

RST124 Jewish Identity and Visual Culture

Tues/Thurs 12:10-1:30, Wellman 101
OH: T/TR 1:45-3:15 2229 SSB
Winter 2006

Prof. Alisa Braun
E-mail: sabraun@ucdavis.edu
Phone: 754-7007

Course Description

What is “Jewish art?” How does “Jewish art” grapple with the Second Commandment? How do Jewish artists portray their Jewish identity? How do depictions of Jews by Jews differ from those created by non-Jews? This class will explore the significance of the visual arts for the study of Jewish history and identity. Among the topics we will consider are the implications of the connection between visual cultural and religious observance, the creation of the anti-Semitic stereotype, the relationship between art and Jewish involvement in political movements, the connection between Jewishness and abstraction, and the challenges faced by artists grappling with the Holocaust. This course is made possible through a grant from the Posen Foundation in support of the study of secular Judaism.

Texts/Images

All readings for the course are collected in a **required course reader**, available at Copyland (231 G St.) Volume I is currently available. Volume II will be available later in the quarter. Images from the readings will be accessible via an “image-bank” located at the following URL: <http://jewishstudies.ucdavis.edu/classes/RST124>

Assignments

Assignments for the course include short response papers, a midterm, and a final paper. In addition, you may be asked to hand in (in advance) questions for discussion or to complete a short, in-class writing exercise. Because of our tight schedule, late work is an inconvenience to us all and will be penalized. If you know of a reason that you must turn in work late, be sure to contact me **in advance**. We may be able to work something out. Work that is not completed at all will receive no credit.

Response Papers/Summaries

You are expected to read and think carefully about the issues addressed in the assigned materials. To that end, you are required to choose **6** readings for which you will hand in short (1-2 page) summaries. You should consider the summaries as opportunities to do some informal, low-stakes writing and to gain early feedback from your instructor. Grades will be based on a 3 point system. An essay will earn 3 points if it demonstrates comprehension of the material, conveys its ideas clearly, and does not miss any significant points. Summaries are due by 8PM on the day before the readings are discussed and must be submitted electronically via MyUCDavis.

Attendance and Participation

Please be aware that your presence at classes and active in-class participation make up a substantial portion of your final grade. If you know in advance that you will have to miss a class, please speak to me beforehand. Repeated absences and/or consistent tardiness will reflect

negatively on your final grade. If you miss more than a third of our class meetings, you will not be able to pass this class. I take this matter of attendance quite seriously, and I expect you to do so as well. If you miss a class, you are responsible for getting hold of assignments/hand-outs and for keeping up with the pace of the class.

It is also your responsibility to read the required texts before we discuss them. I will consider your general preparedness and participation when determining your final grade.

Contacting Me

I will be available to discuss your work and answer questions during my office hours. If these hours conflict with your class schedule, we can arrange another time to meet. If you need to contact me outside of class you may reach me by phone or contact me through e-mail at the address given above.

Essay Format

Formal essays for this class:

1. Must be typed, double-spaced, on standard size paper.
2. Must have a one-inch margin on both sides and at the top and bottom of each page.
3. The first page should have, in the upper left-hand corner, the student's name, teacher's name, course number, and date.
4. Do not number the first page, but on each subsequent page type your last name and the page number in the upper right hand corner. Pages do sometimes get separated, and your name on each page will make it easier to reconstitute the essay should disaster strike.
5. In order to prevent this, however, pages must be stapled (not clipped) together.
6. Do not type a title page. This is a waste of paper. Your essay must have a title, which should be centered. The title should stand unadorned; do not underline it, italicize it, put it in quotation marks, or use a different or larger font. One double space should follow the title before the first line of your essay.
7. Computers can do crazy things with fonts and graphics these days. Please resist the temptation. Let your words carry the power, not your machine.
8. Finally, always keep a copy of your paper. I've never lost one yet, but there's a first time for everything.

Plagiarism

The Office of Student Judicial Affairs defines plagiarism as “using another's work without giving credit.” Remember that you are required to cite a source if you include a direct quotation **or if you borrow an idea and put it in your own words.** It is often difficult to determine the line between being influenced by a text or person and taking words or ideas from that text or person. If you have any questions about whether you should give credit to a source in your work, I suggest that you play it safe and include a citation. Needless to say, if I find evidence of plagiarism in any student paper, I will fail that paper and present the evidence to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. The penalties for proven plagiarism range from failing a course to suspension or expulsion from the university.

Grading (approximate)

Attendance and Participation: 10% Midterm: 30%
Response Papers: 25% Final Paper: 35%

Grading Criteria

Formal essays will be graded on a scale of A to E. Please refer to the following list of grading guidelines and have them in mind when writing your papers and when receiving your papers back:

A: An "A" paper is extremely well-written and takes intellectual risks, going considerably beyond a merely adequate response. Your thesis is challenging to present and your treatment is thorough and insightful. Your writing enhances the power of your argument by being smooth, cohesive, vigorous and fresh and by omitting the distraction of grammatical errors and misspellings. The writer of an "A" essay spends a great deal of time revising to get to this level.

B: A "B" essay does more than fulfill the assignment; it goes beyond a routine response and shows evidence of thought and planning. The paper has a structure, a logic, and argument. It contains no major distracting errors in usage or mechanics and is well developed with good supporting material and transitions.

C: A "C" is acceptable. It carries out the assignment, though in a routine way. It shows evidence of engagement with the topic but may be weakened by awkward expressions or grammatical errors. Or it may be fairly well written, but miss a number of significant points in its interpretation. The absence of a strong, coherent thesis will keep a paper in the "C" range.

D: The "D" paper is weak and only marginally addresses the topic. It may relate to the topic but shows little or no real evidence of engagement. The paper will display awkward writing and a large number of mechanical errors, thus making it difficult to follow the argument.

E: An "E" essay shows little or no thought and is so poorly constructed that one cannot follow the sequence of ideas. This paper is full of mechanical, syntactical, and grammatical errors. This category also includes stylistically adequate papers that do not fulfill the assignment as well as papers that are plagiarized.

Syllabus

January 5

Introduction; The Second Commandment and Jewish Aniconism

Methodological Questions

January 10

Joseph Gutmann, "Is there a Jewish Art?" in *The Visual Dimension: Aspects of Jewish Art*. (Westview Press, 1993.)

Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method"

Jews and Visual Culture in the Ancient World

January 12

Steven Fine, Chapters 4, 8, 11 from *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World* New York : Cambridge University Press, 2005

Art and the Ritual Object: The Haggadah and the Ketubah

January 17

Marc Epstein, Chapters 1, 2 from *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997

January 19

Shalom Sabar, "Introduction" *Ketubbah: Jewish marriage contracts of the Hebrew Union College Skirball Museum and Klau Library*. Philadelphia: JPS, 1990

Imagining Jews

January 24

Richard Cohen, "The Visual Image of the Jew and Judaism: From Symbolism to Realism" from *Jewish Icons: Art and Society in Modern Europe*. Berkeley: UC Press, 1998

January 26

Sander Gilman "The Jewish Foot" and "The Jewish Nose" from *The Jew's Body* New York: Routledge, 1991

Jewish Artists in Western and Central Europe

January 31

Paula Hyman "Acculturation of the Jews in 19th Century Europe"; Larry Silver "Between Tradition and Acculturation: Jewish Painters in 19th Century Europe;" from *The Emergence of Jewish Artists in Nineteenth Century Europe*. London: Merrell, 2001.

Ismar Schorsch "Art as Social History: Moritz Oppenheim and the German Jewish Vision of Emancipation" in *Danzig, Between East and West : Aspects of Modern Jewish History*. ed Isadore Twersky. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1985

Art and Politics

Feb 2

Art and Politics: The Russian Revolution Avram Kampf, “The Quest for a Jewish Style in the Era of the Russian Revolution” in *The Jewish Experience in the Art of the Twentieth Century*. S. Hadley, Mass: Bergin & Garvey, 1984.

Marc Chagall, selections from *Marc Chagall: On Art and Culture*. Ed. Benjamin Harshav. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003

Feb 7 Midterm

Feb 9

Art and Politics: Zionism; Michael Berkowitz “Art in Zionist Popular Culture” from *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry Before the First World War*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Guest Speaker: Elayne Grossbard, Judaica Curator. The Magnes Museum.

Feb 14

Art and Politics: America. Matthew Baigell, “From Hester Street to 57th St: Jewish American Artists in New York” in *Painting a Place in America: Jewish Artists in New York 1900-1945*. ed. Chevlowe and Kleeblatt. New York: Jewish Museum, 1991.

Diana Linden “Ben Shahn’s New Deal Murals: Jewish Identity in the American Scene” in *Common Man, Mythic Vision: Paintings of Ben Shahn*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998

Feb16

Art and Politics: Feminism. Judy Chicago, “The Dinner Party”;
Lisa Bloom, “Ethnic Notions and Feminist Strategies in the 1970s: Some Work by Judy Chicago and Eleanor Antin;” in *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History*. Ed. Catherine M. Soussloff. Berkeley: UC Press, 1999

Feb 21

Guest Speaker: Richard Cohen, Hebrew University

Is Abstraction Jewish?: Critics and Artists

Feb 23

Clement Greenberg, selected essays.

Margaret Olin “C[lement] Hardesh [Greenberg] and Company: Formal Criticism and Jewish Identity” in *Too Jewish: Challenging Traditional Identities*. New York: Jewish Museum 1996.

Feb 28

Matthew Baigell “Barnett Newman’s Stripe Paintings and Kabbalah: A Jewish Take” *American Art* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 32–42.

The Challenges of Holocaust Representation

Mar 2

James Young, "Introduction" and "Sites Unseen: Shimon Attie's Acts of Remembrance" from *At Memory's Edge*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000

Mar 7

James Young "Memory and Counter-Memory: Towards a Social Aesthetic of Holocaust Memorials" in *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in Contemporary Art*. London: Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, 1995

Photography and Memory: Imagining Jewish spaces

Mar 9

Susan Sontag, from *On Photography*; Jeffrey Shandler "The Time of Vishniac: photographs of pre-war East European Jewry in post-war contexts." *Polin* 16 (2003) 313-333.

Deborah Dash Moore "Photographing the Lower East Side" in *Remembering the Lower East Side; American Jewish Reflections*. Ed. Hasia Diner, Jeffrey Shandler, and Beth S. Wenger. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000

Hipsters, Heebs, and Hasidim: Encounters with New Media

Mar 14

The Modiya Project: www.modiya.nyu.edu

Jeffrey Shandler, "The Virtual Rebbe" in *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies, and Broadcasting*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003