

Kyoto and the Visual Arts of Japan

AKP Fall 2025

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CLASS TIMES: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:10-2:40pm

OFFICE HOUR: Thursdays 2:40–3:30 or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course takes students on an exploration of the magnificent visual arts of Japan, from the enigmatic excavated works of the prehistoric period, through the imposing Buddhist arts and breathtaking sliding screen paintings defining traditional architecture, to the vibrant contemporary art scene. Through a sweeping historical survey highlighting the forms and functions of representative artworks in their respective contexts, we will examine such issues as the relationship of Japanese art to Chinese and Korean art, patronage, the ritual and visual functions of Buddhist icons, the translation of concepts into artistic forms, as well as representational strategies and modes of viewing. We will also analyze the continuities and divergences in the relationship of innovative contemporary artworks, in some cases represented in traditional formats and settings, with their historical counterparts.

Drawing on Kyoto's long history and ongoing tradition of spectacular visual arts, in-class sessions will be amply supplemented with onsite classes at museums and temples.

READINGS

Textbook: Mason, Penelope. *History of Japanese Art*. **Second Edition**. Revised by Donald Dinwiddie. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2004.

Other readings will be posted on Moodle.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and participation in classes and field trips, timely completion of the required readings, contribution to class discussions (20%)
2. Assignments (40%)

3. Class presentation on the Buddhist pantheon (20%)
4. Course review assignment (20%)

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Sep 9 (Tu)	Course Introduction
Sep 11 (Th)	<p>Prehistoric Art and Dwellings</p> <p>--<i>Weizhi</i> selection</p> <p>--online resources for archeological sites: Sannai Maruyama, Yoshinogari</p> <p>Also recommended: Mason, pp. 13–29</p>
Sep 16 (Tu)	<p>Mounded Tombs, Imperial Capitals, and the Silk Road</p> <p>--Mason, pp. 29–43, 47–53.</p> <p>Also referred to: Yakushiji (pp. 65–67, 83–84), Tōdaiji (pp. 68–69)</p>
Sep 18 (Th)	Field Trip to Kyoto University Museum
Sep 23 (Tu)	<p>Buddha Śākyamuni: Living Presence and Visual Commemoration in Japan</p> <p>--Mason, pp. 57–58, 98–99</p> <p>--Sarah J. Horton, “Śākyamuni, Still Alive in This World” in <i>Living Buddhist Statues in Early Medieval and Modern Japan</i> (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) pp. 22–28 (1st par.), 42–45 (2nd par.)</p> <p>--Max Moerman, “Dying Like the Buddha: Intervisuality and the Cultic Image,” <i>Impressions</i> 29 (2007–2008), pp. 25–57</p>
Sep 25 (Th)	<p>Buddhist Temple Architecture</p> <p>--Mason, pp. 58–69 (We will focus on Asukadera and Hōryūji.)</p> <p>Also referred to: Hōryūji images (pp. 72–74)</p>
Sep 30 (Tu)	Field Trip to Kōryūji: Early Buddhist Statuary at Kyoto’s Oldest Temple

- Oct 1 (Th) AKP Fall Trip (no classes)
- Oct 7 (Tu) Buddhist Iconography
 --Nishikawa Kyōtarō and Emily J. Sano, “Buddhist Imagery” in *The Great Age of Buddhist Sculpture, AD 600–1300* (University of Washington Press, 1983), pp. 42–46
 -- Reference material: Louis Frederic, *Buddhism, Flammarion Iconographic Guides* (Paris, New York: Flammarion, 1995), pp. 39–76
- Oct 7-9 (Tu & Th) ***Buddhist Pantheon Class Presentations***
 Temples and Treasures of the Nara Period
 --Mason, pp. 84–98
 --John M. Rosenfield, *Portraits of Chōgen: The Transformation of Buddhist Art in Early Medieval Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 107–109
- Oct 10 (Fri) **Field trip to Kyoto National Museum:** special exhibition on “Song and Yuan Buddhist Painting: Early Chinese Masterpieces in Japan” (9/20–11/16)
- Oct 14 (Tu) Zen Temples: Monastic Complexes and Visual Arts
 --Mason, pp. 211–220, Muqi triptych (pp. 222–223), Josetsu’s Catching a Catfish with a Gourd (p. 224)
- Oct 16 (Th) Zen Temples: a) Dry Landscape Gardens, b) Contemporary Sliding Screen Paintings (*fusuma-e*)
 --Park Peter Keane, *Japanese Garden Design*, pp. 47–65
 --YouTube Viewings:
 a) Taizōin Hōjō Fusuma-e Painting Project (2011, 7 mins.):
 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7JEA658doc>
 b) Murabayashi Yūki TEDxYouth@Kyoto Talk (2013, 8:22 mins.):
 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjaueQpp4XY>
- Oct 21 (Tu) **Field Trip to Daitokuji: Obai’in or Daisen’in**

Oct 23 (Th)	Field Trip to Konchi'in --Mason, pp. 254–266. On this field trip we will see works by Kanō school artists, Hasegawa Tōhaku (note especially fig. 300 “Monkey Reaching for the Moon,” which we will see at Konchi'in), and Kaihō Yūshō.
Oct 28 (Tu)	Mandalization: Esoteric Buddhist Space, Art, and Ritual --Mason, pp. 122–132 <u>Assignment #1 due</u>
Oct 30 (Th)	Form and Sound: Localized Visualization of Amida's Pure Land in Uji—Byōdōin --Mason, pp. 143–147, 201 Also recommended: pp. 202–209
Nov 3–7	AKP Fall Break
Nov 11 (Tu)	Portrait Sculpture: Kei School --Mason, pp. 166–170, 184–195 (We will focus on Unkei's Muchaku and Seshin on p. 191, and on Unkei and Kaikei's Niō in the Tōdaiji Nandaimon on p. 187.)
Nov 13 (Th)	Field Trip to Rokuharamitsuji
Nov 18 (Tu)	Multiplication: Field Trip to Sanjūsangendō --Mason, pp. 154–157
Nov 20 (Th)	NO CLASS (for KNM museum field trip on 10/10)
Nov 25 (Tu)	Multiplication and Magnification: Kusama Yayoi Documentary Film: “Kusama: Infinity” (2018)
Nov 27 (Th)	NO CLASS (Monday classes are held)

- Dec 2 (Tu) Concealing and Revealing
 --Sherry Fowler, "Hibutsu: Secret Buddhist Images of Japan." *Journal of Asian Culture* 15 (1991/1992), pp. 137–159
 --“Don’t Follow the Wind” (The Creators Project, 2015, 22 mins.):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWN7d4pBqTs>
Assignment #2 due
- Dec 4 (Th) Word and Image: Illustrated Handscrolls
 --Mason, pp. 115–119, 182–184, 195–200, 210–211 (We will focus on the Sutra of Cause and Effect on pp. 98–99, the Scroll of Frolicking Animals and Humans on pp. 118–119, and on the Kego engi emaki on pp. 198–200.)
- Dec 9 (Tu) Visual Arts and Politics
Field trip to Nijō Castle
 --William H. Coaldrake, “Nijo Castle and the Psychology of Architectural Intimidation,” in Coaldrake, *Architecture and Authority in Japan* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 138–162.
- Dec 11 (Th) Course Review
Course Review Assignment due