

**Fall 2017**  
**JSP 300 / REL 300 / HOA 300**  
***Jewish Art: From Sinai to Superman***  
Mon – Wed: 3:45 – 5:05

Instructor: Dr. Samuel Gruber  
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Office Hours:  
Pages Cafe Bird Library, M 1:30 – 3:30 or by appt.

## **Description**

There is no complete agreement about Jewish art – what it is and what it can be, what purposes it can serve, and when and where it has been and can be made. Still, we all know it exists. This course surveys a wide range of visual art made by and for Jews from antiquity to the present, with special emphasis on art made to serve religious and ritual purposes, but also art of any sort made to document the lives, hopes and fears of individual Jews or of entire Jewish communities.

In the ancient world mosaics and frescoes decorated synagogues; in the Middle Ages richly illuminated manuscripts were used for prayer and study; and since the Renaissance Jews have used art to lavishly decorate Torah scrolls, and scores of ritual items. This rich art – though made for Jewish use – was not necessarily made by Jewish artists. In this course we'll place this work in both cultural and historic context. These works are undeniable examples of Jewish art, but they are often much more than that.

Since the early nineteenth century Jewish artists have increasingly made many kinds of secular art – that is art made for exhibition, collectors, or public dissemination through printing or other display. This is sometimes tied to Jewish experience, but often entirely, or at least seemingly, divorced from Jewish history, Jewish practice and Jewish beliefs.

We will also look closely at the development and adaptation of Jewish symbols in the past and in the present. We'll do this in part by intensive analysis of several little known but symbol-rich synagogues.

The second half of this class will grapple with the question of Jews and modernity, and when and whether art made by Jewish artists can be considered Jewish Art, and why. We will investigate how traditional Jewish values, forms, stories, mysticism, and calligraphy have often mixed with modern artistic strategies informed by new artistic movements, but also political and cultural movements including socialism, Zionism, and psychoanalysis. Finally, we will look at the role of the Holocaust, the State of Israel and American secularism in shaping and defining contemporary art.

## **Course Requirements**

There will be weekly reading of primary source material (in English) which will be discussed in class and the required reading of important secondary materials including essays and books by Joseph Guttman, Gershom Scholem, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Vivian Mann, Edward van Voolen James Young, Richard Cohen, Simon Shama and Ruth Ellen Gruber. All classes will include extensive visual materials. The recognition and analysis of works of art from various formal and historical perspectives is a major part of the course.

## **Field Trips**

There will be two on-campus field trips to the SU Art Collections and to Rare Book Room of Bird Library and one visit to Temple Concord, a 106-year old local synagogue building at Madison and University Street, within walking distance of campus. Field trips will take place during class time and attendance is required.

### **Basic Requirements**

All students are required to:

- attend class (5% of grade)
- participate in class discussions and class presentations (10% of grade)
- write short written assignments (20% of grade)
- write a mid-term take-home essay/exam (15% of grade)
- take a final exam (20% of grade)
- write one descriptive/analytic research paper and/or creative project on a topic approved by the instructor and present in a class a summary of the project (30% of grade)

Weekly assignments and study materials will be posted on Blackboard and sent by email.

### **Class topics (assignments to be announced, topic subject to change)**

*The order and content of lectures is subject to change, and includes the possibility of guest speakers and class meetings off-campus. Listed readings may be changed or supplemented.*

#### **Monday 8/28**

Introduction/Definitions: What Do We Mean by "Jewish Art"

Read and prepare to discuss in class:

Gutmann, Joseph, 1993. "Is There a Jewish Art?" in *The Visual Dimension: Aspects of Jewish Art*, ed. Clare Moore (Westview Press, Boulder), 1-19 (read to p. 16)

This lays out the historical and ideological background for the study of "Jewish Art" (whatever that is). You'll see that while the term is commonly used there is little agreement on what it means. We'll develop our own definitions and test them against the art we study throughout the semester. We'll discuss this article and the issues it raises. Keep a list of terms and concepts with which you are unfamiliar. We'll try to define these together in class.

#### **Wednesday 8/30**

Methods, materials, sources, meanings, message

Go to Webpage of the Jewish Museum (New York) and enter "Collections"  
<http://thejewishmuseum.org/collection>

Browse the collection chronologically and/or thematically and get a sense of the variety of art objects that the Jewish Museum considers worthy of collecting and exhibiting within its evolving definition of "Jewish Art." Choose three items with the creation of each being at least 100 years distant from the other two items. Briefly describe:

- what the object is (why was it made and how was it used or displayed)
- the technique and material(s) with which it is made

-- why it could/should be considered "Jewish Art"

Be prepared to discuss at least one of your choices in class

**Wednesday 9/4**

LABOR DAY – NO CLASS

**Wednesday 9/6**

Jewish art: Between Two Worlds (Video lectures)

**Monday 9/11**

Ancient Art

**Wednesday 9/13**

Field Trip #1: Temple Concord

**Monday 9/18**

Jewish Time / Jewish Holidays I

**Wednesday 9/20**

Jewish Holidays II

**Monday 9/25**

The Medieval Synagogue / Jews in Medieval Art

**Wednesday 9/27**

Medieval Manuscripts

**Monday 10/2**

Jewish Symbols

**Wednesday 10/4**

Wooden Synagogues and Synagogue Wall Painting

Monday 10/9

Funerary Art

**Wednesday 10/11**

Jewish Art in Immigrant Synagogues  
(mid-term take home essay)

Monday 10/16

**Field trip 2: SU Art Galleries**

MIDTERM

**Wednesday 10/18**

Emancipation / Jews and the Academy /

**Monday 10/23**

Painters of the Jewish Condition / Zionism

**Wednesday 10/25**

Jewish Modernists: Impressionism, Art Nouveau, Modernism

**Monday 10/30**

Jewish Realism, Social Justice & Radical Art

**Wednesday 11/1**

Field Trip 3: Library Special Collections

**Monday 11/06**

Describing Jews: Ethnography and Photography I

**Wednesday 11/08**

The Holocaust: Art as Resistance

**Monday 11/13**

Response to the Holocaust

**Wednesday 11/15**

Israel and Art

**Monday 11/20**

THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS

**Wednesday 11/22**

THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS

**Monday 11/27**

Commemorative Art & Monuments

**Wednesday 11/27**

Jewish Art in the Late 20th Century 1:

Comics / Comix: From Superman to Maus

**Monday 12/04**

Jewish Art in the Late 20th Century 2:

Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, & Conceptual Art

**Wednesday 12/06**

New Trends in Jewish Art

**December 15: Final Exam 10:15am-12:15pm**