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Justification

The University of Missouri-Columbia is the flagship campus of the University of Missouri system. As a land grant institution, established to provide knowledge in “agriculture and the mechanic arts” to state residents, the University is committed to its local constituency. Indeed, over 75% of the 27,000 graduate and undergraduate students reside within Missouri’s borders. Most are raised in the many small towns that populate the landscape and are reared in the Christian tradition. In my courses, I seek to provide students with the analytic tools and confidence they need to interrogate their cultural, intellectual, and religious assumptions and form more nuanced worldviews consistent with their personal values and individual career goals.

In the Department of Art History and Archaeology, I am one of six faculty members that focus on the history of art and one of two that concentrate on the arts of the Americas, broadly defined to encompass fine art, architecture, sculpture, photography, material culture, and vernacular architecture. Every other year, I teach a writing intensive introductory course on American Art and Architecture. In addition, I teach a series of three lecture courses on American Art and Culture from 1500-1820, 1820-1913, and 1913–Present. Organized chronologically, these classes introduce students to the history of American visual culture in a more disciplined and thorough fashion. Finally, I am responsible for undergraduate and graduate seminars in my particular areas of interest, including turn-of-the-century American art, American popular culture, the history of photography, art and religion, and visual culture generally.

This syllabus, “Introduction to the Visual Culture of American Religions,” is predicated on an undergraduate seminar I offered in Fall 2001 and Fall 2003. Here, I am translating the seminar into an introduction to the study of American Visual Culture. There are two fundamental ways to organize an introduction to art history class: chronologically and thematically. In chronologically based courses, students learn by making flashcards that link historical period and artistic style and memorizing the relationship between the two. Although the acquisition of an image-bank is critical to art historical scholarship, students often rely on their familiarity with history to avoid learning the more foreign skills of visual analysis. Consequently, I deploy thematic models to emphasize the development of visual literacy and art’s active role in the formation of culture. Since the majority of students in introductory courses like this one will not pursue careers in art history, I want them to leave my classroom knowing how to address four fundamental questions: What is the nature of art and visual representation? How do we – as observers, consumers, cultural critics, and historians – interpret and make sense of material objects? What issues are at stake in visual representation and interpretation? How does art shape social norms and cultural values? In essence, this course seeks to teach basic skills of critical analysis through the visual culture of American religions.

I have selected David Morgan and Sally Promey's edited volume, *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, as my primary text for a number of reasons. First, it is composed of a series of case studies written by scholars from a variety disciplinary perspectives. They serve as models of the myriad ways people think and write about art and religion. Second, it presents a host of objects, including mechanically reproduced illustrations and bibles, churches, folk art, and museum installations, as worthy of serious consideration. Third, although not fully inclusive, it represents a broad range of American religious traditions easily supplemented by additional readings.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I share Morgan and Promey's definition of and dedication to the study of "visual culture." They use the term to undermine the traditional academic distinction between "high" and "low," "fine" and "popular" art; to underscore the importance of interdisciplinary work for the study of culture; to call attention to vision as a socially constructed set of viewing practices; and to stress that an object's meaning is determined by its place in an "economy of ritualized exchange." By examining material culture from this perspective, I focus less on issues of artistic production and more on the power of images to shape personal, communal, and national identities.

In order to encourage the acquisition of analytic tools, I assign a series of directed, one-page thought papers. Designed to teach students how to read a variety of primary and secondary texts, to practice skills of visual analysis, and to engage the readings critically, they also serve to generate discussion in a large lecture course. I require, too, a longer research paper that gives students the opportunity to apply these skills on an object of their choice. The paper is due in three different parts – a formal analysis, a research proposal, and the final product – to prevent students from procrastinating, to expose them to the armature of academic writing, and to encourage original research.

Introduction to the Visual Culture of American Religions

This course serves as an introduction to the relationship between visual culture and religious experience in the United States, from the Spanish arrival in the New World to the present. It seeks to provide the interpretive tools and cultural contexts required for a rigorous investigation of America's religious arts. A number of questions will direct our inquiry:

- What roles do objects play in religious belief and practice?
- What aesthetic and theological frameworks fashion theories of the art object and its relationship to the beholder?
- Who or what determines the sacred character of material culture: the subject matter of the work? Its ritual or social function? The artist's intention? Or the viewer's response?
- How, when, and where do art, religion, ethnicity, modernity, gender, and politics (among others) intersect with one another? Can or should they be untangled?

Due to the introductory nature of the course, we will survey a variety of objects from a number of American religious traditions. Each week we will center our attention on a different type of object *and* a different model of intellectual inquiry. In the first section of the course, "Tools of Art Historical Interpretation," we will learn basic skills of visual analysis through our examination of Northwest Coast aesthetics, African-American Bible quilts, New England gravestones, and Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ*. Then, we will use these interpretive tools to examine religious "ways of seeing" that characterize particular traditions and at certain historical moments. In Part III, we will analyze how objects are used by a variety of traditions to mediate different temporal moments, geographic locations, and cultural contexts. In the end, we will recognize the manifold ways objects shape religious beliefs and practices and inflect ways of seeing and knowing,

Required Texts

Samuel Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artists in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

David Morgan and Sally Promey, eds., *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

All other readings are on Electronic Reserve

Course Requirements

Attendance and ten weekly writing assignments (30%)

Attendance is mandatory. The lectures are designed to supplement the assigned articles, not reiterate or summarize them. You will be held responsible for the information presented in both the lectures and the readings.

I will not take regular attendance; instead, you will be asked to write ten one-page thought papers intended to encourage you to think about a particular issue and to generate class discussion. The assignment will be distributed the class period before it is due; for example, if it is due on Monday it will be assigned the preceding Friday. If for some reason you are unable to attend class or you misplace the assignment, it will be posted on Blackboard (for instructions on how to use Blackboard, please see attached). The days in which thought papers are due are marked with a "*."

Thought papers should be typed and handed in at the end of class. They will not be graded, but will be read and given a "check -," "check," or "check +." Think of each thought paper as a total of ten points: a "check -" = 8, a "check" = 9, and a "check+" = 10. Therefore, completing all ten thought papers assures you at least a B in this portion of the class, and missing one reduces your grade by one letter.

If you know you will be gone *and* send me an e-mail ahead of time alerting me of your absence, you will be able to hand in the assignment the following class period. If you do not complete a thought paper and want to make it up, you can write a two-page critical analysis of the readings assigned for that week OR a one-page response paper to a university-sponsored lecture announced in class.

A paper in three acts (40%)

For this assignment, you will select a single object to critically examine. It can be anything you deem interesting from any religious tradition, from the past to the present, and from fine art or material culture. The only requirement is that you must have a picture of the object to accompany your paper.

1. Formal Analysis

- Three pages, double-spaced with one-inch margins and a 12 point font.
- For this assignment, you will formally analyze the object you have selected; you will translate what you see into a narrative description. In order to do so, you will want to pay careful attention to all the aspects of the object – material, spatial, and temporal – and your physical and emotional responses to it.
- This assignment requires no historical research – it focuses on close looking and verbal description.
- If you are struggling, re-read Jules Prown's, "The Truth of Material Culture-Fact or Fiction," "since it provides a template on how to look and what questions to ask when examining a material object.

2. Research Proposal

- Three pages, double-spaced with one-inch margins and a 12 point font.
- In this portion of the assignment, you want to entertain hypotheses concerning what your object signifies, or what it tells us about its historical and cultural context.
- Of these hypotheses, choose the one you find most interesting or provocative and write about it. Describe your interpretive hypothesis and what led you to assert it. Then, think creatively about what research would be necessary to test your

interpretive hypothesis, and prepare a research plan of action. This should include an annotated bibliography that includes two primary and two secondary sources.

- You do not need to assert an argument, here, or prove a point. You simply want to explain the directions you are heading and the type of research you anticipate undertaking.

3. Analytical paper

- Five to seven pages, double-spaced with one-inch margins and a 12 point font.
- This should be a polished, interpretive analysis of your object. This is *not* simply a matter of adding the two previous assignments together with additional research. Your analysis should digest and develop your previous observations and research, and structure them according to an argument – a clearly worded claim defended by your formal analysis and historical research.
- You will hand in your final analysis with the formal description and the research proposal.

Final Exam (30%)

The final exam will be cumulative. It will cover the assigned readings and material presented in lecture. It will consist of three primary parts, which will total 100 points. It will be worth 30% of your final grade.

1. Slide Identification

- Six questions worth five points, for a total of thirty points.
- The slides will be taken from the assigned readings or course handouts.
- You will have five minutes to identify the slide, provide a brief description that explains why you have identified it as such, and account for its significance.

2. Short Answer Questions

- Three questions worth ten points, for a total of thirty points.
- You will have fifteen minutes for each question.
- The short answer questions will be based on slide comparisons or contrasts. They will be directed, focused questions that require you to explain how the physical characteristics of the objects relate to their cultural contexts.

3. Essay Question

- One essay worth forty points.
- You will have forty-five minutes to complete your response.
- You will need to bring blue-books to the exam.
- One week before the final, I will distribute two possible essay questions for the final exam. You will prepare a reply to *one* of the questions in whatever way you wish, and are free to discuss your response with other students. You are allowed to bring in notes or outlines, but NOT a finished, polished essay. On the day of the exam, you will write your essay in your blue book.

Grading

Papers: Papers will be evaluated with the following considerations in mind:

1. *Point* -- Does the paper make a point? Is it carefully and clearly stated? Is it significant? Is it interesting and engaging for the reader? Does it take a stand and make an argument?
2. *Structure* -- Is the paper well structured: does it include an introduction with a thesis? paragraphs that defend and elucidate its thesis, as well as build a coherent and consistent argument? a conclusion that ties together the different ideas and themes? Are the individual paragraphs well structured, breaking points down into logical sub-points? Do they include a topic sentence that connects the theme of the paragraph to the other paragraphs and the thesis of the paper?
3. *Argument and Evidence* -- Are the interpretive points of the argument fully discussed and well supported? Are there visual observations or texts that support the argument? Is the evidence well chosen and appropriate? Does the discussion make the point clear with explanation and example where necessary, and explore the full implications of the claim being made?
4. *Overall Depth of Thought* -- How well does the paper succeed at going beyond the surface of the text to notice and bring out underlying issues, particularly in a way that shows how the text/image/building might have something to say about our contemporary concerns? Does the paper wrestle with the complexities of the object and problems in interpretation?

Late Policy: I accept late papers if – and only if – I am notified two class periods before the assignment is due by e-mail *and* you provide an alternative due date. Otherwise, you will lose 1/3 letter grade for every day it is late.

University Policies

Academic Dishonesty: Each student should read the University Guidelines on Academic Discipline in the M-Book under “Student Conduct Regulations.” Each student should also be aware of the rules regarding plagiarism and cheating. Plagiarism is the submission of another’s work as one’s own, either by direct copying or by insufficient acknowledgement of the source. Cheating is the use of any form of assistance while taking an examination. The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with grave consequences that range from probation to expulsion. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, citing, etc., please consult the instructor or a manual of style like that of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6 ed.

Students with Disabilities: If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act and need assistance, please notify the Disability Services (A048 Brady, 882-4696) and your instructor as soon as possible. Reasonable effort will be made to accommodate your special needs. For more information about the rights of people with disabilities, please see ada.missouri.edu or call 884-7278.

Schedule

I. Tools of Art Historical Interpretation

Introductions and Definitions

Monday: Introduction to the course

Wednesday: Jules Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" in *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, eds. Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000).

Friday: Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973), 87-125.

Formal Analysis: Northwest Coast Crest Poles

Monday: Bill Holm, "Elements of the Art" in *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1965, 26-57).

**Wednesday:* Thought Paper #1

Using your skills of formal analysis, discussed in class and in Holm, try to decode the various elements of a Northwest Coast interior house screen. If you are struggling, use colored pencils to trace the primary and secondary forms. Even if you can not name the different parts, try to recognize the primary form and how the various parts relate to it. If possible, create a narrative for the screen that may help explain its intent and meaning.

Friday: Gary Wyatt, "Introduction" in *Mythic Beings: Spirit Art of the Northwest Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 7-15.

Bill Read and Robert Bringhurst, "The Raven Steals the Light" and "Nanasimgit and His Wife" in *The Raven Steals the Light* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 12-17 and 62-67.

Iconographic Analysis: African-American Bible Quilts

**Monday:* Thought Paper #2

Read the legends to Harriet Power's Bible quilts in Regenia A. Perry, *Harriet Power's Bible Quilts* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1994). Based on your reading of the legends and your analysis of the quilts, find at least ten motifs that link the written text to its visual referent.

Wednesday: Marie Jeanne Adams, "The Harriet Powers Pictorial Quilts" in *This Far By Faith: Readings in African-American Women's Religious Biography*, eds. Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman (New York: Routledge, 1996), 22-31.

Friday: Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, "Flying Geese Stay on the Drunkard's Path..." in *Hidden in Plain View: The Secret Story of the Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 111-127.

Contextual Analysis: The Culture of Death in Puritan New England

Monday: Dickran and Ann Tashjian, "Emblems to Mortality" in *Memorials for Children of Change: The Art of Early New England Stonecarving* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1974), 62-81.

- Take a virtual tour of Old Burial Hill in Marblehead, MA, one of the oldest graveyards in New England: <http://www.oldburialhill.org/>.

**Wednesday*: Thought Paper # 3

Read the funeral elegy of John Leveret (1679) and the broadside verse of Lydia Minot (1668). Identify at least three characteristics, in relation to form and/or content, which link the elegy and verse to the gravestones we examined on Monday.

Friday: Dickran and Ann Tashjian, “Rituals for God and History” in *Memorials for Children of Change* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1974), 13-33.

Reception Analysis: Beholding Warner Sallman’s *Head of Christ*

Monday: Thought Paper #4

In 1906, ten American artists were asked to paint their conception of Christ. Of these ten images (which you can find on E-Res, under: “St. Gaudens, Ten American Paintings of Christ,” parts 1 and 2), which one do you think looks most like Christ? Why? Provide at least three reasons to support your response.

Wednesday: David Morgan, “Reading the Face of Jesus” in *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Imagery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 124 -151.

Friday: Morgan, “Domestic Devotion and Ritual” in *Visual Piety*, 152-180.

II. Ways of Seeing in Particular Religious Traditions

Earthly and Heavenly Space in Shaker Visual Culture

Monday: Dolores Hayden, “Heavenly and Earthly Space” in *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1976), 64-103.

Wednesday: Sally Promey, “Celestial Visions: Shaker Images and Art Historical Method” in *American Art* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1993), 79-99.

**Friday*: Thought Paper # 5

Examine two Shaker village views from Robert P. Emlen, *Shaker Village Views: Illustrated Maps and Landscape Drawings by Shaker Artists of the Nineteenth Century* (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1987). Using your knowledge of Shaker architecture and visionary imagery, what purposes did you suppose these views served? How might a 19th century Shaker have looked at and interpreted these maps?

Protestant Desire for Roman Catholicism's "Bodily Gaze" in the 19th Century

*Monday: Thought Paper #6

Read selections from James Jackson Jarves, *Italian Sights and Papal Principles, Seen Through American Spectacles* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1856). How does Jarves characterize Roman Catholic belief and ritual? Identify at least three traits he deems particularly "Catholic" and consider why he may have found these traits troublesome.

Wednesday and Friday: John Davis, "Catholic Envy: The Visual Culture of Protestant Desire" in *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, 105-128.

Presentation and Representation: The Sioux Sun Dance

Monday: J. R. Walker, "Ritual" in *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMaillie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 176-193.

Wednesday: Harvey Markowitz, "From Presentation to Representation in Sioux Sun Dance Painting," in *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, 160-175.

Friday: John A. Day and Margaret Quintal, "Oscar Howe: 1915-1983: Father of the New Native American Art" in *Southwest Art* (June 1984): 52-60.

Oscar Howe, "Theories and Beliefs -- Dakota" in *South Dakota Review* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1969): 69-79.

Demarcating Muslim Sacred Space in North America

Monday: Vernon James Schubel, "Karbala as Sacred Space among North American Shi'a: 'Every Day is Ashura, Everywhere is Karbala'" in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press), 186-203.

Wednesday: Thought Paper # 7

Read Aminah Beverly McCloud, "'This is a Muslim Home': Signs of Difference in the African-American Row House" in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press), 65-73. Do you agree or disagree with her analysis? Why or why not? What sorts of additional evidence would strengthen her argument?

III. Social Uses of Visual Culture in American Religious Practice

Contestation and Negotiation: The Spanish in the New World

Monday: Samuel Edgerton, "Introduction: Art as a Tool of Christian Conversion" and "The Millennium of the Mendicant Friars" in *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artists in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 1-33.

Wednesday: Edgerton, “The Cross and the Tree: The Christian Convento as Indian Cosmos” in *Theaters of Conversion*, 34-71.

Friday: Edgerton, “The Convento as Theater: Medieval *Autos* and Nahua *Neixcuitilli*” in *Theaters of Conversion*, 155-171.

Nationalizing Protestantism

**Monday*: Thought Paper #8

Read at least five selections of Stanley W. Lindberg, *The Annotated McGuffey: Selections from the McGuffey Eclectic Readers, 1936-1920* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1976). Identify at least three values that McGuffey intended to instill in his the readers of his schoolbooks.

Wednesday: John H. Westerhoff III, “America’s Most Popular Schoolbooks” in *McGuffey and His Readers: Piety, Morality, and Education in Nineteenth-Century America* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978): 74-109.

Friday: David Morgan, “For Christ and the Republic: Protestant Illustration and the History of Literacy in 19th Century America” in *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, 49-67.

Popular Piety in the Southwest

Monday: William Wroth, “New Mexican Santos and the Preservation of Religious Traditions” in *Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings*, ed. Mary Ann Calo (Boulder: Westview Press, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 1998), 125-133.

Wednesday: Claire Farago, “Transforming Images: New Mexican Santos between Theory and History,” in *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, 191-210.

Friday: Jorge Durand and Douglas Massey, “Masterpieces on Tin: A Survey of Migrants’ Retablos” in *Miracles on the Borders: Retablos of Mexican Migrants to the United States* (Tucson and London: The University of Arizona Press, 1995), 85-121.

Mass Consumption and the Formation of Jewish-American Identity

Monday: Jenna Weissman Joselit, “Introduction” and “The Call of the Matzoh,” in *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 3-7 and 219-263.

Wednesday: Ellen Smith, “Greetings from Faith: Early Twentieth Century American Jewish New Year Postcards” in *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, 229-248.

**Friday*: Thought Paper #9

Read Andrew R. Heinze, “Consumption: A Bridge Between Cultures” in *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 1-18. Reflecting on your own religious tradition, what role do you think consumption plays in your belief and practice? Select three examples and explore the positive and negative consequences of the intersection of consumption and belief.

Expressing Ethnic and Religious Identity through Folk Art: Santería Garments and Altars
Monday: Joseph M. Murphy, “Cuban and Cuban American Santería” in *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994): 81-113.

Wednesday and Friday: Ysamur Flores-Peña and Roberta J. Evanchuk, *Santería Garments and Altars: Speaking without a Voice* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, c 1994).

Displaying Religion in Public: Piss Christ and Dung Madonna
Monday: Sally Promey, “The Public Display of Religion,” in *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, 27-48.

**Wednesday*: Thought Paper #10

Read selected responses to Serrano’s *Piss Christ* from *Culture Wars: Recent Controversies in the Arts* (New York: New Press, 1992), 27-49. Using Promey’s definitions of “public,” “display,” and “religion,” identify at least three reasons Serrano’s photography garnered so much controversy. Use particular responses to support your ideas.

Friday: David Hall, “The Controversy over the Show *Sensation* at the Brooklyn Museum, 1999-2000” in *Crossroads: Art and Religion in American Life*, ed. Alberta Arthurs and Glenn Wallach (New York: The New Press, 2001, in conjunction with the Center for Arts and Culture and the Henry Luce Foundation), 139-187.