SRS 5918:
The Sacred Gaze: Religion, Art, and Culture
Fall 2026
Prof. Emma Anderson

Course Schedule:
Each Tuesday from 8:30-11:30 am in Desmarais 11-143. This is an in-person course. **Attendance and active participation in each class is expected (and is essential to student success).**

Professor's Contact Info:
Email: eanderso@uottawa.ca
Office Phone: (613) 562-5800, X1176.

Office Hours:
Tuesdays at 11:30 am (e.g. immediately after class, in my office at 10-112 Desmarais).

Brief Course Description (from the academic calendar):
An examination of the representation of religion in the arts and/or of the contribution of the arts to religion.

Extended Course Description:
I see this course as a corrective to the approach of many religious studies courses, which tend to stress almost exclusively texts over images, theology over ritual, and elite over popular perspectives. Broadly interdisciplinary and comparatively focused, this course has been designed to engage graduate students working in a wide range of historical periods, traditions, and disciplinary foci.

Religious images have played a central role in many traditions, providing a means to both represent and communicate with the divine, on the one hand, and to explain the religion's key ideas and *dramatis personae* to believers on the other (particularly to the illiterate, the recently conquered, and children). But religious art is more the simply a convenient pedagogical tool, it also has theological significance in and of itself. Within Christianity, religious imagery has long been defended on the grounds that it, like the Incarnation itself, represents the in-breaking of the eternal into the temporal, religious art has long been preoccupied with the human body, gender, and sexuality. But, of course, Christianity is one of the religious tradition that has seen some of the most vehement and violent acts of iconoclasm, or religiously motivated violence against religious images. This course will explore the psychology of iconoclasm, asking "does destroying icons backhandedly affirm their power?"

Arguably, religious imagery is central even in aniconic religions that condemn the production of religious art. Such condemnations have traditionally functioned to create a new, separate, countercultural identity of the aniconic tradition, particularly in the context of a culturally dominant, image-rich religions. But even aniconic traditions, which reject and forbid the production and ritual use of religious imagery, indirectly testify to the power of religious images and their central place in generating collective religious identity. Non-representative religious art has been used in Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and contemporary Christianity to connote divine omnipresence, absence, or inexpressibility. And yet, the gradual invasion of aniconic traditions by figurative imagery leads us to ask, with David Freedberg, "does pure aniconism really exist?"

This course will thus address the central paradox of religious art throughout the millennia: that it tries visually to represent that which is claimed to be beyond form or representation: the divine. Most religions are adamant that religious images merely point to or symbolize the larger reality that they represent, rather than actually incarnating it. And yet there is often a strong, if inchoate sense that there is a divine presence dwelling within religious images. This sense of sacred presence is often tacitly encouraged by religious officials, who themselves participate in the homely rituals of caring for and venerating these icons, and who often share laypeople's awe and amazement when images seem to betray their sentient qualities (as when statues of the Madonna are said to weep or *murtis* of Ganesha drink their milk offerings). In addition to claiming that religious art somehow 'contains' the spirit of the person or spiritual being it represents, devotees often believe in the miraculous origins (such as its coming straight from heaven, uncreated by human hands) and abilities of religious images (to heal, guide, teach, etc.).

Visions and religious images enjoy a paradoxical relationship that will also be explored in the course. Religious art has a demonstrable impact on the visions seen by a tradition's mystics. But visionaries, too, constantly challenge and change the iconography that they have inherited in sometimes startling, even revolutionary ways.

Religious art does not consist only of the treasures of ancient Hindu temples of the splendors contained at the Vatican: it also encompasses the lowliest, tackiest religious trinkets, souvenirs and cheap, mass produced statuettes, when these are felt to be meaningful and beautiful by those who own and venerate them. Themselves evidence of the powerful impulse within many religious traditions towards replication, reproduction, and miniaturization, these religious artefacts show the ancient desire of pilgrims (and tourists) to take something of the experience home with them. In addition to exploring art deemed by its critics to be outrageously blasphemous, the course will also explore critiques (often made by believers within the tradition) of commercialization and "kitsch" which they feel to be degrading and distorting the spiritual life of sanctuaries such as Lourdes.

Finally, the course will also explore the interesting question of context. Does the context of gallery or museum vs. church or temple affect the viewer's perception of the art, or is this determined more by the viewer's individual preconceptions and preoccupations?

Required Texts:

All of the readings for this course will be available online, either as e-resources through the Morisset Library, or on our course website, on Brightspace. Unless otherwise noted, readings are available on Brightspace. There is thus no need to buy a course-Pack or textbooks.

Evaluation:

1) Weekly Response Papers (30%)

Each week, students will prepare a two-page (typed, double-spaced) response to the assigned Readings for that week. Students are responsible for writing a total of **ten (10)** Weekly Response Papers for the term. Given that there are eleven class sessions (not including the first, introductory class, for which no readings are assigned) this means that student can take one week "off" of their choice (but please let me and that week's Forum Leader know so they are not waiting around for it).

The purpose of these Weekly Response Papers is to facilitate students' thinking about the issues concerned, in preparation for the Forum, but secondly, as a professional development exercise: to practice writing short, pithy, and elegant essays is a requirement for conference presentation applications, book reviews, and comprehensive exams.

These brief essays will present the student's considered views on the material by (very briefly) summarizing the week's readings, exploring the relationships between them and, most importantly, analytically responding to and critiquing their arguments and/or linking their ideas to those of other theorists and historians we have studied. Students are also responsible, at the end of their Response Papers, for posing several thought-provoking questions for discussion during the Forum. Students must upload their Response Papers to Brightspace by **Sunday at noon at the latest** to allow them to be reviewed by the Forum Leader and graded by the prof in time for Tuesday's class. This should be considered a **strict deadline**.

2) Leadership of "The Forum" and Forum Participation (20%)
In addition to the lecture, each week students will engage in a Forum, in which they will discuss the assigned readings for the week. Leadership of the Forum will rotate between students, with each student must lead one Forum. Forum Leaders will utilize their review of their peers' Response Papers to lead debate and discussion of the pertinent questions raised by the readings and posed by other students. Even when they are not leading the Forum, it is expected that each student will be fully prepared to engage in informed discussion of the course materials during Forum. Signup for Forum leadership will start during our first class.

3) Research Paper (30%).
Throughout the term, students will research their own projects for their seventeen to twenty page formal research paper, which must address some aspect of religion and art. **Your Research Paper is due on December 22, 2026, with submission via Brightspace (e.g. two weeks after our final class). This should be considered a HARD DEADLINE, so please plan accordingly.**

The Research Paper is the ideal forum for students to pursue their own particular interests, topics, and periods of specialization. Students are encouraged to start thinking about possible topics for their research early in the course, letting me know what you are planning on working on by the end of September at the absolute latest. Students are encouraged to discuss their ideas with me as they evolve. More details will be available in the handout on Brightspace.

4) Research Presentation (20%)
Students are required to make a brief formal presentation of their research project to the class in a 15-20 minute oral presentation. Student Research Presentations allow students to benefit from their peers' and professor's suggestions for improvement of their work. The class benefits by receiving valuable additional information on specialized topics within the field of art and religion. Grading of students' Research Presentations will, of course, be sensitive to the fact that the presentations made earlier in the semester will, of necessity, reflect more preliminary stages of research. Students should endeavor to present their research in a class that most closely fits, thematically, with their chosen topic. Signup will be arranged during the first two class sessions.

Please note: All assignments are due on the dates indicated. Your work should be turned in through Brightspace. Late papers (without certified evidence of ill health or other compassionate consideration) will be penalized 2% points (out of a possible 100%) for each day they are late. **Plagiarism (the unattributed use of the work of others) is absolutely unacceptable and, if engaged in, will result in failure of the assignment, if not the course. For more information on plagiarism and its consequences, see www.uottawa.ca/plagiarism.** For the purposes of this course, the use of AI constitutes plagiarism.

Course Map:

September 15, 2026:
Introduction to the Course
This first class will overview the course's goals, organization, and themes, explain its purview and its requirements, and answer students' questions.

September 22, 2026:
Art and Divine Presence
What is the relationship between a material object and the presence of the divine? Most religions are adamant that religious imagery merely points to the divine, it is not in and of itself the divine. Yet, despite these distinctions, there is often a powerful, palpable sense of presence generated by religious imagery that religious officials often tacitly encourage even as they obliquely question it. Within Buddhism, imagery was originally simply tolerated as an aid to the weak, before becoming one of the great treasures of the tradition. In Christian terms, religious art has been defended as being, in some sense, illustrative of the greater mystery which it represents, the Incarnation, which made something immaterial and inconceivable, both real and finite.
***Required Readings*:**
1) David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2005, "Introduction," p. 1-21, and "Defining Visual Culture," p. 25-47 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
2) David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*: *Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, "The God in the Image," p. 27-37, p. 283-291.
3) Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, "Material Christianity," p. 1-16.
4) William A. Christian Jr., "Images as Beings in Early Modern Spain," in Ronda Kasl, ed. *Sacred Spain: Art and Belief in the Spanish World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 74-99.
5) Jacob Kinnard, *Imagining Wisdom: Seeing and Knowing in the Art of Indian Buddhism*. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999, Chapter 1, "Imagining Images," p. 1-24 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**

September 29, 2026:
Religious Art and Ritual
Traditionally, religious art has had a ritual function: it is created to be used sacramentally rather than just regarded ascetically. In many religious contexts, images are often there to receive the veneration and to exchange powerful, potent eye contact or *darshan* with worshippers. Many religious traditions have elaborate consecration ceremonies in which the divine is ceremonially invited to enter the man-made image: ceremonies which can involve the symbolic "opening" of a statue's eyes or the insertion of a relic within the statue or other object. Veneration can involve caring for the icon's "needs" (light, food,

clothing, etc.) as if it were a living being. This class will address the intimate relationship between images and ritual, including the daily painting of edible rice-flour drawings in India and its diaspora, and the making of ex votos (propitiatory or thanksgiving offerings), which often involve fascinating imagery.

Required Readings:

1) David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, (Textbook) Chapter Two, "Visual Practice and the Function of Images," p. 48-74 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
2) David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, "Consecration: Making Images Work," p. 82-98 and "The Votive Image: Invoking Favor and Giving Thanks," p. 136-160.
3) Diana Eck, *Darshan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1985, "Seeing the Sacred" (selections), p. 3-12, p. 16-22.
4) Vijaya Nagarajan, *Feeding a Thousand Souls: Women, Ritual, and Ecology in Indian – An Exploration of the Kolam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 44-74 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
5) Cynthea J. Bogel, *With a Single Glance: Buddhist Icon and Early Mikkyo Vision*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009. Chapter 3, "The Function of Icons and Visuality as Function" p. 52-60, Chapter 6, "Sight and Syncretism" (selection), p. 141-149.

October 6, 2026:

Art and Visionary Experiences

Religious visions are shaped by iconography, and vice versa. Often, Catholic visionaries ingenuously identify their visions by making reference to the religious art that surrounds them ("how did you know it was the Virgin Mary?" "She looked just like her statue."). In other cases, however, religious visions have provided powerful challenges to traditional iconography. Visionaries' insistence upon the primary and veracity of their experiences can change the way in which these holy figures are envisioned forever, though their innovations are often systematically fought by the Church and the artists charged with embodying their ephemeral visions in stone or stained glass. Alternatively, religious visions can bear artistic seeds decades or even centuries after they are initially seen. The visions of the little-known seventeenth-century French nun, Mary Margaret Alacoque would inspire generations of modern Catholics long after her death with the immortalization of her vision of the Sacred Heart. In some cases, too, the body of the seer herself is also shaped and molded through artistic depictions (such as Teresa of Avila's immortalization by Bernini, or Bernadette's deliberate posing in her many iconic photographs).

Required Readings:

1) David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012, Chapter 8 "At the Cusp of Invisibility: Visions, Dreams, and Images," p. 185-206.
2) Christopher van Ginhoven Ray, "An Aesthetics of Splendor" p. 38-59 In *Iconoclasm: the Breaking and Making of Images*, Rachel Stapleton and Antonio Viselli, eds. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019.
3) Carlos Eire, *The 'Life' of Saint Teresa of Avila: A Biography*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019, Chapter 5, "The Life of the Vida in Art," p. 132-163 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
4) Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age*. London: Penguin Press, 1999, "Bernadette," p. 136-150, "The White Lady," p. 72-82.
5) Raymond Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, "The Sacred Heart Visits the Charollais," p. 9-33 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**

October 13, 2026:

Punishing Icons and Icons who Punish

Religious icons are not always benign, beatific presences: they can also be threatening, and threatened. Legends abound of icons that strike back to avenge their own maltreatment at the hands of the impious: revenge that often seeks redress by afflicting the same body part as that visited upon the statue of the saint. Pilgrimage to holy icons, moreover, can create volatile religious passions that can express themselves through violence directed against religious minorities. But religious icons are also vulnerable to mistreatment, precisely because of their materiality and relative diminutiveness. Consider medieval rituals that sought to punish saints who failed to intervene to succor the sick or desperate by submerging their statues in water, or turning their faces to the wall, thus ritually "humiliating" them. Icons, of course, have always been vulnerable to iconoclasm, which seeks to disprove the efficacy or sacrality of religious images through violence. But does iconoclasm, ironically, only affirm that which it seeks to deny, the power of images? Do rituals of iconoclasm themselves unwittingly replay some of the most powerful religious stories within a religious tradition?

Required Readings:

1) Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994, "The Humiliation of the Saints," p. 95-115 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
2) David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*: *Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, Chapter 6 (selection) "Image and Pilgrimage," p. 99-112.
3) David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, Chapter 4, "The Violence of Seeing: Idolatry and Iconoclasm," p. 115-146 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
4) Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds. *Iconoclash: Beyond the Images Wars in Science, Religion, and Art.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002. "The Icon as Iconoclash," by Joseph Koerner, p. 164-193.
5) Joe Moshenska, *Iconoclasm as Child's Play*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019, "Trifle," (selection), p. 17-31**(e-resource of Morisset Library).**

October 20, 2026:

Intimate Images and Imitation Images

When many of us think of the phrase "religious art" we think of inimitable, ancient masterpieces exhibited in museums or enshrined in churches or temples. But religious art also exists at the opposite end of the spectrum: in Hindu calendar art, pilgrimage souvenirs, and mass reproduced religious statuary, medals, holy cards, and other artefacts that make such imagery available to everyone, regardless of economic status. Being able to own and display in one's own home (or even on one's own body, through religious-themed tattoos, scapulars, or medals) these religious images arguably facilitates a strong sense of familiarity, even intimacy, with the religious figures they portray. The readings for this week explore both this sense of intimacy, and the dynamics of multiplying, imitative images and sites, particularly within Roman Catholicism.

Required Readings:

1) David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*: *Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 5-9.
2) Ronda Kasl, "Delightful Adornments and Pious Recreation: Living with Images in the Seventeenth Century," (selection, p. 154-163) in Ronda Kasl, ed. *Sacred Spain: Art and Belief in the Spanish World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
3) Robert Orsi, *History and Presence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2016, Chapter 4, "Printed Presence," p. 113-123, p. 137-151.

4) Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, "Piety, Art, Fashion: The Religious Object," (selection), p. 25-57, "Authenically Inauthentic: Lourdes Shrines," p. 154-162.
5) Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in David D. Hall, ed. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 3-19.

***** Fall Break: October 24-November 1, 2020, No Class, no Office Hours *****

November 3, 2026
Religious Art in Context
Does the context in which religious art is viewed - religious institution, street parade, or gallery - significantly affect the way in which these images are seen, perceived, or treated? The title of our textbook for this course is *The Sacred Gaze*, suggesting a single gaze, but aren't there different, "context specific" gazes? Or is context relatively unimportant? Is the "the who" who regards the religious art, and his or her preconceptions or preoccupations more important than "the where" in which it is seen? Gallery protocol might frown on the lighting of candles by religious images, but it can neither detect not prevent private, interior prayer before the statues or paintings it displays in its purportedly secular public space. This class will explore the contours of the debate regarding the importance of context vs. individual predisposition in the viewing of religious art, explore different secular institutions' approaches to displaying it (and the diverse responses of viewers), and investigate David Morgan's concept of a "covenant" between the image and its viewer.
Required Readings:
1) David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze,* Chapter 3, "The Covenant with Images," sections: p. 75-83, p. 88-94, p. 105-112 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
2) Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, "The Many Names of the Mother of God," p. 48-60 **(e-resource of Morisset Library)**.
3) James Clifton, "Conversations in Museums," p. 205-213 in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice.* Sally Promey, ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014.

November 10, 2026:
Art and Divine Absence
Aniconism, the interdiction of religious imagery, has been seen by some as reflecting a profound reality, the impossibility of representing that which is ultimately un-representable, unimaginable, and ineffable. This section exploring the art of divine absence will explore the meaning of absence in Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian art. It has been suggested that, in the Buddhist context, the trajectory of the Buddha's story from physical presence to triumphant withdrawal into nirvana celebrates a sort of anti-incarnation, which is reflected in its art, which often stresses absence rather than presence. Similarly, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, exploring non-representational Islamic art, has suggested that God is indeed depicted in these artworks, in the negative space of their ever-repeating geometric designs, which connote omnipresence and eternity. In the Christian context, many observers have noted the gradual withdrawal of the anthropomorphic figure of God from (elite) Christian art since the Enlightenment, which may be a function of theologian's gradual movement away from this traditional image of God the Father to more abstract notions: God as, in Paul Tillich's famous phrase, "the ground of our being."

Required Readings:
1) Jacob Kinnard, *Imagining Wisdom: Seeing and Knowing in the Art of Indian Buddhism*. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1990, excerpt of Chapter 2, "Imaging and Imagining the Buddha," p. 57-72 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
2) Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. Albany: State University of New York Press, Chapter 12, "The Significance of the Void in Islamic Art," p. 185-191 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
3) Jane Dillenberger, *Image and Spirit in Sacred and Secular Art*. New York: Crossroad, 1992, "The Appearance and Disappearance of God in Western Art," p. 93-107.
4) John Shelby Spong, *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith is Dying and How a New Faith is being Born*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001, Chapter 4, "Beyond Theism but Not Beyond God," p. 57-77 (please note, this is a *primary* reading).

November 17, 2026:
Aniconism – A Real or Imagined Category?
While images of the divine are central to devotion in many religious traditions, in others there are equally pronounced taboos upon the creation of religious imagery. Traditions such as Judaism and Islam enunciate this most strongly. And yet some initially aniconic religions are not able to maintain their hostility to imagery, "falling" into iconism. Buddhism and Protestantism are only two examples of religious cultures that became highly iconic following an early, vehement rejection of religious imagery. Such a slide into imagery has led some commentators, such as David Freedberg, to argue that there is really no such thing as aniconism. Observing the frequent exceptions to the aniconic rule in Judaism and Islam, from the image-rich early synagogue at Duras Europa to the representational calligraphy of Islam, Freedberg argues that the refusal to countenance images of the divine is too demanding, too intellectual, and too contrary to human instincts to be sustainable in a living religious context. A similar point is made by Robert Scribner, whose essay explores how, in early Protestantism, images of Martin Luther were seen as thamaturgical (e.g. miracle working) and miraculous (specifically, they were believed to be un-burnable, and to protect buildings from catching alight). This class will debate the existence of pure aniconism, explore the connection of aniconism with monotheism, and explore aniconic objections to religious imagery.
Required Readings:
1) Albert C. Moore, *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977, "Prophetic Iconoclasm: Judaism and Islam," p. 204-227, and "Early Buddhism: From Aniconic to Iconic," p. 142-153.
2) David Freedberg, *The Power of Images,* "The Myth of Aniconism," brief selection, p. 54-65.
3) Robert Scribner, "Incombustible Luther: The Image of the Reformer in Early Modern Germany," p. 323-338, in his *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany*. London: The Hambleton Press, 1987.

November 24, 2026:
Blasphemous Art, Commercialism, and "Kitch"
Art has long been used as a powerful devotional, ritual, and pedagogical tool of iconic religions. But imagery has also been used, historically and contemporaneously, to mock, question, or subvert religion. Although the contemporary fine art scene has often been characterized as indifferent or even hostile towards religion, some of the most powerful and controversial art currently being produced engages with religious themes and ideas in new and audacious ways. Such works of art – such as our case study,

a life-sized crucifix made of chocolate - are often condemned by detractors as being straightforward "blasphemy." But its creators (and defenders) often present these works quite differently, as evidence of an "incarnational consciousness" which seeks to present tired religious symbols and motifs in new, challenging ways. Critics do not just see threats to religion as coming from the world of "high" art. Commercialism and "kitch" have also been seen as a menace to "true" spirituality. Since the mid nineteenth century, commentators have worried about the "feminization," "popularization," "commercialization," and "sentimentalization" of Christianity. Within the tradition, however, devotees have often embraced new technology and aesthetics. Its administrators sought to present Lourdes as a distinctively *modern* Catholic shrine. Pilgrims to Marian apparition sites, similarly, have attempted to use photography as a way of capturing the ineffable presence of the Mother of God.

Required Readings:

1) Eleanor Heartney, *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art*. New York: Midmarch Arts Press, "Body and Soul: The Working of the Incarnational Consciousness," p. 1-24.
2) Horace Ballard, "Complicated Candy: Sensory Approaches to the Controversy over *Sweet Jesus*," in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice.* Sally Promey, ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014, p. 239-245.
3) Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, "Christian Kitch and the Rhetoric of Bad Taste" (selection), p. 163-173.
4) Suzanne Kaufman, Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005, "Introduction: Religion and Modernity: Pilgrimage to Lourdes" p. 1-15, "Remaking Lourdes," p. 32-61.
5) Beth Sauders, "Visionary Camera: The Polaroid SX-70 and Marian Apparition Photography, p. 60-80 in *Iconoclasm: the Breaking and Making of Images,* Rachel Stapleton and Antonio Viselli, eds. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019.

December 1, 2026:

Gender and Sexuality in Religious Art

Religious art is – inescapably - gendered art. Art historian Leo Steinberg argues that the familiar Catholic clustering of its art around the birth and death of Jesus – the two instances (along with his baptism) that he is nearly nude – speaks to a desire to grapple with the full implication of God becoming man with the Incarnation. But Catholic art has also been gender-bending art, in which imagery such as that of St. Wilgefortis, a bearded, crucified female saint, added a ludic, disruptive element that undercut the faith's strongly patriarchal character. But concerns about religious imagery's multivalence or "decadence" has also led, repeatedly, to the reassertion of male control *of* and *in* religious images. For example, perhaps influenced by the Protestants' turn to a male-headed nuclear family during the Reformation, Catholic artists effectively re-imagined St. Joseph from an elderly doddard to the virile, if chaste leader of the Holy Family, challenging the Virgin Mary's traditional dominance. Much the same occurred within Protestantism centuries later as, concerned that Christian art was becoming too "femininized," leaders demanded the creation of new, more overtly "masculine" images of Christ.

Required Readings:

1) Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, p. 1-35.
2) Lewis Wallace, "Bearded Women, Female Christ: Gendered Transformations in the Legends and Cult of St. Wilgefortis," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Volume 30, #1, Spring 2014, p. 43-63.
3) Charlene Villeseñor Black, *Creating the Cult of Saint Joseph: Art and Gender in the Spanish Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, Chapter 3, "Happy Families," p. 59-75.

4) David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, Chapter 6, "Engendering Vision: Absent Fathers and Women with Beards," p. 191-219 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
5) Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, "The Feminine Gender of Catholic Kitch" p. 174-197.

December 8, 2026:
Religious Art, Politics, and Nationalism
Religious art is also inescapably political. In 1967, Robert Bellah coined the term "civil religion" for the panoply of American material culture artefacts (such as the flag), people (such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson) and rituals with a quasi-religious character (such as not allowing the flag to touch the ground, removing one's hat and placing one's hand over one's heart during the playing of the national anthem or the saying of the pledge of allegiance, etc.). Other countries, such as France, have an even more complex series of political/theological iconography, comprised both of religious (such as the Sacred Heart) and explicitly anti-religious symbols (Marianne) and slogans (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*). Even countries not normally associated with ferocious nationalism, such as Canada, have periods in which religious figures, their stories, and their imagery became intertwined with a country's collective identity and ethos. This was certainly the case in the post-war era, when the cult of a handful of seventeenth-century Jesuit martyrs rose to religious and political prominence. And again during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, its leaders were forced to confront – and, in some cases, to reimagine – long-standing, if erroneous, associations of Jesus with whiteness.
Required Readings:
1) Raymond Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, "A Modern Magdalene Seeks Forgiveness," p. 198-223 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
2) David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2005, Chapter 7, "National Icons: Bibles, Flags, and Jesus in American Civil Religion," p. 220-255 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
3) Emma Anderson, *The Death and Afterlife of the North American Martyrs*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013, Chapter 4, "For Canada and for God" p. 165-213 **(e-resource of Morisset Library).**
4) Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Colour of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America.* Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012, Prologue, p. 1-5, Chapter 8, "Civil Rights and the Colouring of Christ," p. 205-233.

*****Please remember: Your Research Paper is due on December 22, 2026 via Brightspace** (two weeks after our last class)*******