

# ARH: 4930- Aztec Art

Derek Burdette, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

University of Florida, (3 credit hours)

Room: FAC 201

Periods: T | Period 5 (11:45- 12:35 PM); R | Period 5-6 (11:45 PM - 1:40 PM)

Final exam: 5/3/2024 @ 12:30 PM - 2:30 PM

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**Course Description:** This course examines the integral role that art and architecture played in the Aztec empire (1325-1521 ce) and its immediate aftermath. We will examine the history, religion and politics of Mexico's greatest empire, while thinking critically about how the Aztecs have been re-imagined by conquistadors, archeologists and academics since the conquest. To do so, we will look at a variety of artforms, including architecture, monumental stone sculpture, manuscripts, and feather arts.

To start, we will trace the rise of the Mexica (as the Aztecs knew themselves) as a political power in the basin of Mexico, paying close attention to how the built environment and visual arts helped to bolster their growing empire. We will also look at the connections between the arts and religion, studying both major temples, ritual actions, and divinatory manuscripts that can help us understand the role of art and devotion in Mesoamerican society. Lastly, we will consider the role of writing and manuscript traditions in the Aztec world, before turning our attention to the lasting legacy of Aztec culture. Throughout the whole course, we will think reflexively about how we come to know the things we think we know. We will consider the strengths and weaknesses of archeological evidence, colonial ethnographic materials, and contemporary theoretical and nationalistic readings of historical materials. Through this process we hope to learn more about the Mexica and their lasting legacy in contemporary society.

## **Required Readings:**

There are two required textbooks for the course, as well as several chapters and articles available on our Canvas page. The textbooks are:

Brumfiel, Elizabeth and Gary Feinman eds.. *The Aztec World*. New York: Abrams, 2008. (ISBN-10: 0810972786)

Díaz, Gisele and Alan Rodgers. *The Codex Borgia*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1993. (ISBN-10: 0486275698)

## **Grading:**

- 10% Attendance and Participation
- 5% Codex Borgia Almanac Assignment
- 15% Discussion Questions
- 20% Research Project
- 25% Exam #1
- 25% Exam #2

**Attendance (10%):** Attendance is extremely important for this class, as many of our learning outcomes can only be achieved by attending class and participating fully in the lecture and discussion. You will be allowed *two* un-penalized absences, which assumes that you will need a day here or there because you are sick, etc. For each subsequent absence you will lose 2 points from the “Attendance and Participation” portion of your final grade. Excused absences still count as absences, so please plan accordingly. Also, note that excessive absences are grounds for receiving a failing grade for the class, and failure to sign in (if you are late, for example) will be counted as an absence.

**Discussion Questions (15%):** Throughout the semester you will have a series of discussion questions on Canvas (in varying formats, including discussion boards, short answer responses, perusal, etc.) that help you process the readings and materials from class lecture.

**The Codex Borgia: Almanac Research Project (5%):** For this assignment we will learn to read the basic almanacs of the Aztec/Mixtec divinatory manuscripts. We will study the divinatory almanacs in class, becoming familiar with their basic form and function. Although you will be limited in your readings by your status as a “novice,” using several supplemental resources regarding Aztec divination and religion you should be able to provide a basic reading of one single scene from the almanac (that associated with your birthday). More details regarding the assignment will be forthcoming.

**Research Project (25%):** The goal of this research project is for you to select an artwork of interest, whether touched upon in lecture or not, and explore it in much greater depth than is possible in class. Along the way, you will build your capacity to execute formal analysis, carry out art historical research (using primary and secondary sources), and analyze the social and historical significance of a visual artwork. More information will be forthcoming. Here are a couple important dates.

1. **Week 6- Feb 16. Object Selection Due on Canvas/ Presentation (5%)**
2. **Week 14- April 11. Final Paper Due (20%)**

**Exams (2 x 25% Each):** These exams are designed to evaluate your understanding of the big themes and issues raised in class, as well as the basic facts, concepts and historical realities we have learned about over the course of the quarter. At the end of

each week, I will post the lectures and key artworks from that week on canvas, and you can use those powerpoints as a guide for preparing for the test. That being said, the majority of the material on the exam will be delivered through class discussion and lecture- and so there is no substitute for attending class and taking thorough notes. The tests will include a combination of short questions regarding basic facts, image-based short answer questions (requiring you to identify the image, talk about its content, and connect it to key themes and issues discussed in class), and longer questions addressing larger themes that connect material from multiple sections of class. The tests will be offered only during the scheduled time, and absence may only be excused by a doctor's note.

### **Grading Scale**

Grades are tabulated on a 100-point scale and a letter grade is assigned as follows:

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86.5–89.4	B+	83.5–86.4	B	79.5–83.4	B-
76.5–79.4	C+	73.5–76.4	C	69.5–73.4	C-
66.5–69.4	D+	63.5–66.4	D	59.5–63.4	D-
59.4 and below	F				

If you have questions about how grade points are assigned by the University, go to: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

### **Reminders and Requirements**

**UF Requirements and Policy:** Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

**Statement Regarding the Honor Pledge:** UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Click here to read the Conduct Code. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

**Accommodations:** I, along with the rest of the University community, am working to create inclusive learning environments. Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with instructors and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester. So,

please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation as soon as possible and we can work to find a solution.

**Respect and Community:** The intent is that we explore the content of this course in a way that is respectful of diversity: gender identity, sexuality, ability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. The intent is also to present content that explores diverse points of view, which might be challenging. Maintaining a respectful environment will be our responsibility. The intent is that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course and that the diversity that the students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated.

**Changes to the Syllabus:** While this document provides guidelines for the class, I do reserve the right to change the syllabus at any time during the semester if the need arises. Each class is different, and sometimes it takes some tweaking to get the right readings, topics, and assignments. Being flexible with the syllabus allows us to get it right.

**In-Class Recording:** Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a

person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

### **Notes on Technology and Communication**

- **Communication and Respect:** We all must strive to be good communicators to make this class successful. This means listening respectfully to others in class (faculty and students) and engaging in respectful conversation. It also, perhaps just as importantly, means maintaining professional standards while communicating via email and outside of class. With that in mind, please use formal, respectful, and professional standards when corresponding via email. This means beginning emails with a formal greeting, employing proper grammar, and avoiding unprofessional colloquialisms.
- **Canvas:** Please make sure that you are familiar with our course site on Canvas so that you will have access to announcements, assignments and readings, and pptx presentations you will need for your work.
- **Course Evaluations:** Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

### **Campus Resources: Health and Wellness**

- *U Matter, We Care:* If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center:* Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- *Student Health Care Center:* Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.
- *University Police Department:* Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center:* For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.
- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services:* For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450.

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**Campus Resources: Academic Resources**

- *E-learning technical support*: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or
- via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).  
*Career Connections Center*: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance
- and counseling services.
- *Library Support*: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- *Teaching Center*: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
- *Writing Studio*: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

# Course Schedule

## **Week 1: Introduction to Class and the Aztecs**

T January 9: Class Introduction

TR January 11: Reconsidering Art History's Approach to Aztec Art  
- Esther Pasztory, "Aesthetics and Pre-Columbian Art"

## **Week 2: How to Create an "Aztec" History of Art**

T January 16: Sources and Perspectives: How to Study the Aztecs?  
- Smith, "The Aztecs of Mesoamerica," 1-29.

TR January 18: Manuscript Traditions and Mexica Histories  
- *The Aztec World*, ch. 10, Boone, "Aztec Writing and History." 179-194.  
- The Florentine Codex Online edition

## **Week 3: The History of the Mexica and Tenochtitlan**

T January 23: Migration and the Origins of an Empire  
- *The Aztec World*, ch. 1, Hicks, "Mexica Political History." 5- 21.  
- *The Aztec World*, ch. 7, Smith, "The Aztec Empire." 121-136.

TR January 25: Mexico Tenochtitlan- The City and its Society  
- *The Aztec World*, ch. 4, Sanders, "Tenochtitlan in 1519: A Pre-Industrial Megalopolis." 67- 85.  
- Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (selection)  
- <https://tenochtitlan.thomaskole.nl/> Amazing Reconstruction of the City

## **Week 4: The Templo Mayor**

T January 30: The Aztec Templo Mayor- The Center of an Empire  
- Matos Moctezuma, "Symbolism of the Templo Mayor," 185- 209.

TR Feb 1: Templo Mayor Continued  
- *The Aztec World*, ch. 8, López Austin and López Luján, "Aztec Human Sacrifice." 137- 152.  
- Dodds Pennock, "Mass Murder or Religious Homicide"

## **Week 5: Sacred Precinct and Religious Imagery**

T Feb 6: Mexica Religion and the Arts  
- Carrasco, "The Religion of the Aztecs," in *Religions of Mesoamerica*, 75-112.

TR Feb 8: Religious Imagery Continued

## **Week 6: Research Project**

T Feb 13: No In-Person Class

TR Feb 15: Research Project- Formal Analysis Workshop In Class

- **Object Selection Due on Canvas**

**Week 7: Divinatory Manuscripts and the Codex Borgia**

T Feb 20: The Aztec Calendar and Divinatory Manuscripts

- Elizabeth Boone, "Time, the Ritual Calendar, and Divination," in *Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate*, 13-32.

TR Feb 22: Codex Borgia- In Class Readings of Almanacs Activity

- Codex Borgia, Introductory text

**Week 8: Exam Prep and Coatlicue**

T Feb 27: Prepare for Exam #1

TR Feb 29: The Coatlicue Image

- Boone, "The 'Coatlicues' at the Templo Mayor, 1999" *Ancient Mesoamerica* 10 (2): 189-206.
- Klein, "A New Interpretation of the Aztec Statue Called Coatlicue," 2008

**Week 9: Coatlicue and Exam**

T March 5: The Afterlives of the Coatlicue Image

TR March 7: Exam In-Class

**Week 10: Spring Break: No Class**

**Week 11: The Tlatoani and State Propaganda**

T March 19: Monuments to the Tlatoani: The Solar Disks and the Teocalli

- Umberger, "Art and Imperial Strategy in Tenochtitlan," 85-108.

TR March 21: The Aztec Calendar Stone, New Fire Ceremony and Aztec Time

- Villela, Robb and Miller, "Introduction," in *The Aztec Calendar Stone*, 1-41.

**Week 12: Aztec Feather Arts**

T March 26: Luxury Goods in the Mexica World

- *The Aztec World*, ch. 6, Nichols, "Artisans, Markets, and Merchants." 105-120.

TR March 28: Feather Arts Continued

- Caplan, "The Living Feather"

**Week 13: Luxury Arts Continued**

T April 2: Mosaics and Gold



- Pillsbury, Joanne. "Luminous Power: Luxury Arts in the Ancient Americas." In *Golden Kingdoms*, 1–13.
- Fane, "Feathers, Jade, Turquoise and Gold," in *Images Take Flight*, 101-117.

TR April 4: No In-Person Class.

- Online Research Project Tutorial and Work

**Week 14: Aztec Arts After the Conquest**

T April 9: The Mexica *after* 1521

- *The Aztec World*, ch. 11, Rodríguez-Alegría, "The Aztecs After the Conquest." 195- 208.

TR April 11: Art after the conquest continued

- **Research Project Paper Due**

**Week 15: Contemporary Art**

T April 16: Exam #2 Preparation

TR April 18: Aztec Resonances in Contemporary Art

**Week 16: Exam #2**

T April 23: Exam #2