

God is beautiful and loves beauty. —A Hadith of the Prophet of Islam)

The medium is the MESSAGE

— Marshall McLuhan

The artist is not a special kind of person, but every man is a special kind of artist.

— A. K. Coomaraswamy

When historians of art apply the term “sacred art” to any and every work that has a religious subject, they are forgetting that art is essentially form. An art cannot properly be called “sacred” solely on the grounds that its subjects originate in a spiritual truth; its formal language must bear witness to a similar origin.

—Titus Burckhardt, *Foundations of Oriental Art & Symbolism*

Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see.

—Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*

When art becomes a cosmos of more and more consciously grasped independent values which exist in their own right...[then] art takes over the function of this-worldly salvation, no matter how this may be interpreted. It provides a *salvation* from the routines of everyday life, and especially from the increasing pressures of theoretical and practical rationalism. With this claim to redemptory function, art begins to compete directly with salvation religion. Every rational religious ethic must turn against this-worldly, irrational salvation. For in religion's eyes, such salvation is the realm of irresponsible indulgence and secret lovelessness.

—Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*

Art, Media, Technology (& RELIGION)

(REL 433 (Religious Studies Seminar, Fall 2019)

Tuesday 1:40-4:20 (EU Hall 101)

Instructor: Dr. Syed Rizwan Zamir (SRZ)

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- During weekends I try to avoid writing e-letters
- If unable to meet during these times, schedule an appointment through email.

WHAT IS OUR STUDY ABOUT?

What is the difference in the experience of listening to the story of Mahabharata from a storyteller, reading that story as a text, seeing its various scenes depicted through paintings or sculpture, staging its narrative as theatre, or/and watching its televised version (say, for example, the extremely popular one on Indian national TV in late 1980s and early 90s)? What about the prophetic stories, whether biblical or Quranic? Are reading scriptural passages about these prophets or/and having these prophetic stories narrated to us through the pulpit the same as watching *The Ten Commandments*, *Noah*, *Exodus*, or/and various Jesus movies? What difference does it make if the medium of image is religiously barred for depicting these prophetic figures, for example predominantly within the Islamic tradition, thus preventing iconic, theatrical, televised and film depictions of these prophets?

All these questions point to probing the nature of 'medium' within which the religious 'message' finds itself, and by which it is shaped. Yet so far in your study of Religion and religious traditions, the focus perhaps has been on content, ideas and thought – on the message – and much less so on the medium through which religious ideas and sensibilities find expression. If then in regards to medium *it is not it that we see* (as Barthes' quote above suggests), how much our seeing and understanding is affected or limited by our unawareness of the medium's invisibility? Our study is built on the assumption that the crucial role of medium, technology and art in communicating religious ideas and thought, and in shaping the way religious convictions and ideas are experienced, tends to be much underappreciated. Medium may not be the message itself, yet it is too closely intertwined with the message to be taken lightly or ignored altogether. These themes cannot be explored properly unless one pays close attention to the nature of a particular medium or art form – and corresponding technologies that make it possible in the first place. Furthermore, theory alone will not be enough; it will have to be complemented by experience of various art-forms and media, and accounts from those who practice it. Some experiential engagement with the various media and art forms, therefore also becomes necessary. Religious communities, and

their scholars and theologians have often spoken about these matters, about the role of art, the impact of the “technological revolution” of modern times and for and against various art forms, media and technology. Their voices will matter as well.

Our study is an ‘exploration’ of these and various other interrelated themes. Drawing therefore widely on theories of art, media and technology and discussing examples from several major religious traditions, we will probe the *reality* of art, media, and technology and explore how they *form, inform, perform, and transform* religious life and its various expressions.

BUILDUP OF OUR STUDY

Our study will comprise **FOUR STAGES**. Each stage is an essential step toward a wider synthesis at the culmination of the course. **STAGE I** of the course attempts to make a *basic case* regarding why and how art, media and technology *matter*, and why paying close attention to these aspects in the study of Religion/or a religious tradition is important.¹ It intends to demonstrate the stakes in the study of intersections among art, media, technology and religion. The core **STAGE II** takes up THE CASE STUDY for our intellectual conversation this term. Here we will examine the intersection of art, media and technology in and through various art forms within the Islamic spiritual, religious, cultural and civilizational context, and with a particular focus on why some artistic forms have a unique and privileged place within this tradition. You will also be invited to explore art/or an art-form within a particular religious tradition of your choice and interest. **STAGE II** will conclude with your **TEACHING-Presentation** on it. **STAGE III** will turn to more contemporary and familiar art-forms, medium(s) and technologies, e.g., the rise of photography and films. Here, traditional art forms, philosophy of art and media and technology (discussed in **STAGE II**) will be compared with their modern counterparts,

¹ It must be noted though that a) our study has ramifications that extend way beyond simply the study of religion and stretch to various dimensions of life, and b) full implications, appreciation and application of our explorations for the study of religion will have to wait till **PART IV** of the course.

comparing, for example, the oral and the written word, theatre with film, or/and an icon with a photographic image. Again, you will present your findings on an art-form, medium, technology of your interest/choice OR explore Religion. The culminating **STAGE IV** (which may be modified to accommodate our curiosities) will then be our synthesis of how our study thus far would affect the way we approach the religious phenomena and the study of Religion, the role and impact of art, media and technology for human experience, and political, social and cultural dimensions of art, media and technology.

NOTE: WE MAY VISIT THE VISUAL ARTS CENTER (VAC) § DCPC.

REQUIRED TEXT-GUIDES

Art Theory For Beginners Paperback – September 8, 2009

by [Richard Osborne](#) (Author), [Natalie Turner](#) (Illustrator) <https://amzn.to/2M8aHBL>

Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology

by [Neil Postman](#) (Author) <https://amzn.to/2yC7FWL>

Islamic Art and Visual Culture: An Anthology of Sources 1st Edition

by [D. Fairchild Ruggles](#) (Editor) <https://amzn.to/2KfoZOi>

Art of Islam, Language and Meaning (Library of Perennial Philosophy Sacred Art in Tradition) Paperback – March 16, 2009

by [Titus Burckhardt](#) (Author), [Jean-Louis Michon](#) (Introduction), [Seyyed Hussein Nasr](#) (Foreword) <https://amzn.to/2Kfv652>

Every Man an Artist: Readings in the Traditional Philosophy of Art (Library of Perennial Philosophy) Paperback – July 13, 2005

by [Brian Keeble](#) (Author) <https://amzn.to/2OH4iin>

The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods (Translations from the Asian Classics) Reprint Edition

by [Sun Zi](#) (Author), [Victor H. Mair](#) (Translator) <https://amzn.to/33fr6fF>

THE ROADMAP

STAGE I: PRELUDE & OVERVIEW OF THE THEMES

NOTE:

1. In view of what unfolds in our ongoing AMTR conversations, each week the instructor will highlight (yellow color) the 'chosen ones' from the "Pool of Readings". In time, you too will be invited to participate and contribute, i.e., add more options to the pool.
2. Pay attention to green color highlights as well because those will require your special attention, individually or collectively.
3. This should clarify that our conversation is a moving and fluid dialogue, among ourselves and with the texts and artefacts we are studying. The ROADMAP will therefore reflect our movement into the known and the unknown worlds of AMTR.

August 27: Warming up & Overview (I) – Stakes in the Study

Pool of Readings to choose from:

1. Neil Postman, "Five Things We Need to Know about Technology" (pdf)
2. "A McLuhan Sourcebook" (270-296) in *Essential McLuhan*
3. **WATCH:** *Ye Gods: Religion and Art* (Library e-view)- IN CLASS

September 3: Overview of the Themes (II)-AMT

Pool of Readings to choose from:

1. *Technopoly* (1-39)
2. Walter Ong, "The Word as Sensorium" in *The Presence of the Word*, 1-21
3. *Art Theory for Beginners*, 1-30

September 10: Theorizing Art, Media and Technology

Given last week's mess, some sections you may have read before:

- 1) **WATCH:** Marshall McLuhan - *The Medium Is The Message* [1977] [HERE](#)
- 2) **LISTEN/WATCH** Walter Ong - *Oral Cultures and Early Writing* [HERE](#)
- 3) *Technopoly*, (21-70)
- 4) *Art Theory for Beginners* (9, 13-25, 28-33, 40-45 & 53-72)

September 17: Art Forms, the Sacred & the Religious

Pool of Readings to choose from:

- 1) *Every Man an Artist* (Introduction, 3-13, 22-26 & 56-107)
- 2) Phillip Sherrard, "Presuppositions of the Sacred"
- 3) SHN, "Religious Art, Traditional Art, Sacred Art" (pdf)
- 4) T. Burckhardt, "The Universality of Sacred Art"
- 5) Joseph E. Brown, *Teaching Spirits* "There is no Word for Art" (61-82)

6) Art, Creativity & the Sacred (selections)

QUEST LECTURE: Traditional Architect, Mr. Hasan Taimoor Khan Muntaz (via Skype)

September 24: Art Forms & Sacred Religious Art ((Static & Moving Forms))

Pool of Readings to choose from:

1) **REPEAT:** *Every Man an Artist* (Introduction, 3-13, 22-26 & 56-107)

2) "The Japanese Garden: Seeing and Cultivating Micro-Macrocosmic Correlativity" in *Religion, Art, and Visual Culture* (Jennifer)

3) Rene Guenon, "The Symbolism of Theatre" (Ariel)

4) "Representation and Reality of Religion in Dance" (Sonali)

5) John Chrissavgis, "The World of the Icon and Creation" (Graham)

6) Graham, "Theology and the Visual Arts" (Liam)

7) Peter Brook, *The Open Door*, 37-92

8) "Dance as a Way of Being Religious" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*

9) Ananda Coomaraswamy "The Dance of Shiva" (1-7, pdf)

10) Sir John Tavener, "Towards the Music Perennis", in *Every Man an Artist*

11) A. Coomaraswamy, "Why Exhibit Works of Art" (111-122) in *The Essential Coomaraswamy* (pdf)

12) "Musical Ways of Being Religious" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*

13) "Music and Worship" in *The First Thousand Years* (5-pages)

OUR QUESTS:

Bill Reilly & Linda Erickson

STAGE II: THE ART OF ISLAM [THE CASE STUDY]

October 1: Islamic Art I

Pool of Readings to choose from:

- 1) **REVIEW:** Powerpoint (Moodle)
- 2) Titus Burckhardt *The Art of Islam* (Preface, pp. 220-225 § Chs: 5, 7 § 1)
- 3) Fairchild Ruggles, *Islamic Art and Visual Culture* (6-9, 13-16, 31-35, 40-46, 49-54, 74-78 § 92-94)
- 4) Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islamic Aesthetics"
- 5) Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and Music: The Legal and the Spiritual Dimensions" in *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World Religions* (pdf)
- 6) William Chittick, "Aesthetics of Islamic Ethics"
- 7) **Documentary:** One Day in the Haram (Amazon Prime)

October 8: Islamic Art II

Pool of Readings to choose from:

- 8) Titus Burckhardt *The Art of Islam* (pp. 199-220, § Chs: 4, 3 § 6)
- 9) *Islamic Art and Visual Culture* (96-101, 107-109, 112-115, 118, 121-123, 127-8 § 175-6)
- 10) Emma Clarke, "The Islamic Garden" (M)
- 11) Peter Chelkowski, "Shia Muslim Processional Performances" (M)
- 12) Peter Chelkowski, "Islam in Modern Drama and Theatre" (M)
- 13) About Imagination

FALL BREAK

FRIDAY, October 11 (4:30 P.M.) – WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16 (8:30 A.M.)

October 22: TEACHING-PRESENTATIONS

- First draft of the Portfolio-JOURNAL due in the class.
- Decision regarding final intellectual practice (Interview-Written Review OR Practice of your choice) to be made now. In case of the latter, Practice must be discussed with and explicitly approved by instructor by this date.

TEACHING-PRESENTATIONS (Peer-reviewed):

Today you TEACH-PRESENT on sacred art of a religious tradition of your choice (Submit annotated bibliography of sources consulted, visual presentation and an outline of the presentation)

GUIDELINES:

1. You are giving "an overview" of the art of your chosen religious tradition
2. You are teaching, not just sharing information
3. Discussion of various forms of art within that tradition, forms that seem absent or less important OR one art form at length.
4. Pay attention to the subject matter of our course, therefore see what observations are possible in relation to media and technology, e.g., how have the changing media/forms and technology shaped religious art? Or what seems to be the underlying philosophy of art that one finds within that tradition.
5. By way of conclusion can you make some observations about what's typical in the aesthetic mode/style/taste/sensibilities of that religious tradition?
6. Related to 2) do not simply 'pour' information on us; you are our teacher-guide.
7. Illustrate and make it visually and artistically compelling

15-20 minute presentation is all we will have time for. Some sort of shareable multimedia presentation with annotated bibliography of resources consulted seem one appropriate way to TEACH-Present.

October 29: Technology & Islam

- 1) Francis Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print" *Modern Asian Studies* (1993)
- 2) Mehdi Golshani (2003), "Values and Ethical Issues in Science and Technology: A Muslim Perspective" *Islamic Studies* 42:2, 317-330
- 3) Maryam Jameelah, *Modern Technology and the Dehumanization of Man* (pdf)
- 4) Ziauddin Sardar, "Paper, Printing and Compact Disks: The Making and unmaking of Islamic Culture" in *Media, Culture and Society*
- 5) Marshal Hodgson, "Islam and Image" in *History of Religions* (1964)
- 6) Titus Burckhardt *The Art of Islam*, 29-42
- 7) S.H. Nasr, "Islam, Muslims, and Modern Technology" in *Islam, Science, Muslims, and Technology* (pdf)
- 8) SHN, "Oral Transmission and the Book in Islamic Education" (pdf)

STAGE III: NEW ART FORMS, NEW MEDIA, NEW TECHNOLOGIES

*(Beginning this week seminar-participants will lead discussion of the assigned readings and suggest [and visit] sites for explorations of the themes of this course, e.g., DCPC and the VAC)

November 5: NEW ART/MODERN ART/POSTMODERN ART

HOMEWORK: Come in with a visual summary/overview (chart/diagram/timeline etc.) and of the development of Art in the West as narrated in and through Art Theory for Beginners. Come prepared to show and discuss your overview. Come in also with TWO questions that come up vis-à-vis this historical overview and a couple of passages to discuss. Class discussion will mostly be based on your preparation and what you bring. See *

Pool of Readings to choose from:

1. **Review:** *Art Theory for Beginners*, pp.1-72;
2. **Read:** *Art Theory for Beginners*, pp.72-186

November 12: STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION

EVERYONE, CHOOSE AND ASSIGN A TEXT AND COME PREPARED TO TEACH IT

November 19: TEACH-PRESENT [New Art, New Media and New Technologies & RELIGION]

TEACH-PRESENT: Choose an Art-form, a Medium, a Technology [or explore the category Religion] and provide through illustrations its:

- ❖ history, recent developments, and future directions
- ❖ religious/spiritual and political/cultural/social impact
- ❖ SWOT Analysis

November 26: JOURNAL-PORTFOLIO WRITING

You will work on your JOURNAL-Portfolio for part of the seminar meeting.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26 (4:30 P.M.) - MONDAY, DECEMBER 2 (8:30 A.M.)

STAGE IV: SYNTHESIS (AMT & THE STUDY OF RELIGION)

December 3: Toward Synthesis (How relevant are these categories?)

EVALUATIONS will also be done today.

DIVIDED INTO TWO HALVES/SESSIONS:

FIRST HALF/SESSION: we will discuss *TECHNOPOLY*; Come in with ONE question/comment from within the text, and ONE question/comment from without;

SECOND HALF/SESSION: Prof. Rachel Pang will be our guest. She will lead the discussion on *THE ART OF WAR*.

Pool of Readings to choose from:

- 1) *Technopoly*, CHAPTER 10 & 11
- 2) *The Art of War*, pp. 76-131

FINAL PORTFOLIO-JOURNAL DUE TODAY

December 10: FINAL REVIEW

30-MINUTE ORAL INTERVIEW

Honor (& Conscience):

The College expects students to fully abide by the Honor Code. The instructor wonders about our conscience and the convergence/divergence between the two.

Additional Resources & Support:

There are numerous resources available to help you through the course. Please see the section entitled "Resources" under the "Dear Strangers" tab from [veils & webs](#).

Disabilities:

A student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see the instructor immediately to discuss modifications to course requirements. "Davidson College values the diversity of its community and is an equal access institution that admits otherwise qualified applicants without regard to disability. The college seeks to accommodate requests for accommodations related to disability that are determined to be reasonable and do not compromise the integrity of a program or curriculum. To make such a request or to begin a conversation about a possible request, please contact Beth Bleil, Director of Academic Access and Disability Resources, in the Center for Teaching and Learning by visiting her office in the E.H. Little Library, by emailing her at bebleil@davidson.edu, or by calling 704-894-2129. It is best to submit accommodation requests within the drop/add period; however, requests can be made at any time in the semester. Please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive."

INTELLECTUAL PRACTICES

PREPARATION FOR SEMINAR MEETINGS*

Each participant is to bring three things per session:

- ❖ To share with us bring one image/artefact with your comment
- ❖ A passage with an observation about it;
- ❖ TWO questions that speak from within the text;
- ❖ ONE question that speaks to the text.

Note: We will go over the difference between speaking from within and to the text

INTELLECTUAL EXERCISES

1. **TWO TEACHING-Presentations** with Annotated Bibliography of sources (10% each) = 30%
 - a. Art within the context of a Religious tradition
 - b. On an Art-form, a Medium, OR a technology
2. **JOURNAL-Portfolio (30%)**
 - a. Your Map/Synthesis of the Course, **OR** One letter to your classmates about your synthesis of what has been studied (10%)
 - b. One dialogue between two authors; **OR** your dialogue with a text/author; (10%)
 - c. 5 pages of writing of your choice - (you may write in any of the genres studied this semester) 10%
3. Oral **OR** Written REVIEW **OR** Self-Assigned INTELLECTUAL PRACTICE [to be discussed with and approved by the instructor] (25%)
4. CONTRIBUTIONS/INSIGHTS to/for class conversations (15%)* - SEE ABOVE

NOTES:

- a. Consider the possibility for all written assignments to be hand-written and unless absolutely necessary the interaction with the instructor to be oral/in-person.
- b. Course requirements maybe modified but not without prior consultation with you.
- c. Some intellectual practices maybe peer and self-graded.

GUIDELINES (for Teaching-Presentation):

This is NOT a presentation. Keep reminding yourself that you are preparing to teach. Think about the best teaching practices that you have witnessed in your classroom experience. In my view a good teaching session involves (and you are not constrained by this view):

- Making your teaching matter, i.e., making issues you raise matter, and making the session count;
- Not everything you know or have discovered can or need be included;

- Some sort of big picture/clear and important conclusion, i.e., what should be the takeaway from your teaching? It is just not good to be lost in the details.
- Concretize ideas through illustrations and artefacts;
- Your ability to make things interesting is always appreciated. But that is not entertainment for entertainment's sake (like art for art's sake!). Is that teaching?
- Clarity for us as to how you are moving as you are teaching, i.e., a clear ROADMAP.
- Finally, the most crucial aspect of teaching is to relate what you teach with what has already been discussed, the texts and the themes of the class.
- **NOTE:** A teaching session will not be more than 20 minutes long. We will need a *clock-keeper* (please volunteer!). It may be self and peer-reviewed, i.e., You will all grade each other's teaching, and yours as well. Do not hesitate to ask questions as they come up.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Intended by the INSTRUCTOR

The course seeks that by the end of the term, participants will have:

- Appreciation of a) religious art, b) religious art as a key 'window' to understanding a religious tradition and its underlying worldviews, c) why in studying religious traditions through art forces us to pay close attention to the way medium and technologies affect experience of art (and therefore religious art), and d) why and how shifting mediums and technologies can shape (even re-form and transform) aspects of religious traditions and experience of those who adhere to it.
- Better understanding of various mediums within which religious art expresses itself, static art-forms (calligraphy, manuscript illumination, icon/image/mural painting) vs. moving art-forms such as oral discourse, dance, music, theatre and film.
- Adequate familiarity with a wide variety of perspectives on religion and art that will include perspectives of practitioners of that art, theologians and philosophers.
- Cultivated thinking (both analytical and imaginative) through intellectual practices of close reading, interpreting, dialogue and discussion, thinking through writing and communicating through writing and dialogue, and finally cultivating these various intellectual practices as closely interrelated 'one' intellectual activity.
- Cultivated skills and appreciation for a close reading of the texts and gained skills and appreciation for class-discussion that is geared towards accomplishing better understanding of important texts, and through these texts, the issues that they raise.

Intended by YOU?