

Art History

Program Overview

We live in a world defined by images. Art History helps us to understand our visual world and to probe the complexities of images, objects, and artifacts found in art and culture. Through the methods and concepts of art history, students learn the 'visual' language of images as they acquire knowledge and understanding of all forms of visual arts ranging from earliest cave paintings to latest new media installations, from monumental to miniature.

Using diverse approaches and theories, art is critically analyzed in the larger social, cultural, economic, institutional, and ideological context of its production, display, and reception. As students engage with works of art and key texts in art history, theory, and criticism, they develop visual as well as verbal and written literacy. Art History fosters creative and critical thinking, inquiry, analysis, and effective communication skills.

In its cross-disciplinary reach, Art History is a unique and wide-ranging discipline that encompasses aspects of history, philosophy, religion, psychology, sociology, gender studies, and cultural studies. Cognate courses with the department of Classical Studies and cross-listed courses with the departments of Sociology and History are offered to broaden the students' conceptual horizons.

While our program is primarily designed to meet the needs of Fine Arts and Arts Administration students, we welcome students from all disciplines to the many courses that do not have prerequisites.

Program and Requirements

Minor in Art History and Theory (24 credits)

MINFHT

The Art History and Theory Minor is for students in any discipline who, in addition to their major concentration, wish to develop a secondary area of expertise in art history. The Minor allows students to sample from the courses offered through the Art History Program: introductory, period-based, thematic, and advanced courses. Students must complete any 24 credits (8 courses) of their choice in Art History (FIH) or cross-listed courses (FIN 235, FIN 292 and FIN 388), or cognate courses, including a minimum of 2 FIH credits at the 300 level.

List of Courses

Introduction Courses (100-level courses)

FIH 100 The Art of Viewing: Introduction to Art History 3-3-0

This course is for any student interested in looking at, thinking about, and understanding works of art and visual media in general. We look at various mediums, ranging from painting and sculpture to video, performance, and Net art. We think about world art in relationship to Western thought and culture, the canon of traditional art history that has shaped our perception, and explore alternative histories of art. We reflect on the circulation, transmission, and display of art through private and public patronage, collections, and exhibitions. We consider the social and material conditions of viewing, and how mediums and social determination condition visual understanding. Finally, we seek to understand the possible content or meaning of art through different methods of interpretation. Overall, the course aims to provide students with the visual, verbal, and conceptual skills fundamental to the description, appreciation, analysis, and criticism of the visual media.

FIH 101 Survey of Western Art I: Prehistory to Medieval 3-3-0

Introduction to concepts and methods of art history. Survey of the visual arts from the Paleolithic Era through the Middle Ages.

FIH 102 Survey of Western Art II: Renaissance to Neoclassicism 3-3-0

This course explores the classical tradition and its developments in painting, sculpture and architecture from the co-called rebirth of Greco-Roman Antiquity in the early 15th century to the revival of classicism in the mid-18th century. Religious and secular key works from the Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo and Neoclassicism are studied in the changing social, cultural and political contexts of their production, such as humanism, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the academy, absolute monarchies, and the Enlightenment.

Intermediate Period-Based Courses (200-level courses)

FIH 219 Neoclassicism to Post-Impressionism 3-3-0

This course examines major developments in painting, sculpture and photography. Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Orientalism, Realism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Symbolism are considered within the broad cultural context of their production, display and reception. The effects of the tumultuous political circumstances of social unrest and the Industrial Revolution will be observed from the mid-19th to the mid-19th century, when art emerged as a politically-engaged, publicly-oriented force, until the end of the century, when artists retreated to a private, subjective realm.

FIH 220 Twentieth-Century Art to the Sixties 3-3-0

Western art from Expressionism to Abstract Expressionism. Major European movements (such as Cubism, Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Constructivism) and American ones (from the Ashcan School to the New York School) will be studied. Topics include the paradigms of figuration and abstraction, innovations such as collage and photomontage, the contribution of literary movements, appropriations from non-Western cultures, and the influences of Freudian and Jungian theories, socialist ideas, the Russian Revolution, totalitarian regimes, and two World Wars on artists.

FIH 221 Art from the 1960s to the end of the Twentieth-Century 3-3-0
The international art scene from the 1960s to today. Topics include Pop art, French Nouveau Realism, Minimal art, Italian Arte Povera, Conceptual Art and the International Fluxus movement from the sixties; the pluralistic seventies – when performance, video, Body Art, Land art, installation and Feminist art seemed to proclaim the ‘death’ of painting; the drastic return of painting by the eighties (with Neo Expressionism, Bad Painting, Graffiti art, etc.), and some of the challenges linked to the globalization of art in the nineties.

Intermediate Thematic Courses (200-level courses)

FIH 225 Special Topic in Canadian Art 3-3-0
This course deals with aspects, issues or themes in Canadian art ranging from the colonial times to the present. Possible topics include the art of the First Nations, the legacy of the early French and English settlers, national identity and cultural diversity, or recent developments in the visual arts of Canada.

FIH 230 History and Theories of Photography 3-3-0
An exploration of the changing nature of photographic thinking and practice from early 19th century experiments to present day digital and post-photography. Different visions and modes of representation are addressed, such as photographic ‘truth’, photography as art, and photography as a means of mass communication (i.e. photojournalism, advertising, fashion and celebrities photographs, propaganda, etc.). In light of its multiple functions in art and culture, the photographic image is studied as part of a larger social, economic, institutional and ideological frame.

FIH 260 Art and Nature: From Landscape to Posthumanism and the Anthropocene 3-3-0
This course analyses how the relationship between art and nature has been shaped by aesthetic and symbolic representations through time and across art paradigms. This course addresses early garden traditions up to posthumanist futures, by way of the emergence naturalism during the Renaissance, conventions of the beautiful, the picturesque and the sublime, landscaping practices, the active sculpting of nature in Earthworks and Land Art, and the ecosystemic views brought forth in eco art.

FIH 290 Current Topics in Art History 3-3-0
This course explores issues of current importance in the practice and interpretation of art, such as: Art and Science; Art and Technology; Philosophy and Criticism of Art; Women and Art; Gender Issues in the Visual Arts; and Art and Politics. Specific topic to be posted in advance of registration

Advanced Courses (300-level courses)

FIH 320 Special Topic in Art History and Theory 3-3-0
This course will address an aspect, issue or theme in art from a multidisciplinary approach to a specific medium or time period ranging from the antiquity to the present, or across time, artistic styles and movements. Possible topics include: Issues in Sculpture, Performance, or Video Art; Art in the Digital Age; Relational Practices and their shortcomings; Art’s Shifting Boundaries from Discipline to Extradisciplinary.

Prerequisites: FIH 100, FIH 102, and two FIH 200-level courses

FIH 323 Seminar in Art History, Theory and Criticism of Art 3-3-0
Advanced course that explores in-depth a topic in art history, theory or criticism of art. Specific topics to be posted in advance of registration.

Prerequisites: FIH 100, FIH 102, and two FIH 200-level courses

FIH 350 Independent Study in Art History I 3-0-0
Open to students who have completed 27 credits in Art History. Students must submit a formal proposal to the art history program outlining a project to be undertaken independently in consultation with the instructor. Approval is contingent on acceptance of the proposed project or course of research.

Prerequisites: two FIH 300-level courses.

Cross-Listed Courses

FIN 235/HIS 225 Museology 3-3-0
An introduction to theoretical and practical aspects of museology. The history and function of art museums, collection and conservation, museum administration and the organization of exhibitions are treated in the course, which includes projects in exhibition management.

Prerequisite: FIH 100 or FIH 102 or consent of instructor

FIH 246/ HIS 236 Public Art and Monuments 3-3-0
An exploration of art made for public spaces and public viewing taking into consideration aspects such as site, natural environment or urban settings, commemoration and politics, the public sphere and the audience.

FIN 292 / SOC 291 Sociology of Art 3-3-0
An introduction to the Sociological study of the Arts. The course focuses on the social practices and organizational frameworks related to artistic production/creation, mediation processes, and the reception of art works and artists. Attention will be given to issues related to race, gender, class, and power.

FIN 388 / HIS 298 Museums and Communities 3-3-0
This inter-disciplinary lecture/seminar course offers students an introduction to a range of theoretical approaches and contemporary developments in the field of Museology. Through case studies and actual work with community groups students will have the chance to experiment with key processes around critical museum work today (rational, documentation, mediation, scenography).
Prerequisite: FIH 100 or FIH 102 or consent of instructor

Cognate Courses

CLA 110 The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Egypt 3-3-0
A survey of the art and architecture of ancient Egypt from the Pyramids to the Valley of the Kings and an introduction to the archaeological discoveries made in Egypt in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

CLA 205 Greek Art and Architecture 3-3-0
Western art and architecture begin in ancient Greece. From miniature vases to monumental statues of ivory and gold, we will explore the creations of potters and painters, sculptors and architects, and study Greek art from the Bronze age to the time of Alexander the Great.
Open to first-year students.

CLA 206 / RSC 203 Early Christian and Byzantine Art 3-3-0
This course examines the ways in which the Christians adapted elements from Greek, Roman and Near Eastern art and architecture to their religious beliefs and requirements and also studies the development of this new Christian art in the Byzantine Empire. Major topics include: Catacomb art, early Christian and Byzantine architecture, mosaic and painting, manuscript illuminations, textiles and the minor arts.

Open to first-year students.

CLA 207 Early Roman Art 3-3-0
In this course we will begin with a study of the colorful wall paintings of Etruscan tombs where men and women drink and dance, and panthers and lions guard the dead. Once rulers of Rome, the Etruscans and their art declined as the Roman Republic grew powerful. We will examine how the Romans developed an innovative art and architecture which expressed the values of their society.

CLA 208 Art and Architecture of Imperial Rome 3-3-0
A survey of Roman art and architecture from the first century C.E. to the fourth century C.E. The course examines the use of art as propaganda and the tension between tradition and innovation in Roman Art.

LIB 213 The Use and Abuse of Beauty 3-3-0
French writer Stendhal said in the 19th century that “beauty is the promise of happiness” and, upon seeing the beauty of Florence, he wondrously proclaimed, “I was in a sort of ecstasy... absorbed in the contemplation of sublime beauty ...Everything spoke so vividly to my soul.” Yet only decades later his compatriot, poet Arthur Rimbaud, claimed that he wanted to “abuse” beauty, for he found her “bitter.” Dadaist and surrealist artist Tristan Tzara went even further, “I have a mad and starry desire to assassinate beauty...” Does Tzara signal not only a dramatic change in Western art, but the claim that all forms of harmony and beauty, including the personal and the political, are conservative. Or is the beautiful in some important sense still of what we might call “transcendent” importance to human life? This course will explore the fate of the beautiful, from the Greeks to 21st century life.

PHI 346 Topics in The Philosophy of Art 3-3-0
A look at some attempts by major thinkers to account for the nature of art and beauty, focusing on texts of Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger.