

Contacts

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Art History
UCDAVIS

Why Study Art History?

Art History as a Discipline and as a Liberal Arts Education

Art History is the study of the visual arts in civilization. It examines changing values in all fields of visual culture, including painting, sculpture, graphics, photography, architecture, film, the mass media, and forms of popular expression. Its interdisciplinary reach encompasses literature, history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, gender studies, critical theory, and cultural studies. Like other majors in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Art History emphasizes verbal and written literacy but it provides more than the standard advantages to a liberal arts education through its unique emphasis on visual literacy.

Art History in the Real World

Like other areas in the liberal arts and social sciences, the study of art history develops critical thinking skills and the capacity to integrate the knowledge acquired through research and meaningful understanding of the world we live in. In this regard, it provides an excellent basis for careers in law, medicine, business, teaching, arts administration, museums, galleries, historic preservation, art libraries, publishing, journalism, advertising, art conservation, and art investment. The major also prepares students for advanced study in art history, architecture, museum and cultural studies. Perhaps most importantly, however, the study of art history provides the critical visual literacy necessary to successfully negotiate our increasingly global world that is evermore flooded with images and dependent upon visual imagery for reaching across historical, geographical and linguistic barriers.

Art History at UC DAVIS

The Art History Major

Students majoring in art history begin by surveying world-historical artistic developments. More specialized lecture courses and proseminars follow in Ancient, Renaissance and Baroque, Modern and Contemporary, American, the Histories of Architecture and Photography, Critical Theory, Islamic, and Chinese. Students may develop their skills in independent study; those interested in graduate study are particularly encouraged to enroll in the Art History Honors Program described below. Art History Majors further develop their sensitivity to the material conditions of artworks through studio art study and are also encouraged to complement their study with advanced work in related disciplines such as classics, religion, history, philosophy, literature, sociology, anthropology, gender studies, American studies, East Asian studies, and foreign languages.

The Art History Minor

The Art History Minor provides a concentrated grounding in visual literacy. Students begin with one lower-division survey course of their choosing and then go on to take upper-division courses across a range of areas with special focus on an area of their choosing.

The Art History Honors Program

The Art History Honors Program is a special opportunity available to students with high GPAs in the major. It is highly recommended for those considering graduate study in art history and related areas. Honors students begin with an advanced seminar and then go on to write a polished, article length study on an art-historical topic of their choosing.

Student Perspectives

Student and Alumni Perspectives on the Value of an Art History Education

We are now living in a complex visual culture, and the only way to fully understand and appreciate it is to go study the gradual development over the years.

—Joey Y. Almario, Art History Major

Upon completing my Master's in 2001, I worked in the Interactive Educational Technologies Department at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art where I researched and wrote content for award-winning multimedia programs. I subsequently held the position of Curatorial Assistant at the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for the Visual Arts at Stanford University. My responsibilities included selecting, researching, and interpreting exhibitions of modern and contemporary works in the permanent collection. Now I am Assistant Curator of New Art Trust, a foundation established by Pamela and Richard Kramlich, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Bay Area Video Coalition, San Francisco, and Tate Gallery, London.

—Anneke Voorhees, M.A., 2001

As a Ph.D. student at the University of Pittsburgh I am studying the role of tradition in the evolution of Japanese art through time, as well as in the world of contemporary Japanese diaspora artists, and specifically in how the continued implementation of iconographical imagery reveals the persistence of custom, the dominance of indigenous beliefs, and the anxiety of social interaction according to gender.

—Sara Sumpter, B.A., 2006