



Yeshiva University

THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS
CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

THE IMAGE AND THE IDEA

An Interdisciplinary Seminar on Art History and Jewish Thought

ARTS 5074 C / Fall 2020

Stern College for Women / Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought

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Course Abstract

As beings rooted in a physical world governed by laws of nature, we achieve sanctity through tangible and sensory means: acts of charity, song, prayer, text study – and art. At the same time, the Tanakh and Talmud express persistent concern lest we give in to the human temptation to render the Divine in finite form. This interdisciplinary course explores the process through which art and artists make use of physical means to achieve spiritual or intangible ends; and the ways Judaism and Jewish sources deal with the tension between the physical and the spiritual, between external act and internal meaning, between the visual and the intellectual, the image and the idea.

Course Structure

In each section of the course, we will pair images, paintings, sculptures and architecture with readings from art history, philosophy and Jewish thought. We will begin by addressing the question of art in religion in general and in Judaism in particular; we will then turn to specific traditions, and utilizing both essays and objects within local museum collections, including Yeshiva University Museum, explore the tension and complex relationship between beauty and spirituality, between appreciating extraordinary aesthetic quality and fulfilling religious ideals. We will also hear from visiting scholars, rabbis, artists, art historians and curators, who will address the subject under discussion at different stages in the course.

Course Evaluation

Weekly Readings and Discussion	20%
4 Critical Responsa	40%
Class Presentation	15%
Research Paper on Object from YUM or another Museum Collection	25%

Attendance & Participation

Students are strongly encouraged to attend **all** meetings during the term and to participate steadily and enthusiastically in class discussion. This is especially important in a class that moves briskly between themes and topics. Attendance will be recorded at the beginning of each class meeting. Promptness, attentiveness, participation, and courtesy to fellow students will be



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considered in the course evaluation at the instructors' discretion. Students are expected to keep up with weekly readings and to come to class prepared to discuss them. Everyone is encouraged to participate regularly and to be engaged in class discussions.

Zoom (and In-Class) Behavior and Cell Phones

With our primary means of interaction being *virtual* this semester, it's important to consider Zoom and all other online communication as an extension of the classroom. Students are required to have their videos on throughout class meetings. Please aim to check in from a relatively quiet setting that minimizes distractions (for you and your fellow students). Your cell phones should be turned off or silenced before the class begins and kept off for the duration of class meetings. Electronic devices, except for computers or devices being used to access the class or take notes, should be stored away and silenced.

Students with Disabilities and Special Needs

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Services, rkohn1@yu.edu, during the first weeks of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.

Honor Code

Stern College maintains an honor code that this instructor and department take very seriously. The work you submit must be your own. All outside sources and references consulted must be properly cited. Cheating will not be tolerated and will result in university disciplinary action. If you are unclear in any way about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to discuss it with the professor.

Writing Center

The College maintains a wonderful resource, The Beren Writing Center, to help student improve their writing skills. It's located in room 714 of 215 Lex. Receive free help with your writing. You can visit the Beren Writing Center or contact them at berenwritingcenter@yu.edu or 646.592.4860. For more information or to make an appointment online, go to: www.yu.edu/writing-centers/beren.

Class Schedule and Topics

I: Introduction / The Value and Dangers of Beauty; On *Paragone* and the Meaning of Style; On Nature; Approaches to Art in Judaism & Christianity

Selected Readings, Topics & Images

- A. Melnikoff, "Rabbi Kook on Art"
- Jonathan Sacks, "God's Shadow"
- Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, "On Depiction of Human Images on the Stained-Glass Windows of an Interfaith Chapel"
- Ernst Gombrich on Rembrandt



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- Dio's *History* and Ammianus's *History* – on the Roman Pantheon
- Procopius, *On the Great Church* [Hagia Sophia]
- Paul the Silentary, *The Magnificence of Hagia Sophia*
- Polybios and Pliny on Roman Portrait Sculpture
- The Synagogue at Dura Europos
- Rembrandt's Portraits of *Jan Six*, *Margaretha de Geer*, and *Aechje Claesdr*; *David at Prayer*
- Titian's Portraits of *Pietro Aretino* and Gerrit Dou's *A Woman Playing a Clavichord*
- Titian's *Portrait of a Man with a Ruffled Sleeve* and Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait*

II. Nature and Technology

Selected Readings, Topics & Images

- Rabbi Aaron Lichtenstein, "The Woods are Lovely, Dark and Deep: Reading a Poem by Robert Frost"
- Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *Lonely Man of Faith, Selections*
- Northern Renaissance Art – Jan van Eyck & the Invention of Oil Painting
- Biographies of Artists – Genius and the Ideal of the Divinely Inspired Artist
- *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters* by Karel van Mander; Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*
- Turner, *Rain, Wind, and Speed*; *Fighting Temeraire*; Von Ruisdael's *Jewish Cemetery*

III. The Image and the Idea

Selected Readings, Topics & Images

- Meir Soloveichik, "Torah and Incarnation"
- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "Seeing and Hearing"
- David Gelernter, *Judaism: A Way of Being*, selections
- Rembrandt's *Balaam* and Pieter Lastman's *Balaam*; Rembrandt's *The Artist in his Studio*; Caravaggio's *David and the Head of Goliath*
- Iconoclasm, Reformation & Counter-Reformation – The Threats and Debates over Images
- A. M. Klein, *The Second Scroll*, chapter 3 – "Leviticus," and "Gloss Gimel"
- James Elkins, "The Most Beautiful Painting in the World"

IV. Life Cycle – Art and the Medium of Mitzvah

Selected Readings, Topics & Images

- Daniel Sperber, *The Jewish Life Cycle Lore and Iconography Jewish Customs from the Cradle to the Grave*, selections
- Meir Soloveichik, "Blessed Unions," and "Mysteries of the Menorah"
- Morritz Daniel Oppenheim, Images of Jewish family life; Selected ketubot
- Leon Kass, "L'Chaim and its Limits: Why not Immortality?" *First Things*, May 2001
- The Enlightened Artist: Why does the Jewish artist lack the authority of a *darshan*?



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- YUM Collection: Circumcision set; Dish used for Brit Milah; Swaddling cloth / circumcision cloth; Torah binder (wimpel) of Naftali son of Uri (Herbert son of Levi Barta)
- Marriage – YUM Collection: Kettubot: Marriage contract of David son of Solomon and Hannah daughter of Hayyim Eliezer; Marriage contract of Mollie Liener and Solomon Maltzman; Marriage contract of Yitzhak son of Moshe Benjamin and Palomba daughter of Shulami Halevy; Ladino Ketubah from Cuba; Marriage contract of Matzliach Pesaro and Rosa Guglielmi; Marriage Ring
- Death, Commemoration, and Tzedakah Shel Emet
- YUM Collection: Kittel; Burial Society comb; Ossuary; Memorial Plaque; Burial Society charity container

V: Art and Architecture as Enhancement for Prayer – The Synagogue and the Image of Jerusalem

Selected Readings, Topics & Images

- Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, “The Synagogue as Institution and as an Idea.”
- Ibid., *Worship of the Heart*, selections
- Maurycy Gottlieb’s *Jews Praying in the Synagogue*, Poussin’s *Destruction of the Temple*, Rembrandt’s *Jeremiah*, Yeshiva University Museum’s *Model of the Temple*
- Gothic Architecture – St. Denis, New Light and Heavenly Jerusalem; The Book of Suger, Abbot of St. Denis, On What Was Done Under his Administration; Erwin Panofsky, ed., Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and Its Art Treasures; Otto Georg Von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, selections; Paul Binski, *Becket's Crown: Art and Imagination in Gothic England 1170-1300*, selections
- Communal Forum/Synagogue Architecture; Ten Historic Synagogue Models from Yeshiva University Museum; Steven Fine, *This Holy Place. On the Sanctity of the Synagogue During the Greco-Roman Period*, selections
- The Sephardi / Italian Synagogue – the tension and sanctity of space
- The Rothko Chapel – Dominique de Menil, The Rothko Chapel: Writings on Art and the Threshold of the Divine
- The Temple of Solomon and Church Architecture
- The Image of Jerusalem, Pilgrimage and the Heavenly City
- Individual Prayer. YUM Collection: Siddur Taniot; Hebrew Prayer Book; Book of Psalms; Prayer Shawl; Tefillin Bag; Pair of Tefillin Cases; Ephemera – Prayer against the proliferation of illnesses

Student Presentations

Conclusions and Review