

Quarter/Year

Fall 2018

Course Number

ART-HIST 410

Day/Time

M 2:00-5:00

Instructor

Gunter

Course Title

Studies in Ancient Art: Aniconism

Degree/Distro Fulfillment



Aniconism is often defined as the absence of any material representation of living, divine, or mythical beings. Widely recognized as aniconic phenomena—both in antiquity and in cross-cultural perspective—are built monuments, such as pillars and steles, and natural formations, such as uncarved stones. In ancient Near Eastern studies, aniconism has traditionally been examined within the context of biblical texts prohibiting the making of cult images, or “idols,” and has played a significant role in analyzing artistic and religious practices in early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In recent decades, aniconism has attracted fresh attention among scholars engaged with a wide range of historical periods and geographical regions, with significant results. These investigations have newly emphasized how nineteenth-century scholarship

profoundly shaped subsequent studies, promoting the idea of an “aniconic age” that was widely adopted by scholars of ancient Greece, the Near East, and early Buddhism.

Drawing on innovative approaches introduced from anthropology, religious studies, art history, and media studies, and new investigations of ancient written sources, this course explores current directions in the study of aniconism within multiple cultural spheres: ancient Greece, Egypt, the Near East, and the early Islamic world. What does “aniconic” embrace, and how do we demarcate it from other representational modes? What are the advantages and limitations of cross-cultural comparison? Topics include analysis of key concepts such as image, representation, figuration, and abstraction; the coexistence of aniconic and figural approaches to representing the divine; the agency and efficacy of material and scale; aniconism and the spiritual experience of vision; comparative approaches to classification; and aniconism and the natural environment.

Required Textbooks

Readings will be made available on Canvas and library course reserve.

Assessments

Class discussion, written responses to selected readings, research paper.