

ANTHROPOLOGY 274 ART AND POWER IN ASIA

This course is designed for students interested in the anthropology of museums, the anthropology of art, and the anthropological study of how Asia, Asians, and Asian arts (broadly defined) are represented through museum exhibitions. We'll also be looking at some of the power dynamics of how Asian arts such as the great temples of Angkor-era Cambodia or the village arts of Sulawesi, Indonesia, were produced in the first place. We'll also look at issues of art looting as this relates to Asian arts and to museums and art collectors. In other words, we'll be studying *several dimensions of power in Asian art worlds*, again very broadly defined.

A special feature of this course this semester will be: **How might Asia and Asians most accurately be represented in American museum spaces so as to puncture blunt and harmful stereotypes?** To help you answer this question in creative and individualized ways, some of your main work in this course will be to **design a make-believe exhibition for Holy Cross's Cantor Art Gallery**, on some aspect of art from Asia. You'll be developing the theme for your imagined show and planning it out, all to culminate in **a final paper for the course which takes the form of a proposal for your exhibition.**

To help you to craft your imagined exhibition, we'll be reading and discussing a number of museum anthropology studies which highlight such thorny issues as the following: Who should get a say in designing a museum exhibition? Whose voices count, and why? How do museum display decisions work to represent identity? What goes on inside a gallery, when visitors interact with the objects on display? How can wall texts in an exhibition best be written and designed to illuminate a complex show's inner thematics? Should an exhibition push into such arenas of experience as sound and smell and touch, beyond the visual dimension? How and why? What sorts of additional programming (lectures, gallery walk throughs, films, etc.) can help enliven a complex exhibition?

Many of our museum anthropology readings will relate to Native American and African art and objects. We'll read these sources for what they say about controversial issues of art, ownership, representation, and the power politics of museums – and then in class we'll discuss at every turn how these insights relate to Asia, art, and power.

To help you think about museums and power we'll also be making a class trip to New York City to do study tours of the Asian art exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Rubin Museum for the Arts of the Himalayas, and the Asia Society Gallery. Each of these prominent museums has a different 'take' on Asia and Asian art and displays their collections and special exhibitions in characteristic, different ways. While in New York city on our study tour, we'll do

an ethnography of these three museums in relation to the arts of Asia. Through this study trip you'll also be able to amass many inventive ideas for your own final project, your proposal for your imagined show in Cantor Art Gallery.

Note: If any students have strong interests in Asian American arts and the representation of Asian Americans in public spaces such as museums, then you can certainly pursue that interest in this course and in your imagined museum exhibition. See me for guidance.