

Religion and the Arts
840:132:01
W 3:50-6:50 pm, CAC
Spring 2024

Professor: Dr. Dugan McGinley
Phone: 848-932-6849; 848-932-9640 (Department Administrator)
E-Mail: duganmcg@religion.rutgers.edu (dugan.mcginley@rutgers.edu)
Office and Mailbox: Room 201, 64 College Avenue, Department of Religion
Office Hours: W 2:00-3:00 pm (let me know you're coming); other times available by request

The arts – such as music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture – provide a unique avenue into the world of religious experience. For religious practitioners, the connection between the arts and religion is almost taken for granted, such that they may not even realize the degree to which some element of artistic expression is involved in their experience. Expressions of religious life are often situated in ritual contexts which evoke all the senses through sound, color, imagery, gesture, movement, smell, and embodiment. Indeed, the origin of meaning or worldview for religious people arises from the dynamic interaction of the cognitive and the experiential.

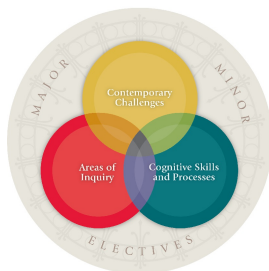
At the same time, performing and visual artists sometimes utilize religious themes and imagery and are themselves often engaged in the same kinds of exploration of meaning that religions pursue and attempt to offer answers. As sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow explains, the arts can “draw people closer to God, often by expressing what cannot be put into words. They spark the religious imagination and enrich personal experiences of the sacred.” Thus, even the most “secular” kinds of artistic production may still convey a kind of religiosity.

In this course, we will explore both how religion is manifested and used in the arts AND how the arts are manifested and used in religion. From that dialectic, we will utilize a combination of cognitive and experiential methods to learn more about the interaction and permeable boundaries between religion and the arts. We will then apply this knowledge to the analysis of specific manifestations of “religious art” both within and outside of religious contexts.

NO prior experience or expertise in either religion or the arts is necessary.

This course fulfills the following core curriculum learning goals of Rutgers University: **[AHp]**

* Students will be able to analyze arts and/or literatures in themselves and in relation to specific histories, values, languages, cultures, and technologies.



Additional course objectives:

- * Students will understand multiple ways religion and the arts intersect.
- * Students will be able to articulate ways that various religions make use of the arts.
- * Students will develop tools for assessing how religious themes are deployed in artistic contexts.
- * Students will be exposed to and appreciate a diversity of both religious and artistic forms.

Required Texts:

The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts, edited by Frank Burch Brown. Oxford University Press, 2014 (reprinted 2018). ISBN: 978-0-19-087119-2 (paperback). Also available as e-book: ISBN: 978-0-19-9721030 (Fully accessible through the Canvas Reading List).

Assigned articles from the journal *Religion and the Arts*, available through Rutgers Libraries. ISSN: 1568-5292 (access via Canvas).

Course Requirements:

1. *Participation* – involves several components/opportunities:

* *Attendance*. Good attendance demonstrates a solid commitment and typically influences your grades on all other aspects of the course. Some of the material covered in lectures and class discussion is not found in the texts; additional details may be given in class regarding particular assignments; and the course material naturally builds on our discussions – so it is vital to be present. If you are sick or have an emergency, it is wise to let me know. Use the University absence reporting website (<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>) to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Please do your best to attend consistently.

You are allowed two absences without a penalty, regardless of the reason. Think of this just like PTO with an employer. There are no such things as “excused” absences that do not count against this allowance, with the exception of religious holidays and documented university events. For absences beyond two, you should send me an enhancement to your IQ Brief, detailing at least three additional interesting points from the reading of the day, especially including any thoughts/ideas you would have contributed in person. Send your paragraph via email to me **within one week** of your absence. Failure to follow up in this manner will drop your participation grade one notch (A to A-, e.g.) for each absence beyond the two allowed.

Since we are meeting in person, most classes will not be recorded and lecture notes will not be readily available (I do not post slides). You should connect with 1-2 other students in the class who can catch you up in the event that you are unable to attend a session in person, while you in turn can help them if they are unable to attend.

* *Taking part in class*. This requires completing the assignments before each class, arriving on time (with notes and texts at hand), taking notes, actively listening and engaging in any class discussion. How and what you learn from taking in a lecture or artistic presentation, reading a textbook, doing research, etc., is exponentially enhanced when you have immediate access to other students’ perspectives on the material. Thus, it is equally important and helpful that you share your perspective so that others may benefit from what you have to say.

Participation also includes your sharing of “reactions” to artistic material shown in class. Sharing of responses/reactions is integral to the experience of the arts. Our reactions are often influenced and colored by the reactions of those around us. Indeed, the audience “matters.” You should also write your reactions in the blue book that will be provided and returned each class period.

* *IQ Briefs*. Also included in your participation grade is an IQ Brief for each of the Handbook chapter assignments. For these, you need to zero in on something you find particularly *Interesting* (I) and something that raises *Questions* for you (Q). These are designed to enable more active reading. They need to be submitted just before class begins and will be used as a basis for our discussion that day, as I may call upon a few students to share elements of their briefs with the class. More details and instructions will be given both in class and on Canvas.

Remember that you do not start out with an A grade for participation. You must earn your grade through consistent course involvement. In general, you should think of participation being assessed according to the following standards. In all cases, your contributions should be respectful of others' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and values.

- A: You arrive fully prepared for each class session and consistently play an active role in discussions. Your comments reflect excellent preparation and project a commitment to the learning goals of the course. You build upon the comments of others and pose insightful critical questions that foster further discussion and advance the level and depth of the conversation. Your reactions/responses reflect a deep encounter with the art/performance. You complete all of the IQ Briefs very well and with detail.
- B: You arrive to most class sessions well prepared and often play an active role in discussion. Your comments reflect good preparation and a desire to learn. Your comments are relevant and demonstrate that you are listening to the contributions of other students. Your reactions/responses demonstrate engagement with the art/performance. You complete all of the IQ Briefs adequately.
- C: Your preparation is inconsistent and you only occasionally engage in discussion. Your comments reflect adequate preparation when you do contribute. Your reactions/responses to the art/performance reflect a lack of range/reach/growth. You do not complete all of the IQ Briefs (or most of them without responding enough in class) or they lack detail.
- D: You come to class unprepared and almost never contribute to discussions -and/or- your reactions/responses reflect lack of interest or focus or poor preparation -and/or- you fail to complete the IQ Briefs adequately.
- F: You never contribute or participate at all; your participation disrespects others; or you use electronic devices for purposes other than note-taking.

Use of electronic devices such as cell phones, laptops and tablets must only be for purposes related to the course (i.e., note-taking). Using devices for other purposes is usually obvious and also unacceptable. The burden of proof is on you to demonstrate that you are not using such devices for other purposes. FYI, There is ample research supporting the fact that writing notes in longhand is much more beneficial than typing. Writing notes by hand improves your engagement with and understanding of the material and helps you retain it better.

2. Focus Pieces. After each of our classes, you will be given a “focus piece” of art or performance to observe via Voice Thread. For each of these, you will post your initial reaction to the pieces of art or performance and do your best to describe why you are responding this way. You may also take into consideration how other students respond. These responses provide the foundation for deeper thinking about how religious/spiritual ideas are expressed in different artistic formats when you have the chance to focus on it. You earn full points as long as you add your response(s) to each piece on time. Each Voice Thread will remain open for one week!
3. *Case Study Analyses*, due as indicated on the syllabus. These are **one-page papers** based on particular cases of artistic presentations we will observe in class, some of which are especially representative of our subject matter and some of which have generated controversy because of their use of religious content. You will begin with your emotional/affective response to the art or performance and then draw on elements of Deborah Haynes’s interpretive model to discuss the case from various angles. You will use this template to link the piece to course material and to analyze and think critically about it. You will need to complete **8 of the 11** (excluding 1 Deep Dive and 2 skipped) analyses that are assigned on the syllabus, More instructions will be given on Canvas, but the general grading rubric will be as follows (with your lowest score dropped):

10 = (Extraordinary work. Thorough. Effective critical thinking. Rare but possible)

9.5 = (Excellent work – well above and beyond expectations)

9 = (Insightfully completed as expected and written very well)

8.5 = (**This is the typical grade for meeting expectations.**)

8 = (Not quite up to expectations, for one reason or another, and/or writing problems)

7.5 = (Something is lacking or inaccurate; and/or faulty critical thinking)

7 = (Falls short as above and/or too much summary without analysis)

6.5 = (These grades and below are compounding the problems mentioned above.)

Remember the point of the assignment is to reflect upon your experience more deeply while also considering others’ reactions and making connections to the course readings. Since these are follow-up papers, they need to be completed by the following Monday. Your score will be lowered one-half number if submitted late and then a whole number for each class period after that. If not completed within the possible allotted time, the grade will be zero.

4. *Deep Dive Reflection Paper and Slide Presentation*, due as indicated on the syllabus. For each class session, extra readings (or other digital materials) are given to explore the topic or related ideas more deeply. These are optional readings/viewings and you only need to complete **one (1)** of them. We will divide these among the students in the class and you will hopefully be able to sign up for the material you find most interesting and relevant. You will need to write a **two-page minimum** paper (double-spaced) reflecting critically on the material in light of that day’s case study and Handbook chapter, based on guidelines to be given on Canvas. You will also need to prepare a very brief presentation (slides) to share with the class what the material is all about. The general grading rubric for the paper will be a similar 10-point scale as given above.

5. *Final Project* (with 3 options, given below). Instead of a final exam, you will be able to choose a project in line with your particular interests and or talents/abilities. In all cases, part of the project is to engage with “religious” art on an experiential level. The other aspect is to think critically about the process and/or experience and connect it to the course material in a manner that demonstrates your understanding of course material.

Performance and/or Creation of Art, to be presented during our scheduled final exam session. You will have a great deal of latitude to construct a project you will find appealing, in consultation with me. This will allow students who are so inclined to utilize their own talents, key into their specific interest area, and engage with the course material on a visceral-experiential level. Students may choose to produce a work of “religious” art or perform a piece of “religious” drama, dance, or music, and provide program/gallery notes and a reflection on the process. Students may work in groups and also propose their own options. You will need to meet with me individually to determine the shape and scope of your project. This is your chance to be creative!

-OR-

Worship Service Critique. You will visit a religious service and observe how the arts are used or not, and assess the experience based on course material. You will follow a given rubric and produce a paper of at least 4-5 pages in length. You should check with me regarding appropriate venues and services for visitation. It must be in-person (not online) with documentation.

-OR-

Field Trip to the New York Public Library of Performing Arts or the Newark Museum of Art (final schedule to be announced). These are opportunities to engage with artistic material together outside of the classroom. You will need to attend one of them and write a thorough report (at least 4-5 pages) about the experience, connecting it to our course material and discussions.

(You may also attend a field trip for extra credit and/or to replace one of the case study analyses. If extra credit, the only requirement is to attend and participate in the conversation surrounding the event, and post a follow-up assessment to the relevant discussion board.)

Grades will be based on the following formula:

Participation	20%
Focus Pieces	10%
Case Study Analyses	25%
Deep Dive Reflection Paper	15%
Deep Dive Slide Presentation	5%
Final Project (Performance, Creation, Field Trip, or Critique)	25%

General Criteria for Evaluation:

- accuracy and precision of scholarship
- clarity of oral and written expression
- progress in critical thinking skills, especially with regard to your own assumptions
- completion of assignments and readings on due dates
- thoroughness, creativity, originality and contribution to field of inquiry

If you have any special needs or a disability that requires any special accommodation to fulfill any course requirements, you need to provide acceptable documentation to the Office of Disability Services. That office will then make arrangements as needed with me.

A Note about Grading: A's are supposed to be exceptional grades. In order to earn an A (Outstanding) in this course, you must complete all assignments **really well**. Your work should not only be mostly free of errors, but also above and beyond expectations. Doing all assignments **well** fits more appropriately in the B(+) range of grades ((Very) Good). When work is flawed, late, or incomplete, it fits into the C (Satisfactory) and D (Poor) range.

Be sure to take advantage of the many academic support services Rutgers offers through a variety of Learning Centers. Go to <https://rlc.rutgers.edu/about-us> for more information. If, at any point, you experience anything impacting your performance or ability to participate in this class, please reach out to me. Please also see the academic, health, and mental wellness resources searchable at <https://success.rutgers.edu/> for further support.

Remember that if you EVER consult an outside source for something you are writing, you MUST acknowledge it through an appropriate citation. Portraying someone else's ideas or work as your own is **plagiarism** and any student found plagiarizing will receive an F for the entire course. (<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>)

In concert with Rutgers' code of conduct, which mandates "that all work submitted in a course, academic research, or other activity is the student's own and created without the aid of impermissible technologies, materials, or collaborations," the use of AI tools is prohibited.

Consult this syllabus regularly. It contains all the foundational information you need to know. It is also very important that you keep up regularly with all materials on Canvas, especially any announcements I may post from time to time. Please set your notifications appropriately so that you do not miss anything. Consult with the OIT Help Desk (833-648-4357) for Canvas help.

Schedule of Topics, Readings and Assignments

Jan 17	Course Introduction	
	<u>Religion and the Senses</u>	
	Plate, An Aesthetic Approach to Religion (Canvas)	
Jan 24	<u>Theory and Method</u>	IQ Brief
	<i>Handbook</i> Chapter 1: Mapping the Terrain of Religion and the Arts (pp. 1-21); Chapter 6.3: An Interpretive Model (pp. 97-102)	

Jan 31	<u>Artistic Ways of Being Religious</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 13: Visual Arts as Ways of Being Religious Case Study: Zimmerli Art Museum, Survey of Visual Arts Works with Religious Themes from the American, Dodge, Russian, and European Galleries Deep Dive: Fowler, “Herman Trunk’s Cubist Crucifix: A Case Study” (Journal 2011: Vol. 15, No. 5)	IQ Brief Case Study Analysis #1 (due Monday, Feb 5)
Feb 7	<u>Artistic Ways of Being Religious</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 7: Musical Ways of Being Religious Case Study: Musical Performance: Messiaen’s “Quartet for the End of Time” Deep Dive: Greene, “Open Completeness” (Journal 2013: Vol. 17, No. 5)	IQ Brief and Focus Piece Case Study Analysis #2 (due Monday, Feb 12)
Feb 14	<u>Artistic Ways of Being Religious</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 11: Dance as a Way of Being Religious Case Study: Dance Performance: Paul Taylor’s <i>Speaking in Tongues</i> Deep Dive: Shawn, “Religious Use of the Dance” (and dance excerpts)	IQ Brief and Focus Piece Case Study Analysis #3 (due Monday, Feb 19)
Feb 21	<u>Artistic Ways of Being Religious</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 10: Dramatic Ways of Being Religious Case Study: Radius Video: “Exploring Religious Drama” and <i>The Passion Play of Oberammergau</i> (documentary); Other uses of the Jesus story and related controversies (Terrence McNally’s <i>Corpus Christi</i>) Deep Dive: Sachs, “The Religious Nature of Theater and the Theatrical Nature of Religion”	IQ Brief and Focus Piece Case Study Analysis #4 (due Monday, Feb 26)
Feb 28	<u>Religious Ways of Being Artistic</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 27: Buddhism – Image as Icon, Image as Art	IQ Brief and Focus Piece

	Case Study: Art Exhibition: “Buddhism and Its Artistic Expression” (The Indian Museum, Kolkata) Deep Dive: Smith, “Nam June Paik’s TV Buddha as Buddhist Art” (Journal 2000: Vol. 4, No. 3)	Case Study Analysis #5 (due Monday, Mar 4)
Mar 6	<u>Religious Ways of Being Artistic</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 25: Hinduism – Visual Art and Architecture Chapter 26: Hinduism and Music	IQ Brief and Focus Piece
	Case Study: Musical Performances: Excerpts from the Ragas Live Festival 2020 Deep Dive: Art Exhibition: “A Century of Sacred Art: Hindu Gods in Print” (Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press) -or- Krishnan, “Contemporary Bharatanatyam at Jacob’s Pillow”	Case Study Analysis #6 (due Monday, Mar 18)
Mar 13	Spring Break: No Class	
Mar 20	<u>Religious Ways of Being Artistic</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 16: Judaism and Music; Chapter 17: Judaism – Visual Art and Architecture	IQ Brief and Focus Piece
	Case Study: Musical/Theatrical Performance: Leonard Bernstein’s <i>Mass</i> (Canvas) Deep Dive: “Revisiting Bernstein’s Immodest Mass” (NPR Interview); Dissertation Chapters	Case Study Analysis #7 (due Monday, Mar 25)
Mar 27	<u>Religious Ways of Being Artistic</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 19: Christianity and Music Chapter 20: Christianity and Visual Art	IQ Brief and Focus Piece
	Case Study: Dance Performance: Alvin Ailey’s <i>Revelations</i> ; Artist Reflections on the Piece; <i>Dancing to Spirituals</i> (Jacob’s Pillow) Deep Dive: <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 37: Sacred and Secular in African American Music	Case Study Analysis #8 (due Monday, Apr 1)
Apr 3	<u>Religious Ways of Being Artistic</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 22: Islam and Visual Art Chapter 23: Islam and Music	IQ Brief and Focus Piece

	Case Study: Art Exhibition: “Art of the Islamic Worlds” (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) Deep Dive: Asher, “Uneasy Bedfellows: Islamic Art and the Politics of Indian Nationalism” (Journal: 2004: Vol. 8, No. 1) -or- Blair, “Invoking the Prophet Muhammad Through Word, Sound, and Image” (2016: Vol. 20, No. 1-2)	Case Study Analysis #9 (due Monday, Apr 8)
Apr 10	<u>Mixing Popular and Religious Cultures</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 36: Art, Material Culture, and Lived Religion	IQ Brief and Focus Piece
	Case Study: Dance Performance: Paul Taylor’s <i>Beloved Renegade</i> ; “Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination” (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) Deep Dive: Karayanni, “Sacred Embodiment: Fertility Ritual, Mother Goddess, and Cultures of Belly Dance” (Journal 2009: Vol. 13, No. 4) -or- Arya, “Reflections on the Spiritual in Rothko” (Journal 2016: Vol. 20, No. 3)	Case Study Analysis #10 (due Monday, Apr 15)
Apr 17	<u>The Arts, Religion, and Social Justice</u> <i>Handbook</i> Chapter 32: Art, Morality, and Justice	IQ Brief and Focus Piece
	Case Study: Theater/Movement Performance: Excerpts from Lloyd Newson’s <i>To Be Straight with You</i> , by DV8 Physical Theatre; <i>A Fire in My Belly</i> by David Wojnarowicz; (Terrence McNally’s <i>Corpus Christi</i>) Deep Dive: Scolieri, “Ted Shawn and the Defense of the Male Dancer”	Case Study Analysis #11 (due Monday, Apr 22)
Apr 24	Course Conclusion Discussion of Final Projects	Final Project Preliminaries
May 8	Final: Student Performances/Presentations	Final Project