

Quarter/Year

Course Number

Day/Time

Instructor

Fall 2020

ART-HIST 389/480

TR 9:40-11

Linrothe

Course Title

Degree/Distro Fulfillment

Special Topics in Asian Art: Gyantse Kumbum, 15th & 20th Centuries



The Kumbum of Gyantse is a landmark in the histories of Tibetan architecture, painting, and Buddhism, comparable in complexity and stature to Borobudur in Java, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople/Istanbul and the Sistine Chapel in Rome. As a senior scholar of Tibetan culture remarks, the Kumbum of Gyantse and its surrounding temples “are understood both within traditional Tibetan sources and among contemporary art historians to represent the pinnacle of Tibetan artistic creation.” The course will consider the patronage, architecture, styles of painting and sculpture, iconography, and iconology of the site, as well as somatic and visual modes of experience within Tibetan Buddhist artistic production. After exploring the systematic integration of architecture, sculpture, and painting of the 15th century Gyantse Kumbum, the course will examine the site’s afterlife in the 20th century, raising issues of contested and shifting meanings projected onto works of art. Gyantse was the locale of a battle during the 1904 British invasion of Tibet. Objects looted by British soldiers continue to turn up on the art market, offering opportunities to discuss colonialism and collecting. The Chinese, who have directly administered the area since 1950, have also used Gyantse for varied purposes including

promoting tourism, critiquing the pre-modern social order in Tibet, and anti-colonial propaganda in films and sculptural tableaux. Although largely protected during the convulsions of the Cultural Revolution, it still suffered damage. The course will examine these issues along with the impact of the Cultural Revolution and contemporary tourism on the site.

Required Textbooks

If you have never taken a course on Tibet, recommended introductions are: Matthew Kapstein *The Tibetans* (ISBN-13: 978-0631225744; ISBN-10: 0631225749) and Matthew Kapstein, *Tibetan Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (ISBN-13: 978-0199735129; ISBN-10: 9780199735129. Other sources will be shared through Canvas.

Assessments

Assigned discussion leading; assigned presentation; short (8-12 pages) research paper.