

## **Maya and Mexican Art and Archaeology (Art 265)**

Art and Art History  
Gustavus Adolphus College  
Spring 2008

Instructor: Travis Nygard  
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Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, 11:20-12:20 and by appointment  
Class Meeting Time: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 10:30-11:20  
Location: FAA Lecture Hall

### **Course Description**

This course is an introduction to the painting, sculpture, and architecture of Native American culture in Mexico, Guatemala, and North America from 700 B.C. to 1500 A.D. Visual culture will be studied as indications of the religious and philosophical thought of the peoples who created them.

### **Course Goals**

- Obtain an overarching understanding of ancient Maya and Mexican culture.
- Develop ways to think about the form and content of art and visual culture.
- Develop an understanding about “artistic identity” as it existed in an ancient nonwestern culture.
- Gain insight into reading scholarship about and criticism of art as both a reader and writer.
- Gain research skills

### **Online Teaching**

The syllabus and select course materials will be posted on Moodle: <http://moodle.gac.edu/> The assignments are to be turned in via Moodle before class on the day they are due.

### **Communication**

My primary means of communication with you outside of class will be email, via Moodle. Because I will use this to send assignments and announcements, you should check your email frequently during the term. Moodle allows me to send emails only to your Gustavus address.

### **Distractions**

Our classroom environment will be best if we can minimize distractions. As such, *turn off your cell phones*. Also, many people (including me) are easily distracted by the smell, sound, and appearance of food, so do not eat during class. Beverages are fine.

### **Late Work**

All work must be uploaded to Moodle before class on the day that it is due. In general I will not accept late work. My reason is that the class will be progressing through the material quickly, and accepting late work would allow you to fall behind in your studies. Exceptions may be made on a case by case basis for documented personal emergencies, such as hospitalizations and funerals. Meet with me individually to discuss your situation.

If you know in advance that you will need to miss a class for personal reasons, then I may allow you to turn in an assignment late. However, you must petition me by the third day of class (February 15th). To do this, you must turn in a typed memo that lists when and why you will be absent and the date that you will turn in your assignment.

### **Attendance**

Attendance in class is required. One absence is permitted during the term without negatively impacting your grade. For every additional absence your final grade will be lowered by 5%. For pre-approved absences and documented personal emergencies, you may make up the class period. To do so, read a scholarly article in the journal *Ancient Mesoamerica* that is at least 15 pages long and turn in a 3-4 page paper about the article. The first page must be a summary of the readings, and the next 2-3 pages must be your critique of them.

### **Participation**

You will be graded on participation based on the following criteria: (1) careful listening to your peers, (2) responding with thoughtful comments, and (3) successfully encouraging other members of the class to share their thoughts. At the end of the term you will do a self-assessment as well as an assessment of several peers, in which you suggest the number of points that you deserve.

### **Online Discussion Forum**

A major part of your participation grade in this course is based on your participation in an online "Wild Card" forum. You are required to post messages at least 2 paragraphs long to the Wild Card Forum 5 times per week throughout the term, excluding Spring Break. Your 2 paragraphs may be in response to someone else. You may post shorter messages as well, but they will not count toward the 5 messages per week quota. In general I will not be participating myself in the forum, as I want you to develop relationships amongst each other. Some days I will dictate a discussion topic to the class, and you are required to respond to it. Other days you are in charge of stimulating your own conversations. In the latter case, your discussions may be about the readings, assignments, practical library skills, or anything else course-related that you believe would be of interest to your peers.

### **Collaboration**

In general, I encourage collaboration. You may work with any of your peers on any assignment, and multiple people can turn in the same paper if you discuss it with me first. If you choose to collaborate on an assignment I may alter the requirements slightly. For example, I might ask for a 6-8 page paper instead of a 3-4 page paper.

It is great if you discuss your ideas with each other, but please disclose that at the end of the paper. For example, you might say, "I would like to acknowledge the insights of <name> who critiqued my ideas

and suggested some further questions.” This is a matter of academic respect, and if you look in almost any art history book you will find a similar list of acknowledgements in it.

### **Formatting**

All papers must be double spaced, use Times New Roman, Times, or Calibri font in size 11 or 12, and have 1 or 1.25” margins. All papers must be stapled.

### **Attribution of Sources and Academic Integrity**

To avoid plagiarism, any time that you summarize or quote another person’s ideas you must cite them. Art history majors must use the humanities style with footnotes and a bibliography outlined in the Chicago Manual of Style (15th edition). It is the standard for our discipline—as indicated by its use in College Art Association publications—and therefore all majors need to be familiar with it. Non-majors may opt to use MLA style.

You are expected to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity, as outlined in the College Honor Code. Plagiarized assignments will not be accepted, resulting in a 0% for the grade. Incidents of plagiarism will also be reported to the Dean, who may choose to take further action. If more than one assignment is plagiarized, the consequence is failing the course.

[http://gustavus.edu/academics/general\\_catalog/current/?pr=acainfo](http://gustavus.edu/academics/general_catalog/current/?pr=acainfo)

### **Disabilities**

Should you require accommodations for a disability I am happy to work with you and the Disability Services Coordinator. The College policy on accommodation for disabilities is as follows: “Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) work together to ensure “reasonable accommodation” and non-discrimination for students with disabilities in higher education. A student who has a physical, psychiatric/emotional, medical, learning, or attentional disability that may have an effect on the student’s ability to complete assigned course work should contact the Disability Services Coordinator in the Advising Center, who will review the concerns and decide with the student what accommodations are necessary.”

[http://gustavus.edu/academics/general\\_catalog/current/acainfo](http://gustavus.edu/academics/general_catalog/current/acainfo)

### **Assignments**

Quiz	5
Participation	6
Homework	10
Research Skills:	
Article Summary	10
Reference List	10
Contextual Research	10
Final Project:	
Initial Assessment of Data and Resources	10
Progress Report 1: Contextual Research	10

Progress Report 2: Annotated Bibliography	10
Final Presentation and Paper	19
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TOTAL	100

### Grading Scale

94-100	A
90-93	A-
88-89	B+
84-87	B
80-83	B-
78-79	C+
74-77	C
70-73	C-
68-69	D+
60-67	D
0-59	F

### Books

The five required books are available for purchase in the Book Mark. Please bring the assigned readings to class each day, as we may refer to them in discussions.

Jeff Bollow. *Writing FAST: How to Write Anything with Lightning Speed*

Michael D. Coe. *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*

Mary Ellen Miller. *Maya Art and Architecture*

Mary Ellen Miller. *The Art of Mesoamerica*

Robert Sharer. *The Ancient Maya*

### Course Schedule

#### Week 1

#### February 11: Introduction to Course

**Online Discussion:** Post a 600 word biography of yourself on Moodle to introduce yourself to the class.

**Assignment:** To give the class a good start, orient yourself to my policies, textbooks, and course content. **There will be a quiz.** The quiz will be closed book, but you may bring a single standard sized sheet of paper with notes on one side. The sheet of paper **cannot** contain information from the syllabus simply copied and pasted in tiny type, the names of your textbook authors or any drawings, maps, or photos. You will turn in your sheet of notes. Feel free to ask the reference librarians for help. By this Friday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, you must know:

1. The policies on the syllabus.
2. The location of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize. The location of the largest cities in each of these countries. The location of the Olmec, Maya, and Aztec peoples. (If I gave you a blank map, could you draw in the political borders, label the cities, and color code the people?)
3. The correct way to pronounce "Olmec," "Maya," and "Aztec."

4. The correct way to pronounce Maya words. Instructions will be posted on Moodle. (Maya names and places are often transliterated into Spanish, and they are not in a dictionary.)
5. Who the authors of your textbooks are. (In one paragraph each, could you state their professional credentials, current employer, and why they are respected in the field of Mesoamerican studies?)

### **February 13: Introductory Lecture**

**Online Discussion:** Do exploratory research on the Maya and Mexican people either online or in the library, and either share something that intrigued you with the rest of the class or respond to something that a peer shared. Feel free to compare the material to other cultures that you are familiar with. Each student must contribute substantially different thoughts.

### **February 15: Lecture on the Caste War and Legacy of Mesoamerican Art**

**Homework:** Read Esther Pasztory's essay "Still Invisible" and prepare a list of 10 ways that Mesoamerican art is different than Western art. Bring both the essay and your typed list to our next class and be prepared to discuss it. The article is posted on Moodle.

**Online Discussion:** Take an inventory of your knowledge of warfare and reflect on how wars you all are familiar with are different than the Caste War, which lasted seasonally for decades. You might ask yourself about the strategies, mindset, and ethics of this type of warfare.

### **Quiz on Orientation to Course**

## **Week 2**

### **February 18: Discussion of Esther Pasztory's essay "Still Invisible"**

**Homework:** Choose one of the following topics and prepare a 1 page handout on it for the members of your small group and me (5 copies): color, line, perspective, and composition. Each member of your group must choose a different topic. Your handout must define the term and list at least 5 ways that artists can manipulate this property. We will use these handouts to analyze real art on February 20.

**Assignment:** Read and write a summary of the following article. Instructions for writing the summary will be posted on Moodle as a separate document. David C. Grove, "Public Monuments and Sacred Mountains: Observations on Three Formative Period Sacred Landscapes," in *Social Patterns in Pre-Classical Mesoamerica*. Edited by David C. Grove and Rosemary A. Joyce. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC. 1999, pp. 255-298. You can download this free at the web site for Dumbarton Oaks.

[www.doaks.org](http://www.doaks.org) Go to Publications, Electronic texts, Pre-columbian Studies, Social Patterns in Pre-Classical Mesoamerica, and then to the specific article. Due February 22.

### **February 20: Hillstrom Museum of Art**

Class will convene at the front of the Hillstrom Museum below the college cafeteria. We will use your handouts to help us better understand the art on display.

**Online Discussion:** Reflect on the art in the exhibition and write a 2 paragraph response to the art that identifies the piece you found most interesting and explains why. Alternately you may expand on someone else's thoughts about the art.

### **February 22: Lecture on Olmec Architecture**

**Assignment:** Prepare a Research and Reference List on the Gove article. Instructions will be posted as a separate document on Moodle. Bring your list to class on February 27.

**Homework:** Homework: Read the article by Charles Tilly “How (and What) Are Historians Doing?” and prepare 3 discussion questions for our next class. The goal of our discussion will be to understand how different types of scholars handle historical data. The article is posted on Moodle.

**Due: Summary of Grove article**

### Week 3

#### **February 25: Lecture on Olmec Sculpture and Discussion about Disciplines of History, Archaeology, and Art History**

**Homework:** We will divide Michael D. Coe’s book *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs* and each student will prepare a one page single spaced handout for the class (16 copies) on their portion. The handout must identify the types of evidence that the author used (e.g. ethnographies, maps, ceramics), include a 1 paragraph summary of the material, and define 3-5 of the most important terms in the chapter, and describe the most interesting object discussed.

#### **February 27: Workshop on Research and Reference List and Discussion of Coe’s Book**

**Assignment:** Undertake contextual research on the article by Grove. Instructions will be posted as a separate document on Moodle. Due March 7.

**Due: Research and Reference List on Grove article**

#### **February 29: Library Workshop**

Class will convene in the front of the Library.

### Week 4

#### **March 3: Lecture on Painting at Teotihuacan**

**Online Discussion:** What did the people of Teotihuacan believe? Research religion online and share your results with the class. Because we have no texts from Teotihuacan, all information is either inferred from objects, and scholars often assume that beliefs were similar to those of the Maya or Aztec. How much confidence do you have in this understanding? Feel free to compare the material to other cultures that you are familiar with.

#### **March 5: Continue Lecture on Painting at Teotihuacan**

#### **March 7: Lecture on Sculpture at Teotihuacan**

**Online Discussion:** How healthy were the people of Teotihuacan? Research the body online and share your results with the class. Feel free to compare the material to other cultures that you are familiar with, or explore related topics.

**Due: Contextual Research on Grove’s article.**

### Weeks 5

#### **March 10: Discussion of Increased Knowledge of Olmec**

**Homework:** Locate a high quality photo of a sculpture from Teotihuacan, and bring a copy of it to class on March 12. You will turn in the reproduction.

### **March 12: Workshop in Hillstrom Museum**

Class will convene in the front of the Hillstrom Museum

**Homework:** Locate the best written piece of non-fiction that you have ever encountered and reread it. This writing may be about Maya or Mexican art, or it could be about something else entirely. If you are referring to a book you only need to reread 20 pages. Reflect on what makes the writing particularly effective, which is *not* the subject matter. Prepare a 1 page handout for the entire class (16 copies) that summarizes the main ideas of the writing and explains strategies that the author used to write effectively. Note: often the most interesting strategies break the “rules” of writing.

### **March 14**

**Homework:** Locate the best written piece of non-fiction that you have ever encountered and reread it. This writing may be about Maya or Mexican art, or it could be about something else entirely. If you are referring to a book you only need to reread 20 pages. Reflect on what makes the writing particularly effective, which is *not* the subject matter. Prepare a 1 page handout for the entire class (16 copies) that summarizes the main ideas of the writing and explains strategies that the author used to write effectively. Note: often the most interesting strategies break the “rules” of writing.

### **Week 6**

#### **March 17: Workshop on the Best Writing You Have Read**

**Online Discussion:** If the writing you have discussed in class is available online, post a link to it so that your peers may read it if they are interested. Reflect on how you find interesting reading material.

#### **March 19: The Western Understanding of the Maya**

We will use clips from the film *Apocalypto* to give us insight into how the Maya are perceived in the west.

**Online Discussion:** Which of Mel Gibson’s other films are you familiar with? Have you seen other films that are similar to *Apocalypto*? What experience do you have analyzing films? What types of films do you personally watch for pleasure? What films do you watch for intellectual stimulation?

### **Spring Break**

### **Week 7**

#### **March 31: Lecture on History of Maya Scholarship and Decipherment of Hieroglyphs**

**Online Discussion:** Read Jeff Bollow’s chapter “Why Write FAST?” and reflect on his philosophy of writing. Identify at least two points that you agree or disagree with, and post your thoughts on Moodle. Alternately you may expand on someone else’s thoughts.

**Assignment:** Begin the initial assessment of data and resources for your final project. Instructions will be posted as a separate document on Moodle. Due April 11.

**Homework:** We will divide Robert Sharer’s book *The Ancient Maya*. Before reading your portion, review all of the handouts about Michael Coe’s book to familiarize yourself with the hallmarks of Mexican culture. Then prepare a one page single spaced handout (16 copies) on your portion of the reading. The handout must identify the types of evidence used in 1 sentence, include a 1 paragraph summary of the material, and define 3-5 of the most important terms in the chapter. You must explicitly address if the hallmarks of Maya culture on your handout are shared with the Mexican culture. To do

this you must strategically read portions of the Coe book that were not assigned to you originally, using the handouts you have as guides. When you present your material to the class you will have exactly 6 minutes to do so, *and we will use a kitchen timer*. (Note that timers are also used at professional conferences.) You will project examples from the books (these may be maps, drawings, or photos) using the document camera. You must practice your presentation in advance, as it is very difficult to judge how much time conveying information will take. We will use the handouts on April 4 and 7.

#### **April 2: Lecture on Maya Iconography**

**Online Discussion:** Read Jeff Bollow's chapter "Why You Hate Writing" and post a 2 paragraph response on Moodle. Each student must ground their response in their own personal experiences of writing.

#### **April 4: Discussion of Sharer's book**

**Online Discussion:** All grant reports on the Foundation for the Advancement for Mesoamerican Studies homepage are the result of research that was intended to answer a compelling question. However, these questions are often not explicitly stated. When reading these reports we need to keep these questions in mind and think about how the data that they found could potentially answer them. Choose 2 reports and identify the question that the researchers were trying to answer. You do not need to read the reports in their entirety. In fact, you should be able to determine the question from the title and introductory paragraphs. For example, the report "Terrace Agriculture in Cerro San Lucas, Teotihuacan Valley" by Julia Pérez Pérez asks how people grew food in spite of geographic challenges. Then reflect on the types of evidence we have discussed in class that would be useful for answering these questions and write a Moodle post about it. <http://research.famsi.org/reports/>

### **Week 8**

#### **April 7: Library Workshop**

Class will convene in the front of the library, and we will be working with the library staff.

**Online Discussion:** Read Jeff Bollow's chapters "Meet the FAST System" and "Capture Your Idea." Consider if this is the same way that you have written in the past and post a response to the readings on Moodle. Refer to specific pages in Bollow and specific personal experiences. Alternately you may expand on someone else's thoughts.

#### **April 9: Discussion of Sharer's book**

#### **April 11: Lecture and Workshop on the Palace at Palenque**

**Homework:** The goal of this assignment is to understand whether Mesoamerican workmanship can be thought of as "high art" like the Mona Lisa, rather than simply as cultural artifacts. A second goal is for you all to understand how Maya aesthetics are different than Mexican. We will use the two textbooks as workbooks in this process. You will be assigned a specific portion of Miller's book *Maya Art and Architecture*, You will read the introduction and conclusion of both of Miller's books (*Maya Art and Architecture* and *The Art of Mesoamerica*) to orient yourself to the material. Then you will choose the most compelling object from your assigned portion, describe it using an art historical vocabulary, and compare it to at least two objects you find in *The Art of Mesoamerica* that are not Maya. Your comparisons must all be the same medium—compare sculpture to sculpture, painting to painting, architecture to architecture, and so on. The first comparison must show features in common. The second must show differences. You will prepare a 1 page handout on your portion, which describes

both your object and the objects that you compared it to. You will have 6 minutes to complete your presentation, and you will use the document camera to project materials from the books. You must rehearse your presentation in advance and you must have the pages that you will project marked in advance to make your presentation effective. The assignment is due on April 18 and 21.

**Due: Initial assessment of data and resources for your final project**

## **Week 9 and 10**

### **April 14: Library Workshop**

Class will convene in the front of the library, and we will be working with the library staff.

**Homework:** Find an example of information that is difficult to cite. Your information does not need to be about Mesoamerica or art. We will use the examples on April 16 to practice thinking through citations.

### **April 16: Workshop on Bibliographic Citations**

**Online Discussion:** Read Jeff Bollow's chapters "Make Your Idea Specific" and "Attach Your Lightning Rod," reflect on the ideas presented and post a 2 paragraph response on Moodle.

### **April 18 and 21: Workshop on Mesoamerican "High Art" Using Miller's Books**

**Assignment:** Begin Progress Report 1 of your final project, on contextual research. Instructions will be posted as a separate document on Moodle. Due April 25.

### **April 23: Lecture on Maya Dress, Body Modification, and Pacal's Tomb**

**Online Discussion:** Find information on a non-Maya tomb, summarize how this tomb is constructed, and explain what is meaningful about it. Make at least one comparison between the tomb you choose and the Maya tomb shown in class. Alternately, Find an image of a contemporary ruler online, identify the strategies that the ruler uses to convey their power. On Moodle post a link to the image and compare how the ruler is using similar or different strategies than the Maya used.

**Assignment:** Begin Progress Report 2 of your final project, an annotated bibliography. Instructions will be posted as a separate document on Moodle. Due May 2.

**Due: Progress Report 1 of your final project, on contextual research.**

### **April 25: Lecture on Maya Ceramics and Looting**

**Online Discussion:** Do you believe that collectors and museums should buy objects off of the black market? Should scholars study them? You may want to refer to an article on this website:  
<http://wings.buffalo.edu/anthropology/Documents/lootbib.shtml>

## **Week 11**

### **April 28: Lecture on Yo'okop and Maya Cosmology**

**Online Discussion:** Read Jeff Bollow's section "Strengthen" and pay particular attention to the "5 easy steps" in each chapter. Based on your personal experiences with writing, discuss on Moodle if you would you modify any of these steps or add additional stages.

### **April 30: May Day Peace Conference**

**Online Discussion:** We will not meet formally this day, but you are required to listen to at least one May Day speaker. Reflect on the type of evidence that the speaker uses to make their points, and how that

evidence is similar or different from the type of evidence we are using in this class. Also reflect on the presentation style of the speaker, noting any strategies for speaking that you might be able to use when presenting your final project to the class. Alternately you may expand on someone else's thoughts on the May Day presentations.

### **May 2: Workshop on Interpreting Site Plans**

**Assignment:** Begin to prepare your final presentations and papers. Your presentations are due May 12-19, and your final paper is due May 23. Instructions will be posted on Moodle.

**Due: Progress Report 2 of your final project, an annotated bibliography.**

### **Week 12**

#### **May 5: Workshop on How to Make an Effective Presentation on Archaeological Material**

**Online Discussion:** Read Jeff Bollow's section "Tweak" and try it out on a piece of your own writing. Post a description of how you changed your writing in a way that you would not normally do and include a "before" and "after" quotation.

#### **May 7: Workshop on the Popular Understanding of the Aztec**

We will watch clips of the 3D film *The Mask*, which is about an archaeologist and psychiatrist who experience hallucinations of ancient Mesoamerica when they wear an ancient Aztec mask. The mask in the film is based on an artifact in the British Museum. By discussing these scenes we will reconstruct how Westerners view the ancient Aztec people.

#### **May 9: Lecture on Aztec Art**

**Online Discussion:** Read Jeff Bollow's section "The Payoff." Reflect on whether his process has been useful to you in improving your writing in this course and post your opinion on Moodle, with justifications. Each student must contribute substantially different thoughts.

### **Week 13**

#### **May 12-19: Student Presentations on Final Projects**

**Assignment:** Revise your final papers in light of the questions and feedback you received during the presentation. Due May 23.

**Assignment:** Prepare a self-evaluation of your participation, as well as the participation of other members in your small group. Instructions will be posted on Moodle.

**Due: PowerPoint presentations are due on the day that you present them.**

**May 12: Cave Research Presentation**

**May 14: Cache Research**

**May 16: Women and Gender Roles**

**May 19: Palace Research and Elite Roles**

#### **May 21: Capstone Activity**

**Due: Self-Evaluation of Participation**

### **Reading Break**

May 23: Final Papers Due.