

Asian History 411: Contemporary Japanese Visual Culture

Syllabus and Schedule - Spring 2007

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Course Description

In this course, you will chart your own path of discovery through contemporary Japanese visual forms that thrive today in and outside Japan. Grounded at the beginning of term with an understanding of some significant Japanese aesthetic and philosophical underpinnings, you will choose an area of visual focus that will guide your study throughout the term (see categories below). This course will not include one large research paper; rather, it will involve a series of writing and other assignments designed to build on your increasing knowledge of your chosen interest area. As you prepare to graduate, you will have an opportunity to apply what you have learned to authentic productions and you will also leave with the gift of an artifact, symbolic of what you have achieved at Western and possibly practical in the portfolio of experiences you take with you.

Visual Categories/Genres

- * Performance Art (e.g., Dumb Type, Sankai Juku, butoh, noh)
- * Manga/Anime/Games
- * Calligraphy/Painting
- * Interactive (e.g., installation, smart mobs, sculpture, architecture, video art, games)
- * Media/Advertising/Photography (e.g., TV, billboards, neon, still photography)
- * Fashion (e.g., clothing, accessories, souvenirs)

Project

The overarching concept for your work this term is to create an artifact from the class that will memorialize some of what you have achieved in college in terms of your artistic and/or intellectual skills, through a focus on a particular aspect of contemporary Japanese visual culture. The work that will go into that creation will consist of: investigating the visual form of your choice (within one of the 6 categories) , "embodying" that learning via some sort of visual piece, leading a classroom dialogue about your chosen genre, and ultimately producing a visual and textual product.

Project Parts (and related percentages)

*Investigative Report (solo report on one aspect of the ultimate group piece) Due April 17: A report of findings about your particular visual focus, including cultural origins, development through cultural borrowing or re-engineering locally, what form looks like today, visual examples accompanying visual analysis of the work.	15%
*Group "Embodiment" (visual study resulting from analysis of Japanese visuals) Due April 24-26: This will be a group analysis of what you have learned of the Japanese visual genre in question through the form of a visual "re-engineering." It could take shape as a visual interpretation of the texture and quality of a stroke of ink (calligraphy) a tableau vivant (manga), a performance in the style of Dumb Type, or a video game inspired by a Japanese precedent, for example. Individual written analysis due May 8.	20%
*Presentation: (introduction to class of your visual focus, discussion) Due May 8-24; For three weeks, the seminar will revolved around class study of these visual genres, with each group presenting their genre to the class, and leading a class discussion around an article (or two) of their choice. Write-ups due the day of.	20%

*Double Blogs on those readings 40 pts (10 points each--if presenting, no blog)	10%
*Group Interpretive Project (publication)	25%
*Participation (1/2 graded by me, 1/2 by group), 40 points	10%

SCHEDULE:

Week One: (April 3 and 5)	Groundwork
April 3:	Introduce course project and its components Historical contexts
April 5:	<p>Readings:</p> <p>-John Dower, <i>Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II</i> (New York: W. W. Norton & CO./New Press, 1999), 19-30.</p> <p>-Andrew Gordon, "Beyond the Postwar Era," in <i>A Modern History of Japan from Tokugawa Times to the Present</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 310-332, 360-61 (endnotes).</p> <p>-Kenneth Pyle, "Epilogue: Japan's Twenty-first Century Resurgence," in <i>Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose</i> (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), 363-374, 419-20 (endnotes).</p> <p>-Donald Richie, "The Occupied Arts," in <i>The Confusion Era: Art and Culture of Japan During the Allied Occupation</i>, ed. Mark Sandler (Washington, D. C.: Sackler Gallery and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 11-21.</p> <p>-Alexandra Munroe, "Scream Against the Sky," in <i>Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky</i> (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 19-25.</p> <p>Noi Sawaragi, "On the Battefield of 'Superflat':</p> <p>-Subculture and Art in Postwar Japan," in <i>Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture</i>, ed. Takashi Murakami (New York: Japan Society and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 187-207.</p>
Week Two: (April 10 and 12)	Considering and Comparing Visual and Cultural Paradigms
April 10:	<p>Overview of Japanese visual forms, 1945-present</p> <p>Peter Duus, "Introduction", in <i>The Cambridge History of Japan</i>, vol. 6 (The Twentieth Century), ed. Peter Duus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-52 (focus on 1-30).</p> <p>Writing Workshop I: Getting Started</p>
April 12:	<p>Contemplation of Japanese aesthetics in contemporary visual forms</p> <p>Donald Keene, "Japanese Aesthetics," in <i>Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader</i>, ed. Nancy G. Hume (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 27-41.</p> <p>Richard B. Pilgrim, "Intervals (<i>Ma</i>) in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan," in</p>

	Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives, ed. Charles Wei-Hsun Fu and Steven Heine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 55-80.
Week Three (April 17 and 19):	Group Work: Genre Analysis Due: Individual Investigative Report Work in groups to prepare for Embodiment of Genre: what will be the focus of your analysis? How will you realize it?
Week Four (April 24 and 26):	Embodiments in Action (20 minutes each) Test out "embodiments" in front of class; get feedback
Week Five (May 1 and 3):	Japan Week "Embodiments" Time devoted in-class Tuesday to preparing for "embodiments" on Thursday.
Weeks Six-Eight (May 8-24):	Group Classroom Discussions Due May 8: Individual Written Analysis of Group "Embodiment" Writing Workshop II: Moving from "What?" to "So What?" Student-led discussions
Weeks Nine-Ten (May 29-June 7):	Publication Prep: Teams of students work on project Meeting places: tba May 29: Writing Workshop III: Reader Response May 31: Continue working on final editing and graphics