THE SILK ROAD CONTINUES: THE WESTERN END

Time: Meetings on Tuesdays from 10:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.
Date: Starting on September 26 and ending on October 31, 2017
Location: Lafayette Library and Learning Center
3491 Mount Diablo Boulevard, Lafayette, CA 94549
Instructor: Hossein Khosrowjah, Ph. D.: Visiting Scholar at the Visual Studies Department
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Office Hours: By appointment (after the class).

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This is a follow-up to the Spring 2017 Silk Roads course with a special emphasis on the western regions along the Silk Road. We will explore how the Silk Road(s) shaped and connected the arts, culture, and some significant aspects of the history of Rome (the Roman Republic and Empire before
and after the division to East and West [between Rome and Byzantium?]), Arabic and Islamic societies, Persia (before and after Islam), and central Asian civilizations. We will also briefly (our last class) address the interconnectedness of these cultures in the modern era. The course will explore the overarching themes of cultural, artistic, religious, and economic exchanges among Silk Road civilizations as the earliest instance of globalization. This course is open to all; it is not necessary to have taken the Spring 2017 course.

**READINGS AND VIEWINGS**

Recommended readings for this course will all be available on the class website. There will be some recommended that may be available on FilmStruck, Hulu, local libraries, and other places. The viewings are helpful in understanding cultural nuances, but not necessarily integral to the course.
COURSE FORMAT
Classes will consist of lectures (usually on PowerPoint lasting 80-90 minutes per class), occasional video clips, and questions and answers (2 x 10-minute slots at the end of each hour).

VIEWINGS
There will be some recommended viewings for this class that will deepen the students’ understanding of nations’ or regions’ contemporary cultural context.

COURSE SCHEDULE
This is an outline of what we will cover in each class period, but it is subject to some adjustments as we progress through the course.
Tuesday, Sep. 26  
A Short Review of the History of the Silk Road, Roman Republic/Empire and the Silk Road

Rome in the first century BCE was the most powerful nation in the world. Not just an influence on the Western art and culture, but one may say IT WAS THE WESTERN ART AND CULTURE! It provided both the language and art, but also the practical aspects of a worldwide Empire. It was also the final destination along the Silk Road, as many commodities and cultural influences found their way to Rome. This session will explore how the passageways to the East brought silk, Mithraism, and other tangible and intellectual things to the Roman Realm and what was sent back to the East including artistic styles and technologies.

Tuesday, Oct. 3  
Persian Empire/ Iran (Before and After Islam)
Class 2

One of the world’s oldest, if not the oldest, continuous national cultures, the Persians/Iranians (we will also explore the nuances of what each term connotes) had already built more than half of the transcontinental passageway (3000 miles of ancient highways) during the glory days of the Achaemenid Empire (Ca. 550 – 330 BCE) when the Chinese emperor Wudi sent exploratory missions to the West in the second century BCE. The Persian Parthian emperors (227 BCE – 224 CE) were the key traders at the center of the Silk Road. Culturally, Persia/Iran was the East-West gateway, as every significant cultural sign is marked by intermixing and hybridity from ancient times to the present moment. This session will discuss both the pre-Islamic period (4th millennium BCE to 7th century CE) and the post-Islamic Iranian culture and its impact on human civilization.
Starting as a tribal Semitic religion in the Arabian Peninsula, within decade of the passing of its founder, Islam became the world’s dominant political and cultural force. Having integrated the ancient civilizations of Persia, North Africa, central Asia, and (in the beginning parts and eventually all of) the Byzantine Empire, Islamic cultures (with emphasis on the plurality not singularity of those cultures) played a major part in re-shaping of the Silk Road, mediating between East and West. In addition to an expansive review of the Islamic art in this class, we will also examine the misconception that Islam forbids figurative images. Look at the center Persian miniature painting above from Al-Biruni’s illuminated 14th century manuscript (details discussed in the class) produced in Tabriz showing the Prophets Mohammad and Jesus riding together.

Present day Turkey is heir to several civilizations, from Lydian and Achaemenid to the Byzantine to the great Ottoman Empire, there have fewer cultures with such rich intersection of Hellenistic, Christian, and Islamic cultures. In a way, The Silk Road as an allegory of interconnected-ness and syncretism is best exemplified by everything that has passed through and left residuals in Anatolia and Constantinople/Turkey. This class will survey the rich cultural and artistic heritage of this nation.
It goes without saying that the beautiful and complex tapestry that often overgeneralized (in an awkward Orientalist manner) as Arab culture is in fact comprised of many diverse and very different histories that adopted a veneer of unified cultural identity after Islam and spread of Arabic as the common language of regions spreading from Mesopotamia to Western-most parts of North Africa. We will focus on regions that were part of the historical Silk Road passage and alternately were part of Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic civilizations, and sadly, enmeshed in some of the most devastating violence of the past two decades (completely linked to their colonial histories as well), Iraq and Syria.

Thursday, Oct. 31  Central Asian Civilizations: Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan

There was a time in human civilization that the names Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, Merv, and Turfan inspired awe and wonder. These central Asian oasis cities were sites of some of the most sophisticated and advanced mercantile urban centers with few rivals in the ancient and medieval times. Their ascendance and glory had everything to do with being at the heart of the Silk Road (so did their decline). These cities brought together the best of Chinese and Persian civilizations. Ask any Iranian why they still speak Persian and not Arabic and they will reverentially name Rudaki (born in present-day Tajikistan) as the father modern Persian poetry and language. Al-Khawrazmi, the father of modern
algebra is another revered Persian-speaking revered figure. The architectural wonders, beautiful arts and crafts, and wondrous music that originated in this region is still there and will be topic of our class.

**List of Suggested Films**

1. *Tulpan* (Sergey Dvortsevoy : 2008, 100 min.) or *Angel on the Right* (Djamshed Usmonov: 2002, 88 min.) or *Kairat*

**Recommended Readings:**

- Short essays by Judy Bonavia, Milo Cleveland Beach and Elizabeth Ten Grotenhuis (Introduction to *The Silk Road: Xi’An to Kashgar* and Preface and Introduction to *Along the Silk Road*, respectively)
• Introductions from Paul Wilson’s *The Silk Roads* and Luce Boulnois’ *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors*.
• Selected chapters from Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Gennocchino’s *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Critical Reader* and John Clark’s *Modernity in Asian Art*.
• Chiu and Genocchio’s *Asian Art Now*, pp. 6-117.
• Excerpts from *Conditioned* (A compilation of experimental film and video art from Turkey that explores the intellectual conditioning of children and teenagers through both the educational system and contemporary Turkish society at large.)
• “Bashir Makhoul in conversation with Gordon Hon: Traffic in remains: identity and resistance in recent work by Turkish artists.”
• Daryush Shayegan’s “At the Cutting Edge of Intersecting Worlds” in *Iranian Contemporary Art*.
• Selected chapters from Contemporary Arab Women's Art Dialogues of the Present.