ART HISTORY MAJOR

MAJOR DESCRIPTION

The discipline of art history is object-based cultural history. It is founded on the premise that artifacts embody, reflect, and shape the beliefs and values of the persons who made, commissioned, and used them. Unlike exclusively text-based historical disciplines, art history documents and interprets changes in human society by taking works of art and other objects of material culture as its primary sources. Since these objects can only be fully understood within the social, economic, political, and religious contexts in which they were produced and used, art history further requires the critical analysis and interpretation of other historical sources to illuminate these contexts. These other sources can include written texts, archival documents, archaeology, and oral history, as well as other art forms such as music and dance. Art history, therefore, is inherently interdisciplinary.

ADMISSION TO THE MAJOR

By the end of the sophomore year, a prospective major should plan to have taken one 100-level introductory course and at least two other courses in art history. For admission to the major, the student must have at least a B average in courses taken in art history and a B average overall.

MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

To complete the major in art history, you must:

• Take one introductory course (numbered 100–199) and nine courses numbered 200 or above. The nine upper-level courses must include at least two seminars (numbered 300–399). *Tutorials for honors theses—ARHA409 and ARHA410—do not count toward the nine required courses.*

• Satisfy the requirements for your area of concentration. The art history major offers two distinct areas of concentration:

  • Concentration in the history of European, American, or African art. For this concentration, the nine upper-level courses must include at least one course in each of the four historical periods—classical, medieval, Renaissance/baroque, and modern—and at least one course in the areas of either African or Asian art.

  • Concentration in the history of Asian art. For this concentration, the nine upper-level courses must include five Asian art history courses—one of which must be a seminar—and at least one course in the European, American, or African traditions.

Additional recommendations. All art history majors are strongly urged to take at least one course in archaeology as part of the major. Students who concentrate in the history of Asian art are strongly urged to take at least one course outside the department dealing with the history or culture of premodern Asia.

For planning an art history major, please consult the Course Projections and Planning Worksheet for New Majors under Course Planning Documents on the art history program website.

One or two of the required nine upper-level courses may be relevant courses taught at Wesleyan outside the art history program in such departments as history, religion, classics, or anthropology. These courses must be preapproved by your major advisor.

GENERAL EDUCATION

Candidates for honors in art history are required to be compliant with the University’s General Education Expectations (through Stage 2).

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

The art history program faculty has set the following goals for student achievement or success in the major.

• Intercultural literacy, including knowledge of at least one foreign language and knowledge of artistic production in more than one world region.

• Visual analysis, including knowledge of a broad range of objects, as well as the ability to analyze the form of one work in depth.

• Textual analysis.

• Historical awareness, or an understanding of how a given object or set of objects relates to a culture, its history, religion, politics, and social structure.

• Methodological sophistication, including experience with more than one art historical methodology and an ability to distinguish methodological differences.

• Expository writing, or the ability to articulate and substantiate a complex argument in writing.

• Research, including the ability to identify and use primary and secondary documents.

• Originality, or the ability to define and carry out a substantial, original research project.

STUDY ABROAD

A significant number of art history majors study abroad, most commonly during the fall or spring semester of their junior year. Study abroad can be a very constructive component of an art history major especially, as it enables students to visit collections and museums in other parts of the world and to apply and deepen foreign language skills. When selecting a study abroad location, students should take into consideration their language abilities and the requirements of programs of interest. Many programs that involve language immersion require the completion of a minimum of two years of language study at the college level prior to studying abroad. While abroad, advanced students may want to use their time to identify artworks or collections that could serve as the basis for an honors thesis during their senior year. Beyond semester-long study abroad programs, students may wish to consider going abroad in the summer months, whether on a shorter length study abroad program or to undertake independent research (juniors may apply for John T. Paoletti Summer Travel Fellowships).

ADVANCED PLACEMENT

A student who has completed an Advanced Placement (AP) art history course or its equivalent while in secondary school and who has achieved a grade of 5 in the art history AP examination will be granted one AP course credit, but only after completing an intermediate-level course in art history at Wesleyan and receiving a grade of B+ or higher. Credit is not awarded for an AP score of less than 5. AP credit may not be counted toward the completion of major requirements.
LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

Because English represents a minority language in art history, majors are required to demonstrate proficiency in at least one foreign language. Proficiency is defined as a minimum of two full years of study at the college level, or the equivalent, as measured by a placement test administered by the language department in question. German, French, and Italian are normally considered the most valuable for study in the discipline. Students concentrating in the history of Asian art may use a relevant Asian language to satisfy the language requirement.

PRIZES

Alumni Prize in Art History. Awarded to a senior who has demonstrated special aptitude in the history of art and who has made a substantive contribution to the major.

Beulah Friedman Prize. This prize recognizes work of outstanding achievement by a student in the history of art. The prize is awarded to seniors.

John T. Paoletti Travel Research Fellowships in Art History. Funds are available to support student research and travel in the summer following the junior year that will result in a senior thesis project. Paoletti Travel Research Fellowships are intended for advanced students who have demonstrated a commitment to art historical study and a strong aptitude for writing and research.

TRANSFER CREDIT

A minimum of five courses within the major must be taken at Wesleyan. All study abroad must be preapproved by the Office of Study Abroad (to receive Wesleyan credit) and by the student’s major advisor (to receive credit toward the major requirements). Courses at other educational institutions in the United States must also be preapproved by the student’s major advisor. In both cases, transfer of major credit will be awarded only if the student submits a course description and detailed syllabus in advance of taking the course. Preapproved credits for study abroad or courses taken at other U.S. institutions can be used to satisfy the 200-level electives for the major but may not count toward the geographical and/or chronological distributional requirements. Transfer students should consult with the art history program director for further information.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Students interested in pursuing museum internships may apply for education-in-the-field credit. To be approved, the internship must involve work that is the equivalent in intellectual content and rigor to a Wesleyan art history course, as demonstrated in substantive research and writing. Students are expected to provide a description of the project(s) they will be working on and the name of their supervisor, who will coordinate the project with an on-campus advisor. Students also must provide examples of the work they did when they return to campus before credit is given. Note, too, that the University charges additional tuition for education-in-the-field credits taken in the summer or while on an authorized leave of absence during the academic year.

HONORS

The honors program in art history is designed to meet the needs of art history majors who wish to pursue a long-term scholarly research project in an area of particular interest. The research project takes the form of a yearlong senior thesis. Candidates for honors are required to earn a minimum GPA of B+ for their major coursework and to be compliant with the University’s General Education Expectations through Stage 2. The senior thesis does not replace the two required seminar courses. Students wishing to consider an honors project must discuss their research interests with a member of the art history faculty and secure the professor’s agreement to serve as tutor for the project by the last day of classes of the student’s junior year. After consulting with the tutor, the student is expected to carry out preliminary research during the summer and is required to submit a detailed proposal and preliminary bibliography for the project by the first day of classes of the fall term of the senior year. Students who fail to meet these minimum requirements will not be allowed to pursue honors. The senior thesis courses for honors in the major are ARHA409 (fall) and ARHA410 (spring).

Senior theses must conform to the University’s general requirements and deadlines for honors in the senior year, as administered through the honors coordinator. Each year’s honors candidates will present 20-minute public talks based on their theses. These talks will normally be held in April of the senior year and will be developed in consultation with the students’ faculty tutors. For more information and an application form, see the document “Honors in Art History: Regulations and Procedures” also available in the department office.

CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE

The honors program in art history serves as the capstone experience for the major.