Major Possibilities: Art History

Quick Facts

- Students will be prepared for application to MA and PhD programs in art history, as well as for work in areas of visual arts such as arts administration or museums, and in other academic disciplines (history, philosophy, etc.)
- Art historians develop skills in doing research; conceptualizing relationships between structure, agency, and culture; combining research and analysis to present arguments with clarity and economy; knowing how to plan and carry out long-term projects; and the ability to analyze and “read” images as carriers of implicit and explicit meaning. These skills are transferable to many contexts in our ever more visually-oriented world.
- The New York Arts Program offers Art History majors the opportunity to serve as apprentices or interns during a semester in New York City, working with faculty sponsors and taking related seminars. Internships help shape professional identities, develop 21st century career-readiness skills, and make meaning of the academic experience.

Art History Major Synopsis

Art history is a humanistic discipline that investigates objects and images through stylistic analysis, study of cultural and historical contexts, and theoretical models of interpretation. The Art History major enables the student to develop visual literacy and critically to assess the complex meanings of material culture within diverse settings. To foster such understanding, Art History courses take a broadly contextual approach by situating art objects in relation to their contemporary political and historical events, such as issues of race, gender, class, and power structures, through intellectual history and aesthetic criticism. All Art History courses are "writing attentive."

Sample Occupational Areas

The skills and abilities developed through a major in Art History serve as the building blocks for a wide range of occupations and career paths. The employment outlook for graduates is competitive, but jobs are available in art publishing, art journalism, libraries, public art councils, art galleries, and companies specializing in furniture and architectural restoration. There are some entry-level jobs in museum work, but most jobs in this field require advanced degrees.

ART MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Working in art museums and galleries requires knowledge of art, not necessarily the ability to create art. The difference between art museums and galleries is that an art gallery depends upon the sales of its artwork to stay open, while art museums receive government funding and private donations in order to function.

- **Museum Technicians**, commonly known as Registrars, help curators by preparing and taking care of museum items. Registrars may also answer questions from the public and help curators and outside scholars use the collections. Registrars usually need a bachelor’s degree related to the museum’s specialty, training in museum studies, or previous experience working in museums, particularly in designing exhibits.
- **Conservators** maintain and preserve works of art and other materials. They must be knowledgeable about art methods as well as the science behind preserving and restoring art. Museums and conservation firms employ conservators, but some conservators work on a freelance basis.
- **Curators** usually work with objects of cultural, biological, or historical significance. As they direct the acquisition, storage, and exhibition of collections, they also need to negotiate and authorize the purchase, sale, exchange, or loan of these collections. In addition, they are responsible for authenticating, evaluating and categorizing the specimens in a collection. Curators oversee and help conduct the institution’s research projects and related educational programs. Today, an increasing part of a curator’s duties involves fundraising and promotion, which may include the writing and reviewing of grant proposals, journal articles and publicity materials, as well as attending meetings, conventions, and civic events.
- **Archivists** collect, organize, and maintain control over a wide range of information deemed important enough for permanent safekeeping. This information takes many forms: photographs, films, video and sound recordings, and electronic data files in a wide variety of formats, as well as more traditional paper records, letters, and documents. Archivists mainly handle records and documents that are retained because of their importance and potential value in the future.
ARTS ADMINISTRATION
Non-profit arts organizations, like most for-profit companies, have a number of administrative, business, or management functions. These roles require people with creativity and an understanding and passion for the arts, as well as skills in a range of areas from finance and marketing to education. In a small company, an administrator is likely to cover a number of functions, marketing and managing performers/audiences to handling finance and insurance. In large companies, the role may be more specific to an area such as programming, education, or sponsorship. Over the last decade, arts management has become a growing field with increasing specialization and training. A number of new graduate training and certification programs have emerged. Some arts managers, for example, suggest eventually pursuing a business degree with a specialization in nonprofit management. Almost without exception, however, arts managers advise getting work-related experience first and considering graduate study later on. If you decide to investigate graduate study, begin by asking professionals what programs they think are valuable and respected in the field.

TEACHING
Teaching positions in higher education require at least a Master’s degree (for community college) or a PhD for four-year school.

APPRAISAL
Appraisers use their knowledge of art, the market, and research skills to assess an artwork’s dollar value, usually for tax, insurance or estate planning purposes. Appraisers could work for auction houses, insurance companies, or independently.

ART CONSULTING
Art consultants (working independently or for a firm) advise clients on art acquisition, planning, and maintenance of artwork.

Sample Job Titles
Antiquarian Book Trader
Antiquities Dealer
Archivist
Architectural Conservation
Art Consultant
Art Investor
Art Journalist
Art Law/Law Enforcement
Art Librarian
Arts Organization Consultant
Auction House Employee
Corporate Curator
Curatorial Consultant
Education Manager
Event Coordinator
Gallery Assistant
Historic Interpreter
Information Specialist
Language Teacher
Museum Work / Preservation
Marketing Research Executive
Visual Resources Curator

Sample/Possible Internship Employers of SU Students
American Art Clay – Indianapolis, IN
Art Institute of Chicago
Arthouse at the Jones Center – Austin, TX
Austin Museum of Art – Austin, TX
Blanton Museum of Art – Austin, TX
Bruce Pearson, Independent Artist – New York, NY
Dougherty Arts Center – Austin, TX
Flatbed Press – Austin, TX
Ford, Powell, & Carson Architects
Galerie W – Paris, France
Kimbell Art Museum – Fort Worth, TX
Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art – Shawnee, OK
Mexic-Arte Museum – Austin, TX
Overland Partners Architects – San Antonio, TX
SU Special Collections – Georgetown, TX
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Museum of Modern Art
Tribeza Magazine Williamson Museum – Georgetown, TX
Women and Their Work – Austin, TX

Sample Full-Time Employers of SU Grads
Activity Specialist (Austin Parks and Rec, Dougherty Art Center)
Discovery Guide (Children’s Museum of Houston)
Executive Asst. to Director (Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery)
Family Programs Assistant (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston)
Gallery Assistant (Mexican American Cultural Center)
Graphic Artist (Jacobs Engineering)
Manager (Art360)
Photoarchivist (Texas State Preservation Board)
Program Assistant (Tampa Museum of Art)
Social Media & Content Marketing Coordinator (Wondercide)
Teacher (Teach For America)
Visual Resources Collection Tech (Southwestern University)