</i> . Selections from Modern Islamic art/calligraphy, BB
T 5 Oct - <b>Meet in Emerson Gallery</b> . Observing the Gaden Shartse Monks Mandala making. (If you can, please come Monday 4 Oct at 9.00am for the opening ceremony in Emerson, and also Wed afternoon around 4.00pm for the closing.)

<p>TR 7 Oct - Further on Buddhist art/Iconomash Readings and Viewings: "Buddha Mind" and "Third Mind", BB <b>2Q2C</b> <b>Note: Afternoon lecture by Sally Promey, 4.10</b></p>
<p>T 12 Oct - What is Religious Art? A discussion based on your papers, and topics in class. No readings, just thoughts. <b>2Q2C</b> <b>Second short paper due W 13 Oct by noon, as email to Prof Plate</b></p>
<p>TR 14 Oct - <b>no class, fall break</b></p>
<p>T 19 Oct (and M 18 Oct) - Individual student meetings with Prof Plate. <b>Thesis statement, outline, and 4-5 entry bibliography due for meeting. Times TBA</b></p>
<p>TR 21 Oct - T 9 Nov - <b>No Class</b>. Prof Plate is away, and this is time for you to work on your papers. <b>Papers Due Monday 10 Nov, by 5.00pm to Prof Plate, by email.</b></p>
<p>TR 11 Nov - Blasphemy/Transgressive Art. Readings: Heartney, <i>Postmodern Heretics</i>, "Body Artists" pp. 42-72 Viewings @ BB <b>2Q2C</b></p>
<p>T 16 Nov - - Blasphemy/Transgressive Art. Readings: Plate, from <i>Blasphemy: Art that Offends</i> BB Viewings @BB <b>2Q2C</b></p>
<p>TR 18 Nov - Readings, Plate, from <i>Blasphemy</i> (cont), BB Watch film in class. <b>2Q2C</b></p>
<p>T 23 - TR 25 <b><u>no class, Thanksgiving Break</u></b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Building the Art-Religion Relation</u></b></p>
<p>T 30 Nov - Architecture. Readings from Taylor's <i>Disfiguring</i> BB Viewings @ BB <b>2Q2C</b></p>

<p>TR 2 Dec - Architecture. Readings from Taylor's <i>Disfiguring</i> BB Viewings @ BB <b>2Q2C</b></p>
<p>T 7 Dec - Modern Art-Religion Exhibitions. Readings from <i>Heaven, Third Mind, Negotiating Rapture</i> exhibits. BB Viewings @ BB <b>2Q2C</b></p>
<p>TR 9 Dec - Modern Art-Religion Exhibitions Readings from <i>Heaven, Third Mind, Negotiating Rapture</i> exhibits. BB Viewings @ BB</p>
<p>T 14 Dec - 2.00-5.00. Meet at Prof Plate's house for Final Presentations.</p>