

THE ART OF THE KANSAI
Spring Semester, 2017
Karin Swanson

Class meeting days: Tuesdays and Thursdays
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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 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 seventeenth century. For this reason, the course will be framed within this temporal context.

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 painting and sculpture, the class will be divided into five chronologically presented units. Initial exploration of each unit will consist of readings and class discussions of issues influencing the production of art, 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, museums and gardens.

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 object as a reflection of the cultural and historical, as well as artistic, milieu in which it was 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

40% Unit Tests
30% Participation, including attendance
30% Final art object analysis paper

Probable Schedule

January	10	Overview of the class, Jomon period
	12	Yayoi and Kofun periods: counterpoint to non-Kansai-centered Jomon; discussion of earliest Kansai art
	17 & 19	Reading the content of Buddhist art: interpreting iconography
Saturday	21	Field trip to Kyoto National Museum or Kyoto University Museum
	24	The initial spread of Buddhism and establishment of worship sites Discussion of fundamental Buddhist art concepts and motivation
	*26	TEST ONE on the above material
	31	Conceptual and architectural differences between Buddhist and Shinto worship sites
February	2	Asuka and Hakuho periods: beginnings of Kansai Buddhist sculptural art
Saturday	4	Field trip to Fujinoki kofun and Horyu-ji (temple), Nara prefecture
	7	Nara period: a zenith of continental cultural dominance in the Nara area
	14	Nara period, part two; discussion focusing on secular arts
	*16	TEST TWO on the above material
	21	Early Heian period: Kyoto-centered Esoteric Buddhist paintings and sculpture
	23	Middle Heian period: Amida Buddha-focused devotional paintings, sculpture and temple complexes
	28	SPRING BREAK
March	2	SPRING BREAK
	7 & 9	Later Heian period: Secular arts, especially handscrolls; discussion of secular arts
Saturday	11	Field trip to Toji and Byodo-in
	*14	TEST THREE on the above material

- 16 PAPER PROPOSALS DUE
- 16 Kamakura period painting, especially handscrolls
- 21 Kamakura period sculpture; focus on the dynamic Kei School
- 23 Muromachi period paintings: the black and white of Zen
- Saturday 25 Field trip to Sanjusangendo and Daitoku-ji
- 28 Muromachi Zen-centered arts: ceramics, gardens and architecture; discussion
- *30 TEST FOUR on the above material
- April 4 Momoyama period Kyoto painting
- 6 Early Edo period Kyoto painting; the dominance of the Kano School
- 11 & 13 Class presentations (tentative – depending on class enrollment)
- *18 TEST FIVE on the above material

Readings will come primarily from *A History of Japanese Art*, Penelope Mason, second edition revised by Donald Dinwiddie, Prentice-Hall and Harry N. Abrams, 2005, but will be supplemented by additional readings provided by the instructor in paper or electronic form.