

Kyoto and the Visual Arts of Japan

AKP Fall 2026

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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%): two assignments (20% each) based on fieldwork and research

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

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

- Sep 8 (Tu) Course Introduction
- Sep 10 (Th) Prehistoric Art and Dwellings
 --*Weizhi* selection
 --online resources for archeological sites: Sannai Maruyama, Yoshinogari
 Also recommended: Mason, pp. 13–29
- Sep 15 (Tu) Mounded Tombs, Imperial Capitals, and the Silk Road
 --Mason, pp. 29–43, 47–53.
 Also referred to: Yakushiji (pp. 65–67, 83–84), Tōdaiji (pp. 68–69)
 --Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group video (18.5 minutes):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_7mf9QJafU
- Sep 17 (Th) **Field Trip to Kyoto University Museum**
- Sep 22 (Tu) Buddha Śākyamuni: Living Presence and Visual Commemoration in Japan
 --Mason, pp. 57–58, 98–99
 --Sarah J. Horton, “Śākyamuni, Still Alive in This World” in *Living Buddhist Statues in Early Medieval and Modern Japan* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) pp. 22–28 (1st par.), 42–45 (2nd par.)
 --Max Moerman, “Dying Like the Buddha: Intervisuality and the Cultic Image,” *Impressions* 29 (2007–2008), pp. 25–57
- Sep 24 (Th) Buddhist Temples: Architecture and Statuary
 --Mason, pp. 58–69 (We will focus on Asukadera and Hōryūji.)
 Also referred to: Hōryūji images (pp. 72–74)

- Sep 29 (Tu) **Field Trip to Kōryūji:** Early Buddhist Statuary at Kyoto’s Oldest Temple
- Oct 1 (Th) AKP Fall Trip (no classes)
- Oct 6-8 (Tu&Th) Buddhist Iconography: Buddhist Pantheon Class Presentations
 Temples and Treasures of the Nara Period
 --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
 --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 13 (Tu) Monday classes are held.
- Oct 15 (Th) Painting Formats: Hanging Scrolls, Sliding and Folding Partitions, 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 *Tale of Genji* on pp. 116–118, and the *Scroll of Frolicking Animals and Humans* on pp. 118–119.)
- Oct 16 (Fri)** **Field trip to Kyoto National Museum:** Special Exhibition on “The Tale of Genji: Radiant Culture of the Japanese Imperial Court” (10/6–11/29)
- Oct 20 (Tu) Class held on previous Friday.
- Oct 22 (Th) 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)
 --YouTube Viewings:
 b) 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 27 (Tu) Zen Temples: Paintings and Gardens
Field Trip to Nanzenji: 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”), and Kaihō Yūshō.
--Mark Peter Keane, *Japanese Garden Design* (Charles E. Tuttle, Tokyo, 1996), pp. 56–65, also recommended pp. 47–54
- Oct 29 (Th) Zen Temples: Ancient and Contemporary Art
Field Trip to Daitokuji: Jukōin
--Jukōin materials
- Nov 2–6 AKP Fall Break
- Nov 10 (Tu) Esoteric Buddhist Space, Art, and Ritual: Mandalization
-- Mason, pp. 122–132
Assignment #1 due
- Nov 12 (Th) Pure Land Faith and Art: Localized Visualization of Amida's Pure Land in Uji—Byōdōin, Assembled Wood-block Sculpture, Form and Sound
--Mason, pp. 143–147, 201
Also recommended: pp. 202–209
- Nov 13 (Fri) Field Trip to Tōji**
- Nov 17 (Tu) Kei-school Sculpture: Portraiture, Heightened Realism, Form Intensified
--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 19 (Th) **Field Trip to Rokuharamitsuji:** Portraiture
- Nov 24 (Tu) **Field Trip to Sanjūsangendō:** Multiplication
--Mason, pp. 154–157
- Nov 26 (Th) Kusama Yayoi: Multiplication and Magnification
Documentary Film: “Kusama: Infinity” (2018)
- Dec 1 (Tu) Concealing and Revealing
Discussion on Strategies of (Re)presentation
--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 3 (Th) **Field trip to Nijō Castle:** Visual Arts and Politics
--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 8 (Tu) Course Review
- Dec 10 (Th) No Class (for Tōji Field Trip on 11/13)
Course Review Assignment due