Course Title: Iconic Artworks of Antiquity  
Course Code: ARTH 160  
Instructor: Diane Zuliani

Course Summary:

The ancient world may seem almost too distant and unwieldy to fathom, but large swaths of ancient history are genuinely graspable through iconic works of architecture, sculpture, and painting. The great accomplishments of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome are lucidly present in monuments made and revered by those civilizations, and this course looks at several such works with the goals of revisiting major themes and achievements of the past, pondering ideas and their evolution over time, and deepening our connection to the wisdom and humanity of our ancient forebears.

On each evening of our chronological journey, a handful of treasured artworks will be brought to life as incarnations of the social, cultural, political, and aesthetic values of the people that created them. Among the canonical objects we will discuss are the Mesopotamian Stele of Hammurabi; the Egyptian Rosetta Stone, Great Pyramids, and Temple of Karnak; Greek figural sculpture and the architecture of the Athenian Acropolis; and Roman portrait sculpture and monumental public works including the Colosseum, the Arch of Constantine, and the Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius. Though our primary focus will always center on such “icons,” lesser-known but historically important works will serve to supplement our main object lessons.

Note About Live Attendance and Recording:

These class sessions will be recorded. Recordings are intended primarily for review purposes, not as substitutes for attending the class sessions. Students taking the course for credit or a letter grade are expected to attend live class sessions.

Grade Options and Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - Join us and enjoy. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.

- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Students must attend a minimum of four live class sessions (i.e., no more than two class sessions viewed via recording).

- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - Students must attend all class sessions.
  - Students must submit a four-page essay drawing a connection between an iconic ancient artwork and some contemporary object or form (art, architecture, media, or otherwise) that you see as fulfilling an equivalent or near-equivalent social role.

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
continuingstudies@stanford.edu
650-725-2650
Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week One: Mesopotamia

The fundamental requirements of civilization are universal, and always involve pictorial communication. This was as true at the dawn of collective human societies as it is today. Tonight, we will consider several powerful examples of art created in ancient Mesopotamia to serve purposes ranging from propaganda and social control to civic cohesion and beauty. Iconic masterworks we will consider in-depth include the commanding steles of Naram-Sin and Hammurabi from the Akkadian/Babylonian periods, and fierce yet refined stone reliefs from Assyria and Persia.

Week Two: Egypt

Having developed for centuries with minimal outside influence, Egypt (Kemet) wrought highly distinctive forms of pictorial communication, which included their pictographic writing. Tonight, we will take time to appreciate several unique masterworks of architecture, sculpture, and sacred objects through which ancient Egyptians defined themselves and their fascinating worldview, beliefs and values. Iconic objects we will discuss include the Rosetta Stone, the Great Pyramids of Giza, the Temple of Karnak, and the tomb treasures of Tutankhamen.

Week Three: Greece I

Unlike Egypt, ancient Greece was a hive of cross-Mediterranean activity, and thus it developed in the path of many cultural influences. Also, the geographic diversity of its island, coastal, and inland city-states gave rise to diverse forms of government and, subsequently, diverse visual languages to evoke differing priorities. Yet despite variable influences, Greek art is always fundamentally Greek in style, meaning, and purpose, because Greek artists sought out forms of cultural expression to match a dominant—that is Athenian—Greek identity. On our first evening devoted to Greek art, we will focus on the human figure, starting with Greece’s appropriation of pharaonic statuary from Egypt, and we’ll watch the evolution of the figure as Greece itself evolved. Iconic artworks we will see include several ancient kouroi and the famous 5th century BCE Doryphoros by Polykleitos.

Week Four: Greece II

If the Great Pyramids of Egypt are the western world’s most iconic works of ancient architecture, the second most iconic must be the Parthenon of the Athenian Acropolis. Tonight, we consider this temple in-depth, including the history of its site, the aesthetics of its core design, the narratives of its ornamental sculptures and reliefs, and its role as a religious and cultural beacon that has illuminated the minds of western architects more than any other single structure in history.

Week Five: Rome I

As Greece’s conqueror, Rome hitched its already well-established native culture to those of the vast Hellenistic territory it inherited. It then fused the results together spectacularly by applying

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*
innovation and civic-mindedness to open spaces, structures, buildings, and civic zones used by all Romans, from plebian to patrician, reinforcing its citizens’ Roman-ness with every trip to the market. On our first evening focused on Roman art, we take time to appreciate Roman innovations in design and materials applied, through great financial investment, to the social infrastructure of roads, aqueducts, arenas, and piazzas, all of which were intended to be facilitators of social cohesion as well as utilitarian commons, yet through the wisdom of their execution have become iconic masterworks in their own right.

Week Six: Rome II

Rome’s maturation as an ancient super-power is well-reflected in its art and architecture. To adorn their wealthy and worldly capital, Rome’s Imperial rulers launched into prolific construction projects resulting in imposing civic structures, magnificent temples, and large-scale public art meant to propagandize their seemingly limitless reach. The Forum, the Pantheon, the Colosseum, and other structures were impressive in their own right, but they also made grand settings for equally grand imperial statuary and monuments dedicated to Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Constantine and others. Tonight, we will focus on these iconic Roman constructions in order to feel connected to the ancient Roman living in this splendid city in the period before the empire’s fall.