Course description: Art History Senior Seminar explores research methodologies and practices of scholarship relevant to art historical study. The course is organized and delivered as a seminar consisting of assigned readings, class discussion, and substantial oral and written work. It is taught on a rotating basis by art history faculty.

Course content & objectives: The seminar this fall explores epistemological frameworks that continue to shape our understandings of the Taj Mahal. The Taj, India’s most famous monument, is often characterized as a symbol of love, a model of architectural perfection, a material replica of Islamic paradise, a global icon, and the measure of all that is cliché in a tourist site. In India’s contemporary political climate, the Taj is also viewed by some as a monument to be reidentified and/or erased. In order to better understand these various responses to the Taj, we will examine the monument throughout its history, focusing on select primary and secondary sources available to us. These include translations of contemporary written accounts, views expressed by current political leaders, and the scholarship of art historians who have studied the buildings and gardens that constitute this vast tomb complex. By asking ourselves “how do we know what we know?” we can begin to identify and question the processes, limitations, and hierarchies of knowledge construction regarding the Taj and its place in global visual culture.

Goals of the course include:
(1) to foster critical thinking
(2) to further develop research and writing skills
(3) to enhance presentation skills and the articulation of ideas in the classroom

There is no assigned textbook for this course. Students will have access to the exhibition catalog Romance of the Taj Mahal and weekly readings will be available on Canvas.

Course structure: This seminar meets once a week for two hours and fifty minutes. The course is structured on the reading, discussion, and presentation of select publications. Each week we will focus on a specific theme and/or scholarly framework that governs the study of the Taj Mahal. These readings, some of which are translations from primary sources from the period, will introduce students to the dynastic history of the Mughals and the artistic tradition of tomb building in northern India. We will also examine various reactions, preconceptions, and representations of the monument that have shaped its “life” throughout history. Students will be assigned readings in common throughout the course but will also have the opportunity to pursue individual research for a final paper and class presentation.
Designed and organized as a seminar, students are expected to have thoroughly read, and digested, the assigned readings. Moreover, it is the student-based presentations and discussions of these readings that make up the course. I encourage students to come and see me during office hour if they are having difficulty with the material or if they feel they are not expressing themselves adequately in class.

Course requirements and grading criteria:
Object ID: ..............................................................5%
Written response essays (4 at 5% each) ...........................................................20%
Visual response presentations (2 at 5% each) ...................................................10%
Initial draft of research paper .................................................................15%
Presentation of research paper ..............................................................20%
Final paper ......................................................................................30%

Object ID: Early in the semester, students will submit a one-page document that identifies the artwork that will serve as their main object of focus for the research paper. The artwork must be selected from the exhibition catalog Romance of the Taj Mahal. Guidelines for this assignment will be distributed and discussed on the first day of class.

Written response essays: Students are asked to submit a 500-750 word essay in response to the weekly assigned materials. Each week, I will provide a prompt that will hopefully assist in connecting the materials together and allow students to address the larger issues raised (rather than summarizing multiple scholars and/or minute details). Your completed written response must be uploaded on Canvas by 9:30am of our Tuesday seminar. I will grade them on both content and the quality of writing. Please see the grading criteria for written work on the last page of this syllabus.

Visual response presentations: In lieu of a written response for two of the class sessions, students will independently make a visual presentation to the class. ARTstor has a decent collection of images in their database and/or you can use images from the readings and/or found online. The presentation should be approximately 30 minutes in length and address all assigned readings as well as the issues provided in the prompt. I will ask for volunteers to present materials so that every student presents at least twice during the semester.

Initial draft and final research paper: Students will engage in independent research on the artwork selected in the Object ID assignment. Any methodological or theoretical approach is welcome. The first draft of the paper (minimum 8 pages/approx. 2,000 words) is due on Tuesday, Nov 8 by 9:30am. Please upload a pdf on Canvas. Students will receive substantial feedback on both the content and the mechanics of writing during individual meetings the following week(s). The final paper (minimum 15 pages/approx. 3,750 words) must incorporate my editorial suggestions and demonstrate substantial development from the initial draft. The final paper is due on the scheduled final exam period for this class: Thursday, Dec 15 by 10am. Please upload a pdf on Canvas. Guidelines for the initial draft and final research paper will be discussed in class at the appropriate time in the semester.

Presentation of research paper: During the last two weeks of seminar, students will present their final research papers in a 20-minute talk with visuals.

Late work: Late work is not accepted unless there is a documented (and university sanctioned) emergency. In this case, the student must notify me about the emergency prior to the scheduled deadline and/or class. If I agree to accept late work, it will be marked down 10 points per day (including weekends) that it is late.
Illness: If you are experiencing any symptoms of Covid please seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or askSHWC@unt.edu) or your health care provider. UNT is no longer offering contact tracing for positive test cases of Covid. Individuals who test positive should follow current CDC guidelines for quarantine/isolation and follow the treatment advice of their primary care physician. Find CDC guidelines. Also, please communicate with me over email so that we may work together in regard to absences and/or missed work for this class.

Posting of grades: Grades will be posted on Canvas. If you would like to discuss a grade with me, we can meet during office hour and/or set up an appointment.

Academic integrity standards and consequences: According to UNT Policy 18.1.16, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism necessitates that I file an incident report to the appropriate authorities and this may result in your failing the assignment, failing the course, and/or being expelled from the University. Please ask me if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism and how you should give proper acknowledgement to your sources in your written work.

Sexual discrimination, harassment, and assault: UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

ADA accommodation statement: UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one’s specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must communicate with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu

Emergency notification and procedures: UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). Please make sure your information is current with this system.

Content in the arts can sometimes include works, situations, actions, and language that can be personally challenging or offensive to some students on the grounds, for example, of sexual explicitness, violence, or blasphemy. As the College of Visual Arts and Design is devoted to the principle of freedom of expression, artistic and otherwise, it is not the college’s practice to censor these works or ideas on any of
these grounds. Students who might feel unduly distressed or made uncomfortable by such expressions should withdraw at the start of the term and seek another course.

Please note: The professor reserves the right to alter this syllabus and schedule if necessary.
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Schedule

Aug 30: Introducing the Taj
How do we know what we know?
A discussion of the themes of the seminar and topics for independent research

Sep 06: Contesting the Taj


Sep 13: Exhibiting the Taj
Object ID due (upload as a pdf to Canvas by 9:30am); 5 minute in-class presentations

Readings: Relevant sections of Romance of the Taj Mahal; Reviews of the exhibition

Sept 20: Contextualizing the Taj


Presenters:
Response #1 prompt: Signature style or revivalist mode? How do we assess and understand architectural style(s), motivations of the patron(s), and functions of architecture?

Sept 27: Fantasizing the Taj


Presenters:
Response #2 prompt: In what ways do constructed biographies of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal affect our perceptions/understandings of the Taj Mahal?
Oct 04: Historicizing the Taj


Presenters:
Response #3 prompt: How do we address issues of translation, bias, veracity, and/or past artistic and cultural constructions in our handling of primary source materials?

Oct 11: Ruling the Taj


Presenters:
Response #4 prompt: In what ways can paintings inform us about the reign and character of Shah Jahan? How might this differ from (or corroborate) characterizations gleaned from primary texts?

Oct 18: Problematizing the Taj

Guest lecture and discussion by Dr. Yael Rice, Associate Professor of Art History at Amherst College

Readings: TBD

Oct 25: Theorizing the Taj


Presenters:
Response #5 prompt: Begley provides a significant amount of art historical evidence to support his theory that the mausoleum is a symbolic replica of the Throne of God at the time of the Day of Resurrection and Judgment. For this prompt, assess his handling of the evidence: what did you find most convincing? What parts of his theory needed more evidence or interpretation?
Nov 01: Excavating the Taj


Presenters:
Response #6 prompt: How do the excavations of the Mahtab Bagh (Moonlight Garden) complicate or refute Begley’s theory? What is the significance of these archeological discoveries in our understanding of the Taj’s layout and symbolism?

Nov 08: Writing the Taj
Initial drafts due (upload as a pdf to Canvas by 9:30am); 10 minute in-class presentations

Nov 15 and Nov 22: Individual meetings with students

Nov 29 and Dec 06: Final in-class presentations of research

Dec 15 (Th): Final research paper due (upload as a pdf to Canvas by 10am)

Grading Criteria for Written Work:

A = Such a grade indicates that the student was able to execute written work with rigor and clarity of thought. An ‘A’ grade means that there were little to no errors in grammar/spelling and that the introduction and conclusion were clear as was the development of the body of text. An ‘A’ grade also indicates that the student provided exceptional responses to the question(s) and/or issues stated in the prompt.

B = Such a grade indicates that the student was able to execute written work with diligence and forethought, though some main issues identified in the prompt were not addressed fully by the student. A grade of ‘B’ also usually indicates that there were limited structural, spelling, or grammatical problems.

C = This is similar to the ‘B’ description, but the number of problems is more extensive. These may include significant grammatical or structural problems, too many generalities, and/or not fully addressing the main question(s) and/or issues stated in the prompt (or, in terms of a research paper, lack of thesis). ‘C’ essays often contain too many quoted passages from the required reading(s) and/or from other sources.

D = A grade of ‘D’ indicates that the student did a poor job in following the prompt (or not articulating a thesis) and/or did not demonstrate an engagement with the materials to satisfactorily complete the assignment. Further, grammatical/structural problems make a ‘D’ essay quite difficult to follow. There are usually far too many generalities, a lack of analysis, and/or lack of reflection on the materials.

F = This either indicates that the assignment was not done or what was done was simply unacceptable for any number of reasons. This includes any indication of plagiarism, which may entail further academic penalty. Please see the section on plagiarism in this syllabus.