

Literature, Art, and Culture of Central Asia

CLC 215

Thursdays 2:10 pm and 3:35, room 316

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Guiding Questions and Objectives for the Course

This is a multidisciplinary writing intensive course that aims to explore Central Asia through the prism of Literature and the Fine Arts in order to reach a better understanding of the region, its traditions in art, and the pivotal periods of history which were particularly fruitful for the arts.

The aim of this course is to discover the highlights of contemporary works of fiction, film, and literature from the Central Asian region. The questions that this course will touch upon are the following: What are the themes and images in Central Asian works of literature and art? What do we learn from them about the way of life of Central Asia? How are these themes and images interpreted in contemporary critique? How is Central Asia shown in the works of art by writers from other regions? How are the major developments and the social and political transformation in the region represented in fiction, film, and fine arts? In what way are the works of art and literature conditioned by prevailing political, social, and cultural constraints? How do they achieve the desired effect?

Students will participate in cultural events (museum and galleries, site visits, and exhibitions) and will meet guest speakers.

Block I: Images and themes in Central Asian films

Aim: to introduce students to themes and images in Central Asian cinema and to film critique.

What is in the focus in the films? What aesthetic and social values do the films have? What audience is they aimed at? How would the films be perceived by international audience? How is your evaluation of the film different from what critics write? How does what critique state affect your initial perception of the film? How does the discussion of the film change your appreciation of the film?

Films: Kosh-ba-Kosh and Luna Papa (Bakhtiyar Khudoinazarov, Tajikistan); Beshkempir and Selkinchek (Abdykalykov, Kyrgyzstan); (Ayil Okmotu, Ernst Abdyzhaparov, Kyrgyzsatan), Rough River, Calm Sea (Marat Saralu, Kyrgyzstan), Bo-Ba-Bu (Ali Khamraev, Uzbekistan), Kite Runner (USA/Afghanistan); Needle (Nugmanov, Kazakhstan); Aksuat (Serik Aprymov, Kazakhstan); Give me some Joy, Angel (Turkmenistan).

A selection of Central Asian documentary films

Reading: Critique of Central Asian cinema (collection of articles)

Blok II: Women at the crossroads

Aim: to explore the depiction of women in Central Asian works of literature and art.

What is the female experience in Central Asia? What are the attitudes towards women and how have they been changing in modern time?

Reading: novels *Jamilla* by Chyngyz Aitmatov; *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini.
Films: Uzbek films *The Kingdom of Women* and *Orator* (Razzykov); Tajik film *Luna Papa* (Khudainozarov), Kyrgyz film *Boz Salkyn*, Turkmen film *Daughter-in-Law* and documentaries including *Bride Kidnapping* and *Men and Women*.

Art by women artists (Almagul Menlibaeva, Daria Shkorpela) and women in art.

Block III: Polyphony in prose: myths, legends, fantasy and austere realism

Aim: to look at different modes of literary narrative

Could this novel What is the role of myths in Chingiz Aitmatov's novels? What is the effect of combining myths and legends, international episodes, and stark reality of the steppe life in *The day lasts longer than a century*? Which of these components is the dominant one? Why could this novel be said to represent so-called "austere realism"? Could we discern the pathos of socialism in the novel? What makes it possible to base a novel on events of one day? What is the relation between literary and real time?

Readings: Novels and stories by Chingiz Aitmatov *The day lasts longer than a century*, *The white cloud of Genghis-Khan* and *The white steamboat*

Block IV: Challenges of new life in Central Asia at the turn of the XXI century

Aim: to identify the writers' and artists' concerns with human condition in modern Central Asia

How is socio-political transformation in Central Asia represented in works by local and foreign authors? What are the authors' concerns?

What are the new trends in art in Central Asia? Do they reflect the new realities? Do they aim to enlighten, educate or entertain?

Readings: novels *Hurramabad* by Volos and *This is not civilization* by Robert Rosenberg

Art slides and films: contemporary art; documentary films of local and foreign authors

Credit and Evaluation

In order to receive credit, students must attend class without fail (more than three unexcused absences will be grounds for X), participate in discussions, write three long essays (at least five pages each) on three out of four syllabus blocks and short writes/responses (one page long) every week, and make a project. Short writes will help students think analytically about the texts they have read, films and art slides they have viewed, and come to class better prepared for discussion. Therefore the essays should be submitted at the start of the class in which we will discuss the pertinent texts, films, and art slides. Projects will be presented at the end of the semester. If a student fails to demonstrate consistent preparation of assignments for class, he/she will be required to take a final exam. Projects will be preferably of creative nature in writing of your own, translation, or art presentation.

Students will be graded on the basis of their class participation and short writes (20% of the grade), project (20%), project (20%) and long essays (60%). Projects that demonstrate originality and significant time input will receive an additional half a grade for their course grade.

The course instructor reserve the right to change or modify the schedule as needed. Any changes will be announced during class.