

ART HISTORY 221: INTRODUCTION TO THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

Prof. Stephen C. Clancy

Office: Gannett 117

Office hours: MWF 2:00-3:00 PM, or by appointment

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WHAT THE COURSE IS ABOUT

The course will explore different facets of medieval life as revealed by the visual and material culture of the Middle Ages. The course will be organized by theme rather than chronology. Topics will include modern fascinations with the "medieval"; medieval maps and world views; religious functions and contexts for medieval images; visual narratives in the Middle Ages; contact and exchange between Jews, Muslims, and Christians; the visual cultures of the aristocracy and middle class; and imagery of death and mortality. The course will investigate a variety of types of objects and images (including buildings, sculpture, manuscript illumination, metalwork, and mosaics), as well as archaeological remains of medieval life.

HOW THE COURSE WILL OPERATE

Required texts

Veronica Sekules, *Medieval Art*

Online readings available through the course website

How I will determine your final grade (assuming good attendance and constructive involvement in the course – see below!)

- 2 exams: worth 22.5% each
- 2 projects: worth 22.5% (these will be explained in separate handouts)
- Miscellaneous reading responses: worth 10% in total

Note:

- The percentages I've assigned here are approximations; **I will take into account the level of commitment, class participation, and improvement when assigning a final grade.**
- In order to pass the course, **you must submit all of the required work.** If you fail to take an exam or hand in a project or reading response, you will receive an "F" for a final grade.

Attendance and class participation

Attendance is essential and required. We will be approaching the course material in class from perspectives not readily obtainable outside of class, and listening, looking, and discussing while the images are on the screens are the only sure ways of mastering the material.

Also, I encourage constructive class participation, and take it into account when I assign final grades. If you are not in class, then

you are not participating in the class. If you are disruptive in class, then you are not participating constructively. If your behavior is disruptive or your absences excessive, **I will either lower your final grade, or drop you from the course.**

Exams and make-up policy

I normally do not give make-up tests. The dates of the tests are given in this syllabus, so **plan your schedules accordingly.** I will give a make-up exam *only* if (1) some unforeseen and documented emergency arises, *and* (2) you let me know *before* the date and time of the exam.

Use of classroom computers and other electronic devices

- The computers with cinema display monitors will be our vehicles for in-class interactions with the digital material that forms the core of this course. However, these computers can also be distractions and temptations. You are welcome to use the computers to check email, etc., before our class begins, but ***once the class begins you may use them only for tasks directly related to our in-class discussions and exercises.***
- Also, ***turn off your cell phones, PDAs, and other digital devices*** once you come into the classroom. Personal laptops or netbooks may be used *only by permission of the instructor, and only for tasks directly related to our in-class discussions and exercises.*
- **Repeated or disruptive violations of these rules will result in your being dropped from the course.**

Academic honesty

The projects will require that you consult books, articles, and web sites. *You must cite any source not only from which you quote, but also from which you paraphrase words or borrow ideas.* I will not tolerate any student using another person's words *or* ideas, and passing them off as his or her own, even if unintentionally. **When in doubt, cite!** If you have any questions about documentation, *ask me before you hand in the paper.* Do not end up failing the course or getting suspended because of an avoidable mistake.

Academic Support Services

In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodation will be provided to students with documented disabilities on a case by case basis. Students must register with the Office of Academic Support Services and provide appropriate documentation to the college before any academic adjustment will be provided.



TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ISSUES

I. VISUALIZING THE "MEDIEVAL WORLD," THEN AND NOW



Week 1 (Jan. 24-28):

How and why do we visualize the "medieval world"? How did the medieval world visualize itself?

- *mappa mundi* and medieval worldviews
- the Renaissance invention of the "Dark Ages"
- romancing the medieval: the Middle Ages meets Hollywood

Required readings

- Sekules, 1-33
- Scott D. Westrem, *The Hereford Map. A Transcription and Translation of the Legends with Commentary* (Turnhout, 2001), xv–xli [online]

Week 2 (Jan. 31-Feb. 4):

Medieval ways of seeing:

- medieval theories of sight: the roles of images in the medieval world

Required readings

- *Online readings*

II. MEDIEVAL SPIRITUAL WORLDS



The church as a visual environment

- the church as a setting for the Mass: the visionary experience

Visualizing the heavenly host

- images of Christ: early visual roles

Required readings

- Sekules, 60-75
- *Online readings*

Week 3 (Feb. 7-11):

Visualizing the heavenly host (cont.)

- images of Heaven and Hell on the threshold: the Last Judgment
- the Virgin Mary: from mother, to queen, to intercessor

Required readings

- Sekules, 82-100; 107-17

- *Online readings*

Week 4 (Feb. 14-18):

Visual narratives

- telling a story in pictures vs. telling a story in words
- some case studies in visual narrative
- story-telling in light: stained glass windows

Required readings

- Sekules, 118-45
- *Online readings*

Week 5 (Feb. 21-25):

Images and the monastic life

- monastic environments: architecture and nature
- carved capitals and the medieval cloister

Required readings

- Sekules, 76-82
- *Online readings*

Week 6 (Feb. 28-Mar. 4):

Spiritual objects

- objects of public devotion: reliquaries, altarpieces, liturgical objects
- relationships between makers and patrons
- the private devotional experience: precious objects in ivory and metal

Required readings

- Sekules, 34-59
- *Online readings*

Week 7 (Mar. 7-11):

The medieval manuscript

- the nature and making of the medieval manuscript
- text as image
- the portable spiritual experience: Books of Hours

Required readings

- *Online readings*

MIDTERM EXAM (take-home): due by Friday, Mar. 11

SPRING BREAK: Mar. 14-18

III. THE VISUAL WORLDS OF THE ARISTOCRACY



Week 8 (Mar. 21-25):

Medieval social constructs

- chivalry and feudalism: social reality and visual ideal

The places and spaces of aristocracy: castles and palaces as architecture and image

- identifying some parts and preconceptions
- practical and symbolic functions of the castle

Required readings

- *Online readings*

Week 9 (Mar. 28-Apr. 1):

The places and spaces of aristocracy (cont.)

- the palace as a chivalric environment

Images in the service of power and status

- establishing a visual hierarchy: the ruler as earthly diety

Required readings

- *Online readings*

NOTE: we will not be holding our regular class meeting on 4/1; instead, I will be asking you to attend an NCUR session

Week 10 (Apr. 4-8):

Images of war

- the ideals and realities of chivalric warfare
- armor and heraldry: lineage and status

Images of the "good life"

- the hunt

Required readings

- Sekules, 146-67
- *Online readings*

Week 11 (Apr. 11-15):

Images of the "good life" (cont.)

- tournaments and the joust
- chivalric visualizations of love
- a taste of poetry and music

Required readings

- Sekules, 168-82
- *Online readings*

IV. THE VISUAL WORLDS OF THE MERCHANT CLASS



Week 12 (Apr. 18-22):

The medieval city

- the emergence of cities and civic consciousness
- urban layout and planning
- questions of infrastructure

- houses and household objects

Required readings

- *Online readings*

Week 13 (Apr. 25-29):

Merchant objects and images

- "bourgeois" imagery and new questions of realism

Required readings

- Sekules, 182-89
- *Online readings*

V. LEAVING THE MEDIEVAL WORLD: IMAGES OF DEATH AND MORTALITY



Images and the afterlife

- images and the concept of purgatory

Week 14 (May 2-6):

The medieval tomb effigy

- images at the extremes: ideal piety and gruesome decay

Image-making and the Black Death

- the impact of the plague on society and art

Required readings

- Sekules, 100-06
- *Online readings*

FINAL EXAM: during finals week (take-home)