Course theme:
This course focuses on how museums display and curate “religion” in their roles as public sites of education and citizenship, and as cultural attractions. By paying close attention to the material artifacts in museums and to the stories that curators tell about these artifacts, we will examine two main sets of questions. First, what difference does it make that artifacts of religious devotion—or artifacts that some communities consider sacred—are at the heart of many museum collections? How do museum staff accommodate communities that continue to imbue these artifacts with religious meaning? Second, what can we learn from thinking about the historical provenance of many museum artifacts, which were often contributed by collectors who were colonial officials and/or Christian missionaries? Today, institutions of public memory in Canada and elsewhere work with very different understandings of the politics of “cultural heritage” and the accommodation of religious difference. Thinking about these differences with historical perspective will help us to think critically about the intersection of religion, nation, materiality, and cultural difference. Through museum visits, course readings, lectures, and interaction with curators from the ROM, the course will offer a hands-on introduction to the critical study of museums as spaces of religions in the public sphere.

Course objectives:
In this course, students will learn to think critically about the importance of museums and material artifacts for public understandings of what counts as religion in specific national contexts. With recourse to disciplines of study of religion, history, anthropology, and museum studies, students will develop their analytical understanding of key concepts such as materiality, religion, and secularism, as well as the concept of the public sphere.

This course will also allow each student to develop skills of effective writing and use of visual evidence in both print and digital formats, as each assignment builds capacities in different kinds of analytical and descriptive writing in museum contexts.

Required Texts:
Two books are required for purchase, and several shorter readings are available via Blackboard.

- *Every Object has a Story: Extraordinary Canadians Celebrate the Royal Ontario Museum.* Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2014 (EOHS). Available at the ROM, with a 10% discount.

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**Detailed Assignment Guidelines**

1. **Readings and Participation (15%)**:
   - To participate in the class, and to earn a decent grade, it is imperative that you do the readings each week and that you bring to class your textbooks and printed-out texts, prepared to discuss them. Class attendance is mandatory; we will take attendance in class and at ROM visits.
   - Students who wish to use computers to take notes should refrain from using the internet or checking email during class, as it is distracting for everyone.

2. **In-class writing responses (10%)**
   - Each student will write seven in-class critical reflections (max. 500 words), for which you will be given 10 minutes during class meetings without ROM visits. These reflections should raise questions or insights based on the readings and class discussions.

3. **Provenance assignment (20%--group work)**:
   - Working in groups of two, choose two “religious” artifacts from the ROM’s collections, and answer the following questions in 4 double-spaced, 12 point font pages: 1) what information does the label on each artefact convey, and how does their placement in the gallery convey further information? 2) what is the provenance of each artifact? 3) why have you classified this object as “religious”? 4) why do you think the ROM has chosen to display these two objects?
   - Your assignment must include images of the objects, a map of where they appear in the ROM, and references to at least 2 of the course readings so far, as well as at least one peer-reviewed reference you find yourself.
   - Include a signed Statement of Academic Integrity (available on Blackboard) with your assignment.

4. **Label assignment (25%)**: 

Please consult the syllabus distributed by instructor.
• Create a new label for a “religious” artefact in the museum (not one of the artefacts you have already chosen), and justify your label with reference to what we have learned, using course readings and at least 2 scholarly articles;
• Go beyond a written label to include digital content (i.e. a link to a web page, Tumblr site, or a YouTube video, etc.
• Your assignment will include the current ROM label for the item, your new label, and a 4 pp. justification.

• When writing your label, consider the following issues, addressing these issues directly in your justification: 1) the audiences for your label (e.g. children, members of the particular religious community, art historians, etc.); 2) the pedagogical goals of the label, or what does this label seek to communicate to and teach your audience? 3) critical awareness of how the placement of this artefact in a museum setting is different from its use in a devotional setting.
• Your assignment should include references to course readings and at least 2 scholarly articles from the following journals: Material Religion, Museum Studies, History of Religions, Curator: The Museum Journal.
• Include a signed Statement of Academic Integrity (available on Blackboard).

5. Object Story assignment (30%):
• Choose one of the objects you have already discussed in earlier assignments (or a new one if you want), and write an “every object has a story” essay about this object, using the twinned articles from Every Object Has a Story as models for your writing. Choose an object that attracts or repels you, or simply makes you curious or puzzled, and that you want to write about from both scholarly and personal perspectives.
• Write the “object story” of the artefact that includes a discussion of its provenance, its placement in the museum, and your own critical analysis of it based on the readings from class and your own personal response to the artefact.
• Your assignment must include a written essay of 6-8 pages, as well as specific reference to 5-7 scholarly articles; up to four can be drawn from the course readings, and three must be new articles drawn from the list of journals given for the Provenance Assignment.
• If you want to include a visual and/or digital element to your object story, please do so!
• If class numbers permit, we will have an exhibition session during which students will use poster or digital presentations to share their work and receive feedback from colleagues.
• Include a signed Statement of Academic Integrity (available on Blackboard) with your assignment.

Written assignments
• For citations, use the Chicago Manual of Style’s author-date method, found here. Be sure to provide a bibliography of all works cited and consulted in your assignments, including print and web sources.

• Assignments 3-5 should be submitted in hard copy at the course mailbox at the Department for the Study of Religion, 170 St. George St., 3rd Floor, and electronically via turn-it-in.com. Each of these assignments must include a signed Statement of Academic Integrity, available on Blackboard.

• Late papers are not accepted, except in the event of documented illness. You need to obtain proper documentation of your illness and you must contact me as soon as possible. Do not wait until the assignment’s due date has passed! If you fall ill, please print out a copy of the “student medical certificate” and have it signed by your physician (http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/undergraduate/forms).

• With this syllabus, all work has been assigned and made public in advance. It is your responsibility to plan ahead so that you can successfully complete and submit all assigned work on its announced due date. It is possible that you will have multiple assignments due for your various courses on the same day or week. Plan ahead, as this is not grounds for granting an extension. Only in the case of long-term illness lasting more than one week and which is properly documented, will an extension be considered.

• Save, save, save. Email assignments to yourself. Keep a draft on your USB or external drive. I will not grant extensions for computer and/or printer malfunctions.

• Plagiarism: Plagiarism—representing someone else’s words as your own or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program—is a serious offence that can result in sanctions. Trust your own ability to think and write, and make use of the various resources available at U of T that can help you do so (e.g. professors, teaching assistants, writing centres). Also, see the U of T writing support website at www.utoronto.ca/writing.

Classroom Environment and Policies:
We should all expect that different voices and opinions will be given free expression in our classroom and that we will treat each other with respect.
• Cell phones must be switched off and out of sight.
• Internet use and emailing is not allowed during class time, unless it’s part of our activities.
• Be on time for class. Late arrival will result in a reduction in your attendance and participation grade.
• Email: Please use your @utoronto.ca email address for all course-related correspondence.
• Questions about the syllabus and course assignments should be asked in class, so that everyone can benefit from the answers.
• I encourage you to come to my office hours with questions about the readings, lectures, and your ideas for the assignments. Email should be used only for emergencies.
• I encourage you to contact a classmate to get the lecture notes if you miss a class.
• Grades will not be discussed via email. Please see me during office hours.
• “Cooling off period”: Upon receipt of graded assignments, I require that you wait 24 hours before contacting me to arrange a meeting to discuss your grade. This gives you the opportunity to carefully read your paper, as well as your T.A.’s comments.

Religious Holidays and Observances and Privacy
According to U of T regulations: “It is important that no University member be seriously disadvantaged because of her or his religious observation. Students have an obligation to alert members of the teaching staff in a timely fashion to upcoming religious observances and anticipated absences. Every effort will be made avoid scheduling tests, examinations or other compulsory activities at these times.” Personal information is collected pursuant to section 2(14) of the University of Toronto Act, 1971 and at all times it will be protected in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Please note that this course requires presentations of one’s work to the group. If you have questions, please speak to the course instructors, refer to www.utoronto.ca/privacy or contact the University’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Office at 416 946-5385, Room 201, McMurrich Bldg., 12 Queen’s Park Crescent, Toronto.

Accessibility
Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me as soon as possible.

Syllabus

September 15: Introduction to Museums and Material Religion

September 22: Theme One: The Study of Religion and the Genesis of the Modern Museum

The readings for this week set us up for thinking about the long historical interaction between the study of religion, the collection of artifacts, and the development of the museum in an era of colonialism and “nation-building”.

• Reading 1: Paine, Religious Objects in Museums, Intro and Ch. 1, “Objects Curated”
• Reading 3: Silvia Forni and Lawrence Hill, “Edo Plaque”, in EOHIS, pp. 82-89.
September 29: Colonialism, Missionaries, and Museum Collections
What are the implications of the history and collective memory of colonialism, as well as the role of missionary encounters, for our understanding of the curation of museum collections? Who owns the past? We will focus on the question, what might it mean to “decolonize” a museum?

- **Reading 3:** Silvia Forni and Uzoma Esowanne, “Ikem Headdress” in *EOHS*, pp. 52-56.

October 6: ROM Visit 1: Collectors and their Legacies

| ROM Host: TBA |

In preparation for our first visit to the ROM, please read these two different accounts of how museum collections are formed, thinking about the differences between the two readings in tone, style, and presumed audience (e.g. for a U of T student in 2014 is a book written in a conversational style by a ROM curator in 1956 harder to understand than a book chapter written by a scholar in 2004? If so, how and why?). Be ready to ask the curator questions based on your readings.

- **See also:** [https://www.uni-marburg.de/relsamm](https://www.uni-marburg.de/relsamm)

October 13: Theme Two: Devotion and Display: Religious Objects in and out of Museums
This week’s readings focus on the displacement and creative transfiguration engendered by the display of religious objects in museum spaces. For example, Indian religious images often appear to viewers in museums as self-contained aesthetic objects appreciated for formal beauty, with no extraneous noise. For Indian worshippers, however, such icons are ritually venerated, smeared, bathed, adorned, and elaborately dressed.


**October 20: What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?**
Unesco defines intangible cultural heritage as “the traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed down to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning the nature of the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.” Museums as receptacles of cultural heritage may be considered in the context of alternative forms of modern life associated with media, leisure, and spectacle.


**October 27: ROM Visit 2: Curating the Sacred**

**ROM Host: Deepali Dewan, Senior Curator, South Asian Arts & Culture**

What happens when museum visitors understand a gallery as a sacred space, or interact with artifacts as sacred objects worthy of veneration or ritual care? In conversation with ROM curators we will tour the museum with this question in mind.

- **Reading 2**: Ka Bo Tsang and Wayson Choy, “Paradise of Maitreya” in *EOHS*, pp. 32-37.

**November 10: Fall Break: No class**

**November 17: Theme Three: Cataloguing and Augmenting the Museum ‘Experience’**

How do digital technologies transform the experience and understanding of the museum-goer? Do digital tools enable greater ‘sensory’ participation in the museum, or do they distract from appreciation of the objects in their own right?
November 24: Repatriation and the Dead
When museums house ‘human remains’ they also house a community’s ancestors. This clash of categorization has become the source of many legal battles that have dramatically changed museum practices; repatriation has become a rallying point for revitalizing communities around the world.


December 1, ROM Visit 3: Taxonomies of Religion and Museum Spaces
ROM Hosts: TBA
Cataloguing and labeling an object is a deeply cultural act that names an object and its owners. As Smith argues, religion, too, is a colonial category that defines some practices as in, and others as ‘out’. What happens when museums use “religion” as a way to define, understand, and organize objects that are, in themselves, often products of colonial religious encounters?

- Reading 2: Paine, Religious Objects in Museums, Ch. 8, “Objects Militant” and Ch. 9 “Objects Promotional”, pp. 81-100.

December 5: The Museum and its Publics: Religion, Citizenship, and the Secular
Museums are often government-funded institutions, with educational as well as public missions. In the context of a ‘secular’ public sphere, how does religion enter in to the narratives, displays, and constituencies of a public museum?

- **Reading 3:** Deborah Metsger and Charlotte Gray, “Traill Scrapbook Herbarium”, EOHS, pp. 66 – 75.

Optional additional readings (useful for assignments, especially!)