Konan Year-in-Japan Program, Fall 2019

Class: Japan Studies 9 The Art of the Kansai

Instructor: Karin Swanson

Meeting times: Wednesdays, 3rd and 4th periods

Office hours: Generally available after class. I will also have scheduled office hours on 10/2, 10/23, 11/13, 12/4 and 12/18

Course Description

The Kansai area, and in particular the "golden triangle" formed by the cities Kyoto, Osaka, and Nara, has been for the majority of Japanese history the center of the highest level of art production in the country. Although earlier art can be found in the Kansai, it is with the large quantity of lavishly produced items made for inclusion in the fourth century tomb mounds of politically and militarily important clan leaders that this area was firmly established in its artistically dominant role, a role continuing with only minor interruptions until power and patronage shifted to Edo (present day Tokyo) in the early seventeenth century. For this reason, the course will be framed within this temporal and spatial context.

An objective overview of types of art produced in the Kansai during the above defined time period reveals that although many objects were produced for secular use, the vast majority are religious. Among these religiously-motivated commissions, the Buddhist arts are most prevalent. Therefore, some of the introductory classes will include some materials designed to facilitate greater understanding of the meaning and use of the objects created, including iconography and various Buddhist sects.

Assuming no prior experience in art history, the goals of the class are to maximize the opportunities of looking at Kansai art, much of which can still be found in its original context, and to establish a locus for its meaning and motivation for its creation. Focusing primarily on architecture, painting and sculpture, the class will be divided into five chronologically-presented units. Initial exploration of each unit will consist of readings and an overview of the cultural factors influencing the specific type of art production, as well as looking at many examples of the variety of art made during that period. Following this will be field trips to some of the most important sites studied, such as temples, a castle, gardens and an ancient tomb mound..

Course Objectives

Upon completion of the course, students will have gained conceptual frameworks within which newly-encountered Japanese art objects can be evaluated. These frameworks, for example, historical or media-based, can be used to consider an object in terms of its linear progression within the "history" of Japanese art, its relevance or lack of relevance to objects made in the same media, etc.

The course is object-centered, but views the objects as reflections of the cultural and historical, as well as artistic, milieu in which they were created. Therefore, students who have gained a successful overview of art analysis will be able to self-formulate appropriate questions to ask when faced with a previously unknown object. They will also be able to surmount the difficult task of setting aside 21st century views of artists and art creation to focus on the more probable environment of object creation and meaning within the appropriate context. The final project will be on modern or contemporary art, giving students the opportunity to compare precedents with more recent developments in the area, as well as measure the effectiveness of their analytical frameworks.

Grading Criteria

Unit Tests 50%

Final Paper (6-7 pgs.) 20%

Attendance/Participation 20%

Attendance policy is consistent with the YiJ Course Policies; students must attend 80% of class sessions to avoid automatic failure. Class field trips are considered regular class sessions.

Participation evaluation rubric follows:

A – Exemplary. Student comes to class punctually, remains in the classroom, is well-prepared, shows active interest in the class, and continues to make good progress in mastering class materials. Student is active in class discussion.

B- Acceptable. Student comes to class punctually, is rarely out of the classroom, shows interest in the class, is satisfactorily prepared, and makes moderate progress in mastering class materials. Student occasionally participates in class discussion.

C – Unsatisfactory. Student comes to class late and/or leaves before the end of class. Student is insufficiently prepared, including not bringing relevant materials. Student often leaves the classroom, including for extended periods of time, displays little interest in the class including non-participation in class discussion. Student is sometimes engaged in activities not related to the class.

F – Student is often absent, extremely late or leaves early, displays lack of preparation or no engagement in the class.

Visual Analysis paper (2 pgs., from Horyu-ji field trip) 10%

Please note that written assignments submitted late will be given lower grades, and that electronic submission will be allowed only in case of emergency as determined by the instructor.

Texts and Materials

The primary course text is the first five chapters in History of Japanese Art (first edition, published 1993) by Penelope Mason. This material will be supplemented by other readings in PDF or print copies. Students are expected to have read the material before the class during which it will be discussed. The instructor will also often supplement the text material with other visual examples and comparisons, not all of which are available either in the text or online; this is one reason for the attendance policy.

Classroom policies

-Please turn off any electronic devices, and put them inside your bag, not on the desk or chair. Use of them during class will result in subtraction of total points.

-Sleeping in class is not acceptable.

-If there are physical reasons necessitating your often going to the restroom during class, please choose a seat near the door.

-If you are a student with any special needs, please make me aware of it; don't assume that someone else has already informed me. Sudden disclosure of such issues near the end of the semester may make adjustments and accommodation difficult.

- make-up tests require written documentation for the absence

Course Schedule

	3rd period	4th period
September 18	Introduction to the class; Jomon period	Yayoi and Kofun period

Reading: Mason, pp. 12-32, What is Japanese Architecture? pp .54-55

September 25	Introduction to Buddhist Arts, earliest worship sites and spread of Buddhism	

Reading: Swanson, pp. 1-6, Mason, p.33 & 38-39, Great Age of Japanese Buddhist Sculpture, pp. 42-46

October 2	Discussion	Office hours
*October 9	TEST ONE on the above material	Buddhist/Shinto worship sites

Reading: Mason, pp. 33-42,50-51 What is Japanese Architecture? pp.14-15, 40-41

October 16	Asuka/Hakuho periods	Nara period

Reading: Mason, pp. 42-80, What is Japanese Architecture? pp 16-17, 56-59 Great Age of Japanese Buddhist Sculpture, pp. 15-21

October 23 Discussion Office hours

(Saturday) October 26 Trip to Horyu-ji and Fujinoki Kofun, in Nara prefecture

*October 30 TEST TWO on the above material Early/Middle Heian periods

Reading: Mason, pp. 97-122 What is Japanese Architecture? pp.18-19

November 6 Horyu-ji Visual Analysis paper due
Middle and Later Heian periods Discussion

Reading: Mason, pp.122-146 What is Japanese Architecture? pp.64-67

*November 13 Office hours TEST THREE

November 20 Kamakura period painting & sculpture Muromachi painting I

Reading: Mason, pp. 147-174

November 27 Muromachi painting II, tea and gardens Discussion

Reading: Mason, pp. 174-76, 193-210 What is Japanese Architecture? pp. 22-23, 26-27. 70-77, 94-95, 104

(Saturday) November 30 Trip to Nijo Castle and Daitoku-ji Zen temple in Kyoto

*December 4 Office hours TEST FOUR

December 11 Final Paper due

Momoyama period Momoyama period

Reading: Mason, pp. 211-242

*December 18 Office hours TEST FIVE