



# The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice

By David Morgan

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**The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice** By David Morgan

"Sacred gaze" denotes any way of seeing that invests its object—an image, a person, a time, a place—with spiritual significance. Drawing from many different fields, David Morgan investigates key aspects of vision and imagery in a variety of religious traditions. His lively, innovative book explores how viewers absorb and process religious imagery and how their experience contributes to the social, intellectual, and perceptual construction of reality. Ranging widely from thirteenth-century Japan and eighteenth-century Tibet to contemporary America, Thailand, and Africa, *The Sacred Gaze* discusses the religious functions of images and the tools viewers use to interpret them. Morgan questions how fear and disgust of images relate to one another and explains how scholars study the long and evolving histories of images as they pass from culture to culture. An intriguing strand of the narrative details how images have helped to shape popular conceptions of gender and masculinity. The opening chapter considers definitions of "visual culture" and how these relate to the traditional practice of art history.

Amply illustrated with more than seventy images from diverse religious traditions, this masterful interdisciplinary study provides a comprehensive and accessible resource for everyone interested in how religious images and visual practice order space and time, communicate with the transcendent, and embody forms of communion with the divine. *The Sacred Gaze* is a vital introduction to the study of the visual culture of religions.

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### **Review**

"The Sacred Gaze is a seminal book--it goes further than anything else I know of in placing religious aspects of the field on a firm foundation of scholarship. Morgan has almost single-handedly defined the subfield of religious visual culture studies, and the present volume moves the conversation to an impressive new level."

### **From the Inside Flap**

"The work presented in this book is very important. It offers a useful bridge between art history and religious studies, opening up the insights of each to the other. By offering a workable set of analytical categories to be used in studying religious images, Morgan's excellent scholarship promises to advance the current move toward more sophisticated understandings of religious material culture by leaps and bounds."—Jeanne Halgren Kilde, author of *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America*

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"The Sacred Gaze is of fundamental importance for the relations between images and religious belief, and is a major contribution to the burgeoning field of visual studies. Morgan's wide-ranging book moves from the contested status of images between cultures, to the history of current American attitudes towards them. A notable achievement."—David Freedberg, author of *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*

"This book is a tonic. It's just what visual studies needs: a sensible, ecumenical, interdisciplinary, multicultural consideration of the place of visuality in religion, and the place of religion in all images. It should help start conversations that can go back and forth between the secularized debates of the university and the religionist discourse that still predominates outside it."—James Elkins, author of *The Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*

"David Morgan makes a compelling case for the importance of visual evidence in the study of religion, and he offers useful suggestions about how to interpret that evidence. I don't know of a better introduction to religion and visual culture."—Thomas A. Tweed, author of *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*

### **From the Back Cover**

"The work presented in this book is very important. It offers a useful bridge between art history and religious studies, opening up the insights of each to the other. By offering a workable set of analytical categories to be used in studying religious images, Morgan's excellent scholarship promises to advance the current move toward more sophisticated understandings of religious material culture by leaps and bounds."—Jeanne Halgren Kilde, author of "When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America""The Sacred Gaze is a seminal book--it goes further than anything else I know of in placing religious aspects of the field on a firm foundation of scholarship. Morgan has almost single-handedly defined the subfield of religious visual culture studies, and the present volume

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