

# Art History: A Study Guide

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## What is art history?

It is the study of the vast and inclusive category of what we have come to call art. Art history students and faculty don't make art; they spend a lot of time looking at it and thinking about how and in what circumstances it was made. VPHA46 makes clear to you the approaches to art history that are currently important.

Art history at UTSC focuses on the global and contemporary, but also gives you a solid grounding in approaches to art and the visual across time, cultures, classes, gender, and geography. Students at UTSC regularly go beyond the university's walls to experience art for themselves and also through the eyes of art world practitioners in art world spaces.

## The programs:

Art history represents a great diversity of perspectives, time periods, and places. You will find that the major and minor programs are not progressions of required courses, as programs in the sciences tend to be, but rather matrices that begin with study of approaches and methods and go on to offer opportunities to develop breadth, explore individual interests, and hone your research and visual skills. The major program includes guidelines to ensure that you take advantage of the global range of art history courses at UTSC.

Important program planning details:

- 1) A student may use any version of a program that is or has been in existence during her or his years at UTSC.
- 2) A university rule prohibits students from taking for credit any course that is a specific prerequisite to a course already taken.
- 3) Some St. George or U of T Mississauga courses may be exclusions of U of T Scarborough courses and *vice versa* although the calendars for those campuses do not say so.
- 4) Not all courses are offered every year.

Please check with your Program Director if you have any questions about anything related to art history programs and to your interests in the field!

## The courses:

The A level in art history serves at least two main audiences: students who wish to go on to take further art history, curatorial, and/or studio courses, and those who might only take this single course but who want fundamental knowledge and tools to enhance a life-long interest in visual art. VPHA46 Ways of Seeing: Introduction to Art Histories is constructed and taught with this dual audience in mind.

B-level art history courses provide basic knowledge of artists and works of art, and of the social and cultural contexts that enable artistic production and reception. A number of these courses have no prerequisites, and are designed to accommodate students from other programs as well as art history program students. The B-level courses offer opportunities to see the diverse ways in which the discipline breaks its subjects down into fields, issues, themes, and methodologies. Faculty may introduce students to the specific areas and practices of research in which they themselves are engaged, and since these areas and practices are partly defined by the larger practices of art history, the dynamics by which art history sees itself are revealed. Some B-level courses have a strong gallery and museum focus, providing a window onto institution practices and more importantly, offering many opportunities to spend time with original works of art.

C-level art history courses often operate as seminars, and students learn quickly that their own level of participation will help determine how well they do and how much they gain from their experience. Usually these courses have small class sizes with tightly focused topics and intensive research opportunities. Students really begin here to develop their theoretical knowledge, competence at independent research, and ways of communicating results. Some C-level courses are based on work in galleries and museums.

D-levels: these courses are research-intensive and writing-intensive, and may also have a strong gallery and museum component. While the C-level courses help students to build competence in independent research, the D-levels offer them opportunities to hone these skills, possibly in preparation for graduate work. D-level courses are critical for students interested in graduate study or employment in an art history-related field.

## **Effective art historical study and research:**

It is a given that much research today uses digital methodologies and materials. At the same time, real research doesn't come from Wikipedia or Google! To any serious U of T student, real research means taking advantage of the wonderful online *and print* material to which your UTOID gives you instant access. Some of the best general online resources for art history are:

The UT LIBRARIES site (<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/home/>), which not only gives you catalogue information about the millions of books and journals in U of T libraries or licensed by the University for online use, but also offers lots of useful research tools. Glance through the links entitled "Research," "Services," and "Students" on the home page. Paulina Rousseau, the UTSC librarian responsible for arts subjects, will help you to do searches ([http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/utsc\\_vpa](http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/utsc_vpa)). Of course, your art history instructors will also be able to suggest sources in their fields of study.

FADIS, the Federated Academic Digital Imaging System (<http://fadis.library.utoronto.ca>). This superb image database is easily searched by artist, title, and various keywords.

ARTstor (<http://simplelink.library.utoronto.ca/url.cfm/56985>), which has more than a million images.

ART FULL TEXT, a database of articles from important international art journals ([http://main.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRdetail.cfm?Resources\\_ID=453134](http://main.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRdetail.cfm?Resources_ID=453134)).

OXFORD ART ONLINE

([http://main.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRdetail.cfm?Resources\\_ID=122734](http://main.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRdetail.cfm?Resources_ID=122734)), which includes Grove Art Online, an amazing scholarly encyclopedia of art, the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms, and much more.

Some excellent books on iconography (subject matter) in art:

Helene E. Roberts, *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: themes depicted in works of art* (at UTSC Library reference desk)

Diana L. Eck, *Darshan: seeing the divine image in India* (may be borrowed from Pratt Library on the St. George campus)

Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *Dictionary of Christian Art* (in Robarts reference)

*Cassell Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (UTSC Library reference desk)

## Writing about art:

It's about good writing, period, and not about being "academic." Basic good writing is something you should come to expect of yourself, and good writing begins with an understanding of the structures of the language.

Gerald Nelson's *English: An Essential Grammar*

([http://main.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRdetail.cfm?Resources\\_ID=434539](http://main.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRdetail.cfm?Resources_ID=434539)) is a brief, clear interactive guide.

If you are still learning English, this guide will be a constant help, and if you are a native speaker, you might keep in mind that most of us need to refresh our knowledge of grammar from time to time, and this book will help. If you have taken HUMA01, you have a great start on writing well.

A couple of good pithy writing guides:

UVic's Dictionary of Usage (<http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/Pages/DictionUsageToc.html>)

A searchable version of W. Strunk's wonderful classic, *The Elements of Style*

(<http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html>)

## Types of assignments:

There are several kinds of work that art history students do, and sometimes an assignment requires more than one of them. A general guide such as the one at <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/art-history/> may be useful, but be sure you understand what your instructor expects in each assignment.

## Citation:

Please remember that all students are responsible for knowing the information at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>. For correct citation of sources, please see <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/documentation>. Art historians usually use the Chicago Manual of Style and sometimes the MLA citation format; guides for both are linked to this summary page.

## Essay prizes:

To learn more about the essay prizes and other merit awards available to UTSC students, please see [http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~registrar/financial\\_aid/scholarship](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~registrar/financial_aid/scholarship).

## What do I gain from studying art history?

Recent students have told us that “My study of art history at UTSC has not only changed but has shaped me as a person and how I see the world. Paintings, sculptures, photography, and all of the media involved in art represent life in a way you and I may not envision things.” “If anything, I think it has made my passion for art stronger. I often find myself defending art history and contemporary art at times when people are calling it ‘strange’...” “Learning about art history from professors who are clearly passionate about the subject inspired me to deepen my studies in art, and I have found the experience very enjoyable. I find myself making more art now than I have in a very long time.” “My study of art history at UTSC has made me even more interested in art every year.” The lectures not to take everything they read at face value, and are “shaped to open up our minds not only to art history but to life and what art means to humanity.”

Students have found that their study of art history increases critical skills that enhance their future prospects. It teaches them to “provide physical evidence for an abstract idea” while it shapes and focuses their interests in art. Further, they have found that the differences of perspective among art history faculty are important to overall broadening of thought. The verbal presentations required in some course develop skills fundamental to all kinds of employment. Art history students also develop research skills, observation skills, analytical skills, interpretive skills, writing skills, historical knowledge, cultural knowledge, and knowledge of current controversies and issues. They gain open-mindedness, the ability to question assumptions and to develop their own conclusions, and an ability to make theoretical connections with fields such as English. They build their understanding of the art world and their awareness that works of art have a multiplicity of meanings depending on perspective. One student states that the most crucial thing offered by art history courses is “the developing of oneself to see past one's own views and observations.”

## What can I do with an art history major?

As one student put it, “The program displays an array of perspectives for a student to go on into the world and pursue a career in law, education, politics, medicine, or even as an artist.” While art history students find work in a wide range of fields after graduation, those who complete the art history major may go on master's programs in art history or to Canadian and international PhD programs, MFAs, curatorial internships, and graduate programs in such fields as development studies or to B.Ed. and M.Ed. programs. If you are interested in curatorial work, you will be glad to know that some UTSC art history instructors have had curatorial experience in museums, and this comes into their classrooms both through discussions with students and through certain courses. If you're interested in curatorial work, please see <http://www.collegeart.org/guidelines/curatorial> and speak to your Program Director.