



Jews and Art

Course Description

Where many scholars in the 20th century have attempted to formulate specific definitions of Jewish art, no consensus has emerged until this very day about what we might consider it to be. The concept of Jewish art has been traditionally linked to particular subjects and motifs, to style, or to certain groups of artists. In this course we will examine the multiple ways in which Jewish identity has surfaced within—and been influenced by—the visual arts. We will begin by examining attitudes towards art in the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, while trying to refute the myth that Judaism is inherently opposed to ‘graven images,’ or bereft of a visual tradition. We will examine the various periods in Jewish history and the part played in them by Jewish artists and designers. As part of studying a culture's need for ritual objects for its religious purposes, we will survey the various objects used by Jewish communities throughout the world for Jewish holidays, at home and in the synagogue. We will emphasize the unique role of the Hebrew language through the development of Hebrew typography, beginning with ancient Hebrew alphabet and focusing on modern – and postmodern – interpretations of its typefaces. Moving through the medieval period and the Renaissance, we will look at Jewish ceremonial art, illuminated manuscripts and synagogue architecture, while examining how Jewish artists adopted—and adapted—Muslim and Christian practices to their specific needs. Turning to modern Jewish art, we will discuss various examples of Jewish artists' preoccupation with issues of identity, reaction to the Holocaust and the Zionist - and later on Israeli - relations to these issues and subjects. Our aim will be not only to familiarize ourselves with basic information concerning Jewish history and culture, but to see how artists exhibit at times, an attitude of reproach to traditional Jewish customs and beliefs.

Requirements for the course

- * Assignments: 2 response papers (max. 250 words) to readings 10%
- * 1 essay (max. 1500 words): suggested essay topics will be provided 40%
- * Research paper (8000 words) 50% of final grade.

Set Texts :

- Harold Rosenberg, "Is there Jewish Art?", in Vivian Mann (ed.), *Jewish Texts in the Visual Arts*, (Cambridge, 2000)
- R. B. Kitaj, "First Diasporist Manifesto" (Thames and Hudson, 1989)
- Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew, Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton, 2001)
- Dalia Manor, "Imagined homeland: landscape painting in Palestine in the 1920s", *Nations and Nationalism*, Volume 9 Issue 4, pp. 533-554.

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Course Syllabus

1 Introduction- I

Getting familiar with the following:

- a. art history glossary and terms
- b. issues in defining the term "Jewish Art"
- c. various research approaches to the subject of Jewish art and their historical contexts
- d. the visual arts and the Second Commandment in Jewish tradition
- e. Rabbinical prohibitions and ordinations in relation to the second commandment

2 Introduction II

Jewish ritual objects as described in the Bible:

- a. The legendary figure of *Bezalel ben Uri*, mythical forefather of Jewish artists and designers, master of the Tabernacle in the desert.
- b. Utensils of the Tabernacle: their functions and visual form as described in the Biblical text.

Part One: Jewish Art and Architecture in the Greco-Roman World

3. The Synagogue

Architectural plans of synagogues in the Roman-Byzantine period:

- a. synagogues in the Galilee
- b. Dura Europos
- c. Ostia.

4. Contents and form in the Roman-Byzantine period I

- a. The wall paintings of Dura Europos
- b. wall paintings in the catacombs of Rome

5. Contents and form in the Roman-Byzantine period II

- a. floor mosaics in ancient Palestine synagogues (4th, 5th, 6th centuries)
- b. reliefs and friezes on synagogue columns and facades
- c. symbolic icons in the minor arts: coin design, terra cotta lamps, glass vessels.

Part two: Jewish Art and Architecture in the Middle-Ages and the Renaissance

6. **Hebrew Book illumination in the Middle-Ages**
 - a. Hebrew Typography: *Sephardic* and *Ashkenazi* lettering
 - b. the art of the book: print and cursive lettering, illumination and binding
 - c. Jewish illuminated manuscripts in Egypt, the Near East, Spain, Germany and Italy

7. **Visual images in the illuminated Jewish book before and after the invention of the press**
 - a. Passover *Haggadahs*
 - b. *Customs Books*
 - c. carpet pages in illuminated Bibles
 - d. title pages in printed books
 - e. main Hebrew book publishers in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe

8. **Art in the service of traditional Jewish Culture**
 - a. The *Alteneue* synagogue in Prague
 - b. Synagogue furniture and accessories in Eastern Europe and Italy
 1. The *Bima*
 2. *Aron haKodesh* (the Holy Ark)
 3. The *Parochet* (ornamental curtain)
 4. *Shiviti* panels, *Mizrachim* panels.
 - b. Decoration for the *Tora* scroll
 1. Mantle and box
 2. Bells
 3. *Rimonim* (fillials)
 4. *Keter Torah* (*Torah* crown)
 5. *Torah* plate
 6. *Torah* reading pointer

9. **Jewish ritual artifacts I: The Sabbath and Jewish holidays**
 - a. The Sabbath
 1. Sabbath lamps
 2. Sabbath tablecloths
 3. *Kiddush* (blessing) utensils
 4. *Havdalah* (end of Sabbath blessing) utensils
 - b. Jewish holidays
 1. Belt buckles for *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement)
 2. Tablets and decorations for *Sukkot* (The Feast of Tabernacles)
 3. *Menorahs* (eight branched candelabra) for *Hanukka* (the Feast of Lights)
 4. illuminated manuscripts and printed *Book of Esther*
 5. Passover plates
 6. Paper cutouts for *Shavuot* (Pentecost)

10. **Jewish Ritual artifacts II: The cycle of Life**
 - a. Birth:
 1. Artifacts of the woman giving birth and the baby
 2. Elijah's chair
 - b. a Jewish man's ritual objects
 1. *Talit* (a prayer shawl)

- 2. *Tefilin* (philacteries)
- 3. a case for *Tfilin*
- c. marriage and the Jewish home
 - 1. *Ketubah* (Marriage contract)
 - 2. *Mezuzah*
- d. Death
 - 1. Jewish tombstones
 - 2. *Hevra Kadisha* (literally “Holy Society”, The Burial society) utensils

Part three: Jewish art and architecture in the modern world

11. Jewish artist’s reactions to Jewish Emancipation

- a. England
 - 1. Solomon Alexander Hartt
 - 2. Simeon Solomon
 - 3. Solomon J. Solomon
- b. Germany
 - 1. Moritz Oppenheim
 - 2. Isidor Kaufman
- c. France
 - Alphonse Levi
- d. The Netherlands
 - Joseph Israels
- e. Italy (and Poland)
 - Enrico Glitzenstein

12. Jewish artists reaction to European Nationalism and Anti-Semitism

- a. Maurici Gottlieb
- b. Mark Antokolski
- c. Samuel Hirszenberg
- d. Maurici Minkowski
- e. Leopold Pilichowski
- f. Willem Wachtel
- g. Ephraim Mose Lilien

13. Synagogue architecture in the modern world

- a. European synagogue architecture in the 18th and 19th centuries
- b. American synagogue architecture

14. “The School of Paris”

- a. the case of Amedeo Modigliani as a 'Jewish artist'
- b. the case of Moise Kisling as a 'Jewish artist'
- c. Chaim Soutine
- d. the case of Kikoine as a 'Jewish artist'

15. New trends in the formation of a secular Jewish art at the beginning of the 20th century

- a. An-Ski’s anthropological expeditions in search and documentation of Jewish Life in Russia
- b. Jewish artists and the Russian Revolution
 - 1. Marc Chagal and the short lived *Vitebsk school*

2. El (Eliezer) Lissitzky
3. Natan Altman
4. Shlomo Yudovin

16. **Jewish artists, Publications, art historians, art collectors and patrons in Berlin 1900-1933**
 - a. Jewish Expressionist artists in Berlin: Jacob Steinhardt, Joseph Budko, Ludwig Meidner
 - b. The *Judischer Verlag* (Jewish Publication) and other Jewish and Hebrew book publications
 - c. Karl Schwartz and the founding of the Jewish museum in Berlin
 - d. A Jewish tradition revived and revised: modern Passover *Haggadahs*
 - e. Design and illustration of modern Jewish books (Joseph Budko)
 - f. The short lived publication of *Rimonim*, a journal of Cultural Jewish issues
 - g. Stage design for Hebrew and Yiddish plays (Boris Aronson)

17. **Jewish painters and sculptors before WW2**
 - a. Jacob Epstein
 - b. William Zorach
 - c. Ben Shaan
 - d. Raphael Soyer.

18. **American 'Jewish Art'?**
 - a. Jewish artists of *The New York School* (Gottlieb, Guston, Newman, Rothko)
 - b. Jewish critics (Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg)

19. **Jewish art and the Holocaust I**
 - a. Jewish artists documenting their fate during World War 2
 1. Felix Nussbaum
 2. Charlotte Salomon

20. **Jewish art and the Holocaust II**
 - a. Reactions to the Holocaust
 1. Jacques Lipshitz
 2. Jack Levine
 3. Leonard Baskin
 4. Ben Shaan
 5. Art Spiegelman
 6. Judy Chicago
 7. George Segal
 8. Rachel Whitehead

Part four: Jewish Art and Zionism

21. **First attempts at a creation of *A new Art for an Ancient People***
 - a. *The New Jew* concept in Zionist thought
 - b. Ephraim Mose Lilien and Theodor Herzl
 - c. Boris Schatz and the foundation of the *Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts* in Jerusalem

22. **Art in Jewish Palestine 1906-1948**

- a. The search for *local* characteristics of a new modern, secular Jewish art
 - 1. sacred versus local, native Landscapes
 - 2. *Orientalism* versus *Impressionism* and *Realism*
- 23. The role of museum curators, art critics, authors and poets in the formation of Jewish-Israeli art**
- a. The founding of the *Bezalel National Museum in the Land of Israel* (1906)
 - b. National poet H. N. Bialik's concept of a modern national Jewish art
 - c. The founding of the Tel Aviv Museum (1936)
 - d. The concept of a *Kibbutz* museum and its utopian role in a socialist society
 - e. Utopian contemplations over the desired qualities of a new Jewish-Israeli art: art in the service of society versus art for art's sake
- 24. Art in Israel 1948-1988**
- a. 'War Artists', 'War Art' and 'Art for Art's sake' during the 1948 War
 - b. Israeli artists' late reaction to the Holocaust
 - i. Art produced by Israeli artists in general (Mordechai Ardon, Marcel Jancu and others)
 - ii. Art produced by Holocaust survivors (Marian [Pinchas Burstein], Moshe Bernstein, Hofstater (and others)
 - iii. Art produced by second generation Holocaust survivors (Chaim Maor, others)
- 25. Israeli symbolism as used in Icons, Emblems, commercial logos and advertisement**
- a. Models based on Biblical motifs
 - b. Israeli *Flora* and *Fauna* and their relation to *The Seven Kinds*, *The Four Kinds* and mythical as well as realistic animals in Jewish tradition
 - c. Israeli non-Zionist 'Return to Roots' in popular Jewish-religious posters
- 26. Issues of Jewish Identity in the 20th century**
- a. American and British artists (Kitaj, Larry Rivers, others)
 - b. The case of Yaakov Agam as a 'Jewish artist'
 - c. Israeli artists
 - i. Michal Neeman
 - ii. Moshe Gershuni
 - iii. Larry Abramson
- 27. Israeli artists and their reaction to Jewish traditions and customs**
- a. Israeli designers of ceremonial artifacts
 - b. Avner Bar-Chama
 - c. Jewish blasphemy (Yocheved Weinfeld, Moshe Gershuni and others)