Course content & objectives: This seminar explores the myths and the making 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 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 political leaders, and the scholarship of art historians who have studied the buildings and gardens that constitute this vast tomb complex. With this foundation, we can then start to deconstruct the myths, legends, and scholarly theories that attempt to explain the prominent place of the Taj in global imaginations.

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

There is no assigned textbook for this course. Weekly readings are 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 publications that feature aspects related to the study of the Taj Mahal. Each week, the class readings focus on a specific theme. 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. Though we address different themes each week, the readings build off of each other so that we can better understand how the monument has come to express these varying identities. Students will be assigned readings in common throughout the course but will also have the opportunity to pursue individual research for a final 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 hours 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:
Written response essays (6 at 10% each) ................................................................. 60%
Visual response presentations (2 at 10% each) ................................................................. 20%
Final class presentation ........................................................................................................ 20%

Written response essays: Students are asked to submit a 500-750 word essay in response to the weekly assigned materials. 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 8am of our Wednesday 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. Each 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 twice during the semester.

Final class presentation: At the end of the semester, students will be asked to present a topic or artwork that aligns with the themes of the seminar. This presentation must be 20 minutes in length and include visuals. Guidance on selecting your topic will be provided at the appropriate time.

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 also requires you to contact the UNT COVID Hotline at 844-366-5892 or COVID@unt.edu for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure. Also, please communicate with me over email so that we may work together in regard to absences and missed work for this class. Please visit this link for more info [https://healthalerts.unt.edu/](https://healthalerts.unt.edu/) and a scenario guide for UNT students [https://healthalerts.unt.edu/covid-guidelines](https://healthalerts.unt.edu/covid-guidelines)

Spring 2022—isolation and quarantine requirements align with new CDC guidelines:

- COVID-positive individuals isolate for 5 days from the onset of symptoms followed by 5 days of mask-wearing (there are exceptions based on symptoms).
- The fully vaccinated are still not required to quarantine if exposed and asymptomatic.
- The non-vaccinated must quarantine for 5 days if exposed.

Because of the short quarantine period, contact tracers will not identify and communicate with close contacts. For this reason, seating charts and attendance records will not be needed for spring. If a student notified the COVID team that they have been exposed to COVID, information will be provided to the student to help identify if they need to quarantine and determine a return date. In these cases, the student is responsible for informing faculty of their absence and determining make-up work.
Posting of grades: Grades will be posted on Canvas. If you would like to discuss a grade with me, we can 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

Jan 19: What is the Taj and Whose Taj is it? A discussion of the themes of the seminar
Jan 26: Politicizing the Taj—Part 1


Feb 02: Politicizing the Taj—Part 2


Feb 09: Monument to Love—Popular Perceptions


Presenters:
Response #1 prompt: In what ways do constructed biographies of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal affect our perceptions/understandings of the Taj Mahal?

Feb 16: Monument to Love—Primary Sources


Presenters:
Response #2 prompt: How do we address issues of translation, bias, veracity, and/or past artistic and cultural constructions in our handling of primary source materials?
Feb 23: Portrait of a King—Painting Shah Jahan and his Imperial Authority


Presenters:
Response #3 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?

Mar 02: The Mausoleum and Beyond—Modeling Perfection


Presenters:
Response #4 prompt: Signature style or revivalist mode? How do we assess and understand architectural style(s), motivations of the patron(s), and functions of architecture?

Mar 09: Debates over Symbolism—Part 1


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?

Spring break Mar 14-18

Mar 23: Debates over Symbolism—Part 2


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?
Mar 30: Experiencing the Taj—Part 1


**Presenters:**

**Response #7 prompt:** Identify and describe the most significant contributions that Edensor makes regarding audience reception and physical experience at the Taj complex.

Apr 06: No class—Independent work on final presentations

Apr 13: Experiencing the Taj—Part 2

**Reading:** Amita Sinha and Terence Harkness, “Views of the Taj—Figure in the Landscape.” *Landscape Journal* 28 (2009): 1-20.

**Presenters:**

**Response #8 prompt:** In what ways might landscape design positively impact tourist experience(s) at the Taj? In what ways is the Taj View Corridors project problematic?

Apr 20: No class—Independent work on final presentations

Apr 27: Final presentations

May 04: Final presentations

**Grading Criteria for Written Work:**

**A** = Such a grade indicates that the student was able to execute the written response 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 the written response 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. ‘C’ essays often contain too many quoted passages from the required reading(s).

**D** = A grade of ‘D’ indicates that the student did a poor job in following the prompt and/or did not demonstrate that s/he engaged 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.