THE IMAGE AND THE IDEA
An Interdisciplinary Seminar on Art History and Jewish Thought

Course Description
As beings rooted in a physical world governed by laws of nature, we achieve sanctity through tangible and sensory means: acts of charity, song, prayer, text study – and art. At the same time, the Tanakh and Talmud express constant concern lest we give in to the human temptation to render the Divine in finite form. This interdisciplinary course explores the process through which art and artists make use of physical means to achieve spiritual or intangible ends; and the ways Judaism and Jewish sources deal with the tension between the physical and the spiritual, between external act and internal meaning, between the visual and the intellectual, the image and the idea.

Prerequisite
Jewish Ideas and American Democracy

Course Structure
In each section of the course, we will pair images, paintings, sculptures and architecture with readings from Jewish thought. We will begin by addressing the question of art in religion in general and in Judaism in particular; we will then turn to specific mitzvot, and utilizing both essays and objects within the collection of the Yeshiva University Museum, ponder how beauty can enhance, and detract from, the proper approach to and appreciation of the medium of mitzvah. Throughout the course, we will also hear lectures from visiting rabbinic scholars, artists, art historians and curators addressing the subject under discussion at each stage in the course. We will visit and make use of a special exhibition at the YU Museum, *Threshold to the Sacred: The Ark Door of Cairo’s Ben Ezra Synagogue*, as well as other museum collections and visits.

Course Evaluation

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<th>Weekly Readings and Discussion</th>
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<td>4 Critical Responsa</td>
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<td>Class Presentation</td>
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<td>Research Paper on Object from YUM Collection</td>
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Attendance & Participation
Students are strongly encouraged to attend all meetings during the term and to participate steadily and enthusiastically in class discussion. This is especially important in a topical survey class that moves briskly between themes and topics. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class meeting. Promptness, attentiveness, participation, and courtesy to fellow students will be considered in the course evaluation at the instructors’ discretion. Students are expected to keep up with weekly readings and to come to class prepared to discuss them. Everyone is encouraged to participate regularly and to be engaged in class discussions.

Honor Code
Stern College maintains an honor code that these instructors take very seriously. The work you submit must be your own. All outside sources and references consulted must be properly cited. Cheating will not be tolerated and will result in university disciplinary action. If you are unclear in any way about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to discuss it with either or both professors.
Writing Center
The College maintains a wonderful resource to help student improve their writing skills: The Stern Writing Center. It is located in room 714 of 215 Lexington, right around the corner from the Art History classroom. Tutors are on hand to help you on writing assignments, and to offer techniques for assessing your own work. Students can schedule regular appointments online or drop-by to check if a tutor is available. We are more than happy to make the introduction for you. You can make appointments or learn more about the Center through: http://yu.edu/writing-centers/beren; email berenwritingcenter@yu.edu, or call 917-326-4981.

Students with Disabilities and Special Needs
Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services – (646) 592-4132 – during the first two weeks of class. After approval for accommodations is granted, please submit your accommodations letter to us as soon as possible to ensure the successful implementation of those accommodations.

Course Outline

I: Introduction / The Value and Dangers of Beauty; On Nature; Judaism & Christianity

The Value and Dangers of Beauty
Readings
- Talmud *Yoma*, Selections on the Temple and the *Aron HaBrit*
- Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, selections on the Pantheon
- Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, in *The Church of St. Sophia Constantinople*
- Procopius, *On the Great Church*
- Paul the Silentiary, *The Magnificence of Hagia Sophia*

On Nature
Readings
- Rabbi Aaron Lichtenstein, “The Woods are Lovely, Dark and Deep: Reading a Poem by Robert Frost”
- Polybios and Pliny on Portrait Sculpture
- Northern Renaissance Art – Jan van Eyck & the Invention of Oil Painting; Miedema, Hessel, *The Lives of the illustrious Netherlandish and German painters from the first edition of the Schilder-boeck* … by Karel van Mander, selections

Image and the Idea
Readings:
- Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, selections
- Meir Soloveichik, “Torah and Incarnation”
- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “Seeing and Hearing”
- David Gelernter, *Judaism: A Way of Being*, selections
• Iconoclasm, Reformation & Counter-Reformation – The Threats and Debates over Images
• James Elkins, “The Most Beautiful Painting in the World”

II: Life Cycle – Art and the Medium of Mitzvah
Readings & Topics
• Daniel Sperber, *The Jewish Life Cycle Lore and Iconography Jewish Customs from the Cradle to the Grave*, selections
• Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: Judaism as Corporeal Election*, selections.
• Meir Soloveichik, “Blessed Unions,” March 2012
• The Enlightened Artist. Why does the Jewish artist lack the authority of a *darshan*?
• YUM Collection: Circumcision set; Dish used for Brit Milah; Swaddling cloth / circumcision cloth; Torah binder (wimpel) of Naftali son of Uri (Herbert son of Levi Barta
• Marriage – YUM Collection: Ketubot: Marriage contract of David son of Solomon and Hannah daughter of Hayyim Eliezer; Marriage contract of Mollie Liener and Solomon Maltzman; Marriage contract of Yitzhak son of Moshe(?) Benjamin and Palomba daughter of Shulami Halevy; Ladino Ketubah from Cuba; Marriage contract of Matzliach Pesaro and Rosa Gugielmi; Marriage Ring
• Death, Commemoration, and Tzedakah Shel Emet
  YUM Collection: Kittel; Burial Society comb; Ossuary; Memorial Plaque; Burial Society charity container

Special Visit to Collection of Isaac Pollak – on ritual & ceremonial practices around death

III: Art and Architecture as Enhancement for Prayer – The Synagogue and the Image of Jerusalem
Readings & Topics
• Rambam, Laws of Prayer, Chapter1
• Ibid., Book of Commandments, Commandment #5, comment of Nahmanides ad loc
• Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, “The Synagogue as Institution and as an Idea.”
• Ibid., *Worship of the Heart*, selections
• Communal Forum/Synagogue Architecture. YUM Collection: Ten Historic Synagogue Models; Steven Fine, *This Holy Place. On the Sanctity of the Synagogue During the Greco-Roman Period*, selections
• The Sephardi / Italian Synagogue – the tension and sanctity of space
• The Rothko Chapel – Dominique de Menil, *The Rothko Chapel: Writings on Art and the Threshold of the Divine*
• The Temple of Solomon and Church Architecture
• The Image of Jerusalem, Pilgrimage and the Heavenly City
• Individual Prayer. YUM Collection: Siddur Taniot; Hebrew Prayer Book; Book of Psalms; Prayer Shawl; Tefillin Bag; Pair of Tefillin Cases; Ephemera - Prayer against the proliferation of illnesses

Special Exhibition: *Threshold to the Sacred: The Ark Door of Cairo’s Ben Ezra Synagogue*, on view at YU Museum

Visit to Metropolitan Museum of Art – European Paintings Collection: Guest lecture by Dr. Maryan Ainsworth

IV: Public Ritual and Holiday

Readings & Topics

• Talmud Sukkah, selections on *hiddur mitzvah* and *peri etz hadar*
• Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Memory*
• *Ibid., Haggada and History*
• Communal Worship and Holiday. YUM Collection: Esther Scroll with Case; Esther Scroll and Case; Esther Scroll and Case
• Ceremonial Objects. YUM Collection: Havdalah Candleholder; Spice Container; Laver; Kiddush Cup
• Torah. YUM Collection: Torah Finials; Torah Pointer; Torah Shield; Torah Binder

Special guest lecture: Rabbi J.J. Schacter

V: Student Presentations, Conclusions and Review