Art History at the University of Chicago

Art History

Major, Minor, Core Offerings, and Electives
Students interested in the study of art and architecture are supported in the Department of Art History at the University of Chicago, which offers:

- Core Classes meeting the general education requirements in the “Art Music Drama Core”
- Elective classes on particular subjects in art and architectural history plus Design Studio classes
- Art History major with a focus on art or architecture
- Art History minor
- Architectural Studies minor

Art and architectural history courses teach students to analyze the visual and sensual evidence found in diverse works of art, architecture, design, and material culture across different historical periods and cultures. By honing skills of close looking, description, interpretation, and the judicious use of historical sources, art history offers tools and methods for understanding a world saturated by visual media while grounding our understanding of artistic production in varied social and cultural contexts.
Art and architectural history at the University of Chicago distinguishes itself with classes that are:

**Global**
Our classes encompass art and architecture produced and consumed all around the world, in many times and places. Courses span five continents, as our historical strengths in Asian, European, and North American art have expanded to include Latin American and Islamic art, as well as the relations between these and other geographical areas traditionally treated in isolation. Art history faculty regularly teach Core classes offered in the University's study abroad programs, for example in Barcelona, Beijing, Oaxaca, Paris, and Rome.

**Interdisciplinary**
Art history is an interdisciplinary and thus quintessentially UChicago discipline. Students are encouraged to apply and share their related skills and interests, from foreign languages and literatures, history, economics to chemistry, physics, and molecular engineering in our two annual Suzanne Deal Booth conservation classes.

**Object-driven**
Original works of art, buildings, and sites weave through our curricular fabric. Students have access to: internships in local or campus art institutions; the annual Gold Gorvy Traveling seminars and others classes held abroad, courses taught by museum curators, classes meeting in the local built environment of our campus and the city of Chicago, and seminars taught in local collections such as the Smart Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Field Museum of Natural History, and the Newberry Library.
Core Classes

There are three kinds of courses in art history that fulfill the General Education requirement in Art, Music, and Dramatic Arts, but all share a common goal: to help students develop skills in the perception, comprehension, and interpretation of art and architecture.

Art History 101 is a general introduction to art team-taught by a group of faculty members. It addresses materials from a broad and changing range of genres, periods and traditions. Emphasis is less on any particular historical context than on building skills in perceiving and thinking about works of art and architecture as culturally meaningful objects.

Art History Surveys (numbered 14000 through 16999) focus on the art of a single broad but well-defined period, place, or tradition. These courses involve sustained attention to the cultural or historical context of works of art, usually covering a period of centuries in the history of a given tradition.

Art in Context courses (numbered 17000 through 18999) approach the broad issues of the Core by focusing on specific, local cases within the context of larger global issues. These courses relate art and architecture to their immediate historical settings—inTELlectual, cultural, economic or stylistic—the better to understand their specific achievements and significance.
All courses typically encourage the close analysis of particular works of art or architecture, explore the range of questions and methods appropriate to the explication of a given period, culture, genre, or medium, and critically examine the methods of the historical study of art and architecture. In addition, all courses foster in students the ability to translate their skills and understanding into verbal expression, both oral and written. Course requirements often include critical writing assignments, collaborative projects, and direct encounters with original works of art or architecture, and may also include a midterm and/or final exam.
**Major and Minor in Art History**

Each student develops a course of study tailored to his or her interests, building a Special Field shaped by geographical, chronological, or thematic questions. Examples include such topics as medieval and Renaissance art, studies of the built environment, materials and conservation of modern art, and race and ethnicity in art. The basic components of the major concentration are: a Special Field, devised in consultation with departmental instructors and the Director of Undergraduate Studies; a distribution of courses outside the special field; at least two research papers in art history (emerging from ordinary coursework in the department); and a third-year seminar on art-historical methods and issues. Fourth-year students who wish to pursue honors in the major conduct independent research on a topic of their own devising, producing a BA Paper with the guidance of a faculty member and a graduate course assistant. Minors in art history take a total of 6 upper level courses and write one research paper as part of one of those courses.

**Minor in Architectural Studies**

The interdisciplinary minor in Architectural Studies equips students to analyze the form and changing history of the built environment through a combination of coursework in art history with up to four courses on architectural or urban topics offered in any department. Courses on architectural history are complemented by architectural design studios that enable students to explore the creative and critical potential of design techniques and methods, providing an invaluable perspective on why buildings and cities take the forms they do. This is the only university program that focuses on designing and analyzing buildings as material, three-dimensional, culturally meaningful environments. See the separate brochure for more information on the University’s offerings in urban architecture and design.
The unique combination of skills that art history teaches—visual analysis and its written expression—are valuable to any future career. Not limited to academia, these include curatorial, educational, preservation, conservation, and development work in museums and other non-profit art institutions; positions in municipal planning and cultural departments as well as design firms and environmental organizations; and entrepreneurial paths in galleries and auction houses. University of Chicago art history students have gone on to work in these institutions but have also pursued careers in architecture, conservation science, preservation, finance, consulting, advertising, law, and medicine.

The Department of Art History and the University provide a number of resources, including a robust internship program, to help students gain professional experiences and launch a career. The Department of Art History offers paid annual summer internships at Christie’s auction house in New York City and in the Art Institute’s Conservation and Conservation Science Department. Our Visual Resources Center offers several paid internships for VRC Fellows/Jeff Metcalf Interns, providing training in digital image processing, image research, and digital archives. The Smart Museum of Art offers many internships under the mentorship of curators and staff in education, registration, installation, development, and conservation.
The Department of Art History and the College Center for Research and Fellowships have collaborated to establish a series of Undergraduate Research Associate positions in local area institutions. These positions are mentored jointly by a faculty member and a curator and can extend from one quarter to a whole calendar year.

As part of Career Advancement, UChicago Careers in Journalism, Arts, and Media (UCIJAM) provides essential professional development opportunities to help students launch successful careers in these fields. Internships, fellowships, employment opportunities, and alumni networks take UChicago students across the country and around the globe, allowing them to develop intellectually and culturally outside the classroom as professionals and pursue opportunities in a wide variety of disciplines. Art history students have interned or worked in local museums such as the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Field Museum, in prestigious institutions in other major cities such as the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and in numerous galleries, non-profit institutions, or architectural firms.