ART HISTORY MAJOR

MAJOR DESCRIPTION

The Art History program aims to provide student majors with a strong historical and theoretical understanding of the visual and material environment created by humankind. Art history is founded on the premise that artifacts embody, engage, and shape the beliefs and values of the persons, groups, and societies who made, commissioned, and used them. Students will learn to document and interpret changes in human society by taking works of art and other objects of material culture as their primary sources. They will also critically analyze and interpret written texts to help reconstruct and illuminate the contexts—social, economic, political, philosophical, and religious—in which artifacts were produced, used, and understood.

The study of art history around the world requires knowledge of both objects and languages, including foreign languages and traditional and recent theoretical languages pertaining to cultural production. To this end, courses in the program present students with a wide variety of analytical tools that span established methods of formal, stylistic, historical, and iconographical analysis as well as newer post-structuralist approaches and critical theories of race, gender, and socioeconomic relations. Students also have opportunities to cultivate skills in archaeological and spatial approaches to the discipline, including such digital platforms as GIS.

A major in art history prepares students to pursue a variety of professional goals. Our graduates have built successful careers in higher education, museum work, the art market, architectural history and practice, urban planning, landscape architecture, historic preservation, publishing, cultural property law, and other fields.

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

For the graduating classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021, click on the following link for ARHA major requirements [https://www.wesleyan.edu/art/arthist/form/MAJOR_REQUIREMENTS_for_2019-2020-2021.pdf].

For the classes of 2022 onward, please see the requirements below.

A minimum of 10 courses is required for the art history major, all of which must be taken on a graded basis. These include a one-credit introductory course (numbered in the 100 range), seven intermediate and advanced courses (numbered in the 200 and 300 ranges, distributed as outlined below), and two elective courses. The design of the major’s requirements ensures that students gain geographic breadth and historical depth, while having the opportunity to define their own interests and to chart their own path through the major.

Students complete an introductory course (numbered in the 100 range). There are two ways to satisfy this requirement: a survey course that introduces a broad range of artworks over an extended time span, or a writing-intensive course whose topic is more focused. The following link provides a list of introductory course offerings [https://www.wesleyan.edu/art/arthist/form/ACTIVE_ARHA_2022.pdf]

Student majors complete seven intermediate and advanced courses (numbered in the 200- and 300 range, respectively) that together fulfill the following geographic and historical requirements:

Students complete courses in four of the five geographic areas:

- The Americas
- Europe
- East Asia
- South Asia
- Africa

And they elect courses in three of the four following historical periods and categories:

- Ancient
- Medieval
- Early Modern
- Modern

Any single course may be counted toward only one of these area or period requirements. The following link provides a list of courses currently offered and the categories they may fulfill [https://www.wesleyan.edu/art/arthist/form/ACTIVE_ARHA_2022.pdf]

Two of these seven courses must be seminars (numbered 300 or above), which foster more advanced skills in reading, writing, and independent research. These courses often include some mix of regular presentations, collaborative learning, and/or a substantial research paper.

The introductory course and all seven of the courses satisfying historical period and geographic area requirements must be taken at Wesleyan.

The remaining major course requirement is two electives, which allows students to pursue their own commitments within art history. Electives may be drawn from additional art history courses or those cross-listed with art history; art history courses taken abroad or classes in cognate fields, such as anthropology, archaeology, art studio, CEAS, FGSS, film, foreign languages, history, music, religion; social, cultural, or critical theory; sociology; and/or urban studies. Students carefully select these elective courses in consultation with their major advisor. In order for these electives to count as courses towards the art history major, they must be petitioned—ideally prior to enrollment—and approved by the major advisor.

In order to become conversant in art history as a global practice, students must 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. Up to two courses in a foreign language may count as electives towards the art history major. German, French, and Italian are normally considered the most useful for the study of European art. Students concentrating in the history of Asian art are encouraged to study a relevant Asian language. Other languages may be relevant depending on a student’s course of study. For those languages not formally taught at Wesleyan, there are alternative ways of studying them, developed through the Center for Global Studies. See wesleyan.edu/cgs/ [https://www.wesleyan.edu/cgs/]

For knowledge of critical theories, students are encouraged to consider ARHA courses as well as those in other disciplines linked to Wesleyan’s Social,
Ten courses is the minimum number required for the art history major. To take full advantage of the program, students are encouraged to take more than the 10 required courses and/or to pursue honors projects in art history.

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

Art history majors acquire the following skills, which will serve them in their coursework as well as in their careers beyond Wesleyan:

- Visual analysis, including knowledge of a broad range of objects and places, as well as the ability to analyze in-depth the form, materials, and meanings of specific works, buildings, and sites.
- Textual analysis, including close reading of primary and secondary sources in both historical and theoretical genres.
- Historical awareness, or an understanding of how a given object, building, or site relates to the culture(s) that produced them, including their history, religion, politics, philosophies, and social structures.
- Intercultural literacy, including proficiency in at least one foreign language and knowledge of artistic production in several world regions.
- Methodological sophistication, including experience with more than one art historical methodology and knowledge of critical theories.
- Expository writing, or the ability to articulate and substantiate a complex argument in writing.
- Research, including how to formulate a research question and relevant methodology as well as to locate, read, and evaluate appropriate sources.
- Originality, or the ability to think independently and create new knowledge.

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

In order to become conversant in art history as a global practice, students must 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. Up to two courses in a foreign language may count as electives towards the art history major. German, French, and Italian are normally considered the most useful for the study of European art. Students concentrating in the history of Asian art are encouraged to study a relevant Asian language. Other languages may be relevant depending on a student’s course of study. For those languages not formally taught at Wesleyan, there are alternative ways of studying them, developed through the Center for Global Studies. See wesleyan.edu/cgs/ (https://www.wesleyan.edu/cgs).

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 courses 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 submit syllabi (including a list of course meetings, readings, and assignments) to the Art History Program Director for courses they wish to petition to count for the art history major or minor.

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

Students seeking honors in art history undertake an independent, two-semester research project under the guidance of a faculty advisor, which results in a senior thesis. This project offers qualified students a unique experience to formulate a research question, master the relevant literature, and make an original contribution to the field, all under the guidance of a faculty tutor who has expertise in the topic. Students pursuing senior theses enroll in a two-semester tutorial (ARHA 409/410).

A successfully completed honors thesis demonstrates an ability to identify an original question, propose a research methodology, and work independently to achieve a significant outcome. These are skills that are very much in demand across a variety of professions.

Our graduates who have gone on to pursue postgraduate degrees in fields distant from art history (whether in law, medicine, or business) have found an honors thesis to be the most meaningful and significant part of their academic career. An honors thesis is particularly suited to students who are considering graduate studies in the humanities or related fields. The demonstrated ability to successfully complete a yearlong independent research project comprises the single most important component of an application to an MA or PhD program.

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).

Students wishing to consider an honors project should begin discussing ideas with relevant faculty tutors towards the beginning of the spring semester of their junior year. In order to receive full consideration, students must submit an application (linked below), which is due on the third Friday of February. Applications to write senior theses include the following information:

- A brief description of up to three possible topics (1 paragraph each)
- A list of up to three possible advisors who have indicated a preliminary willingness and availability to serve as tutors. Students are expected to have taken at least one course with any requested faculty tutors. A preliminary agreement to serve as tutor is not a guarantee.
- Relevant coursework related to the research topics

Faculty advisors will be assigned to students based on student interest and faculty availability; submitting an application does not guarantee that a thesis project will be approved. Assignments will be announced by the end of the first week of March.

After receiving their tutor assignment, thesis writers are expected to carry out preliminary research during the summer after their junior year and are required to submit a detailed proposal and preliminary bibliography for the project by the first Monday after classes start during the fall term of the senior year.

Juniors who have research projects that necessitate travel may apply for a Paoletti Research Travel Grant in March of their junior year to fund thesis research and travel over the summer before their senior year. See wesleyan.edu/art/arthist/travel_fellowships.html.

In addition to conforming to the University’s general requirements and deadlines for honors, candidates in art history participate in a senior colloquium that meets in October and February and culminates in April in “senior talks,” 20-minute public presentations based on students’ completed theses.

For more information and an application form, see the document "Honors in Art History: Regulations and Procedures," available in the department office and via download:

Honors in Art History: Regulations and Procedures (https://www.wesleyan.edu/art/arthist/form/honors_regulations_procedures.pdf)

Honors Evaluation Procedures (https://www.wesleyan.edu/art/arthist/form/honors_evaluation_procedures.pdf)

Honors Application (https://www.wesleyan.edu/art/arthist/form/honors-app.pdf)

CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE

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