

Pre-Columbian Art in Middle America

Code: 100566
ECTS Credits: 6

2025/2026

Degree	Type	Year
Art History	OT	3
Art History	OT	4

Contact

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Teachers

Ana Belen Villalonga Gordaliza

Teaching groups languages

You can view this information at the [end](#) of this document.

Prerequisites

In addition to the understanding of catalan and spanish, a good reading comprehension is recommended in other modern languages.

Objectives and Contextualisation

The aim of this subject is to provide students with the theoretical and methodological tools needed to deep in their knowledge of pre-Columbian cultures in Mesoamerica, from a historical-artistic point of view. One of the first elements to be reviewed will be the concept of art understood, not from our Western aesthetic perspective, but from the point of view of Americanist studies.

The main objective is that the students learn how to identify the forms of artistic expression of the cultures that developed in Mesoamerica during the Formative periods until the conquest of America and understand how the interaction processes affected in different cultures. Finally, special emphasis will be placed on the manifestations produced in the field of visual arts and their iconographic interpretation.

Competences

Art History

- Critically analysing from the acquired knowledge a work of art in its many facets: formal values, iconographic significance, artistic techniques and procedures, elaboration process and reception mechanisms.
- Interpreting a work of art in the context in which it was developed and relating it with other forms of cultural expression.
- Recognising the evolution of the artistic imagery from the antiquity to the contemporary visual culture.
- Students must be capable of applying their knowledge to their work or vocation in a professional way and they should have building arguments and problem resolution skills within their area of study.
- Students must be capable of communicating information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialised and non-specialised audiences.

Learning Outcomes

1. Accurately defining and explaining an artistic object with the specific language of art criticism.
2. Analysing ideas about an artistic phenomenon in a given cultural context.
3. Analysing the creators of an artistic phenomenon in a specific cultural context.
4. Analysing the recipients of an artistic phenomenon in a specific cultural context.
5. Applying the iconographic knowledge to the reading of artistic imagery.
6. Connecting an artistic imagery with other cultural phenomena within its period.
7. Distinguishing the elaboration techniques and processes of an artistic object.
8. Engaging in debates about historical facts respecting the other participants' opinions.
9. Examining an artistic imagery and distinguishing its formal, iconographic and symbolic values.
10. Explaining the reception mechanisms of a work of art.
11. Identifying the artistic imagery, placing it into its cultural context.
12. Reconstructing the artistic outlook of a particular cultural context.

Content

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction to the study of pre-Hispanic art. Geographical, environmental, and cultural framework. Historical periods and cultural areas.
2. Ancient settlement of the Americas. Chronological framework and prelated challenges. Ancient and modern theories of settlement: new perspectives. Cultural areas. Americanist studies.
3. Rock art: engravings and paintings.

MESOAMERICA

4. Concept of Mesoamerica. Historical periods and cultures. The historiography of pre-Hispanic art and its sources. Concept of art and artist in pre-Hispanic Mexico. General characteristics of this art. Worldview.
5. The Formative. The village cultures of the Mexico Basin and the Olmec Culture of the Gulf. Olmec architecture (San Lorenzo, La Venta, Tres Zapotes). Sculpture: colossal heads, stelae and other reliefs. Ceramics. Dissemination and interregional contacts.
6. The Classic. Teotihuacan culture. Socio-political organization. Religion. Teotihuacán as a sacred city. Architecture of men and gods: palaces, residential complexes and temples. Painting, sculpture in stone and ceramics.
7. The splendor of the Classic and its transition to the Postclassic. Mayan culture. Socio-political organization. Religion. Periodization. Architecture: techniques, elements, typology of buildings and styles. The cities: A) Central zone (Tikal, Bonampak and Palenque) b) North zone (Chichén Itzá and Uxmal). Sculpture: materials, types and styles. Painting. Ceramics.

8. The Postclassic period. Aztec culture. Socio-political organization. Religion. Written sources. Architecture: Tenochtitlan, Tenayuca and Calixtláhuaca. Stone sculpture and reliefs. Ceramics. Minor arts and goldsmithing.
9. Representation of women in Mesoamerican art: interesectionality in society and material culture.

Activities and Methodology

Title	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Type: Directed			
Attendance at seminars and/or conferences	6	0.24	3, 4, 2, 5, 9, 8, 12, 6
Theory classes	37	1.48	3, 4, 2, 11, 5, 1, 7, 9, 10, 8, 12, 6
Type: Supervised			
Elaboration of a poster about a work of art in a gender key.	10	0.4	3, 4, 2, 11, 5, 9, 12, 6
Type: Autonomous			
Personal study	45	1.8	3, 4, 2, 11, 5, 1, 7, 9, 10, 12, 6
Writing activities focused on specialized readings.	10	0.4	3, 4, 2, 5, 1, 7, 9

Methodology

Theory classes will be led by the teacher, who will present the essential aspects of each topic orally, using PowerPoint for visual support. The content will be systematized, and recommended bibliography will be suggested to help students prepare for the exam.

In some cases, prior reading of selected texts will be required before the presentation of certain topics.

Attendance at seminars and/or conferences.

In-depth reading of texts, along with the completion of related activities, which must be submitted or discussed in class.

Independent study.

Supervised project: creation of a poster on an artwork (to be determined), approached from a gender perspective and connected to material culture and society.

Annotation: Within the schedule set by the centre or degree programme, 15 minutes of one class will be reserved for students to evaluate their lecturers and their courses or modules through questionnaires.

Assessment

Continous Assessment Activities

Title	Weighting	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
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Critical report	20%	20	0.8	3, 4, 2, 11, 5, 1, 9, 10, 8, 12, 6
Group work and oral presentation of the poster.	30%	18	0.72	3, 4, 2, 11, 5, 1, 7, 9, 12
Midterm exams (2)	50%	4	0.16	3, 4, 2, 11, 5, 1, 7, 9, 12, 6

The subject will be evaluated applying the following procedures:

* 2 Midterm exams: 50%.

* Group work and oral presentation: 30%.

* Completing assignments, reviews, summaries of conferences or seminars, and/or analytical comments on the texts: 20%.

Single evaluation

* Final test: 50%

* Preparation of papers, reviews, summaries and / or analytical comments on the texts 30%

* Critical review of a reading/lecture with a gender perspective 20%

Remarks:

At the time of each assessment activity, lecturer will inform students (Moodle) of the procedure and date of review of each test.

The student will receive the grade of "Not assessable" as long as he / she has not completed more than 30% of the assessment activities.

Use of AI: For this course, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies is permitted exclusively for support tasks, such as bibliographic or information searches, text correction, translation, or style improvement in reviews. The student must clearly identify which parts have been generated using this technology, specify the tools used, and include a critical reflection on how these tools have influenced both the process and the final outcome of the activity. Lack of transparency in the use of AI in this assessed activity will be considered a breach of academic integrity and may result in a partial or total penalty in the grade for the activity, or more serious sanctions in severe cases.

Recovery procedure

The Faculty establishes an official date for recovery during the last days of the course. Students who have opted for single assessment and students who have opted for continuous assessment can apply for this recovery

In the case of continuous assessment, students must have previously submitted each of the partial written tests. If you have not submitted to each of the marked written tests, the right to final recovery is lost. Students with the partial written tests approved can not submit to the recovery to raise note.

Recovery is only possible to pass the failed tests with a maximum grade of 6. The oral presentation or other evaluable activities that have not been presented on the date set by the teacher are excluded from the recovery process.

In the event of a student committing any irregularity that may lead to a significant variation in the grade awarded to an assessment activity, the student will be given a zero for this activity, regardless of any disciplinary process that may take place. In the event of several irregularities in assessment activities of the same subject, the student will be given a zero as the final grade for this subject. These affected evaluation activities will not be recoverable.

Bibliography

MESOAMERICA:

- ÁLVAREZ IZACA, María Isabel et al., *Estilo y región en el arte mesoamericano*. México: Instituto Investigaciones Estéticas, 2017.
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- PIÑA CHAN, Román., *Los olmecas. La cultura Madre*. Barcelona: Lunwerg, 1990.
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- TALADOIRE, Eric., *Archéologie et art précolombiens: la Mesoamérique*. Paris: École du Louvre, 1995.
- VAILLANT, George., *La Civilización Azteca*. México: F.C.E, 1980.
- VÁZQUEZ DE AGREDOS, María Luisa et al. *Art and the Senses in Ancient America: Materiality and Meaning*. Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2024.
- WESTHEIM, Paul., *Ideas fundamentales del Arte prehispánico en México*. Madrid: 1987.
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Recommendation on how to cite bibliography:

<https://www.uab.cat/web/estudia-i-investiga/com-citar-i-elaborar-la-bibliografia-1345708785665.html>

Software

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Groups and Languages

Please note that this information is provisional until 30 November 2025. You can check it through this [link](#). To consult the language you will need to enter the CODE of the subject.

Name	Group	Language	Semester	Turn
(PAUL) Classroom practices	1	Catalan	first semester	morning-mixed
(TE) Theory	1	Catalan	first semester	morning-mixed