

## Studying History of Art at Oxford

Anything designed by human beings exhibits visual qualities that are specific to the place and period in which it originates. History of Art concentrates on objects generally described as 'art', though in Oxford this definition is framed broadly to embrace items beyond 'Fine art' or 'Western art'. History of Art aims to arrive at an historical understanding of the origins of artefacts within specific world cultures, asking about the circumstances of their making, their makers, the media used, the functions of the images and objects, their critical reception and subsequent history.

As well as educating students in the historical interpretation of artefacts in their cultural contexts, a degree in History of Art provides skills in the critical analysis of objects through the cultivation of 'visual literacy'. The acquired skills have broad applicability in a wide range of professional settings, as well as serving the needs of enduring personal enlightenment.

## Studying History of Art at St Anne's

St Anne's has a dedicated History of Art faculty, [Dr Jason Waite](#), who works exclusively with visiting students, serving as personal tutor and often as course tutor as well. Dr Waite can offer a personalised approach to enrich your individual History of Art learning and interests.

## Study durations

You can apply to study History of Art as a single subject or jointly with another humanities or social science subject and in some cases with a science subject. You can apply to study History of Art for any study duration.

	Ext AY	AY	Fall Term	Hilary and Trinity terms	Studied with other subjects
<b>History of Art</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Classics; Classical Archaeology and Ancient History; Asian and Middle Eastern Studies; English; History; Medical Humanities; Modern Languages; Music; Philosophy; Economics; Law; Politics Computer Science; Experimental Psychology; Maths

## Courses

If you are offered a place to study History of Art at St Anne's for the:

- **Extended academic year** you will study 'Reconsidering British Art' during September followed by 4-6 courses across Michaelmas, Hilary and Trinity terms.
- **Oxford academic year** you will study 4-6 courses across Michaelmas, Hilary and Trinity.
- **Fall Term** you will take 'Reconsidering British Art' during September followed by 2 history of art courses during Michaelmas term.
- **Hilary and Trinity terms** you will study 3-4 History of Art courses.

## Teaching methods:

Students are taught through a mixture of tutorials, lectures, seminars, and in-gallery sessions. As with all Oxford study you will undertake a high volume of independent self-guided academic work and research working in libraries, archives or museums. Visits to exhibitions and historical buildings will also be part of the course and you will be expected to explore the museum collections at Oxford to enhance your studies.

Please note:

- All courses are dependent on a student possessing the appropriate academic background, as deemed by St Anne's tutors and having fulfilled any required or necessary prerequisites.
- We cannot ever guarantee a particular course can be offered in any particular year, courses are always subject to change and tutor availability.
- Visiting students do not sit University examinations so your assessment methods will be based on your tutorials, essays etc. to be set by your Tutor at the commencement of the course.

**There are a wide range of History of Art courses you can indicate a preference for, these can include:**

### **Re-Considering British Art**

**(taught in September and offered during the academic year as well)**

This course examines how artists and writers have shaped Britain's cultural environment, engaging with themes such as landscape, empire, migration, and contemporary curating. Students will explore both historical and modern perspectives, situating British art within wider global contexts and examining how cultural production reflects and challenges ideas of national identity. Beginning with questions of how "Britishness" has been defined through art, the course moves on to examine the rural landscape as a site of both nostalgia and dispossession, the Black Atlantic and the role of diasporic cultural production, and the shifting dynamics of contemporary curatorial practice. Close attention is paid to how artworks intersect with broader social, political, and economic histories, including colonialism, industrialisation, and globalisation. By bringing together canonical figures with artists historically excluded from mainstream narratives, students are encouraged to interrogate the exclusions and silences embedded in the category of "British art." Through a combination of tutorials, seminars at the Ashmolean Museum, and visits to other art institutions, the course offers students a framework for rethinking the narratives of British art, foregrounding diverse perspectives and its global resonances.

### **Contemporary African Art**

This course introduces and examines contemporary African art, exploring its conceptual, historical, and critical dimensions. Students will engage with questions of identity, belonging, and the material and imaginative possibilities of artistic practice across Africa and the African diaspora. The course introduces key theoretical frameworks, including postcolonial, transnational, and sociocultural approaches, while testing their usefulness through close study of case studies ranging from established to emerging artists. Tutorials will foster critical debate on the framing of "African" art within global artworld structures and its positioning in relation to modernism and contemporaneity. Alongside textual and theoretical analysis, the tutorials will emphasise direct engagement with artistic practice on the continent itself. In depth examination of artworks and art practice in specific West and East African countries will highlight artists' diverse use of media, and draw out the differing political, social, and conceptual conditions underpinning their work. Decolonial perspectives will provide a framework for questioning stereotypes, interrogating Western narratives of art history, and rethinking what it means to speak of "African" art in a global present.

### **Global Modernism(s)**

Since the 1990s, the growing introduction of non-western art into Western art-history classrooms – mirrored by an expanded representation in exhibitions, research and biennales – has raised a question of interpretation: can we apply the terms of Western art history to non-western art? The 'Global Modernism(s)' course will explore this question in relation to the history of Modernism. Western formalist teleology located the development and innovations of 20th-century Modernism only in the cultural 'centres' of Paris, London and New York (see for example

the canonical volume *Art Since 1900*). Since then, attempts to pay closer attention to art from the 'peripheries' have ceded to a rejection of the 'centre-periphery' model itself, replaced by various temporal and spatial conceptualisations such as, in no particular order: global modernisms, multiple modernisms, local modernism, heterochronicity, transculturation, transversals, etc. Students will be introduced to current reappraisals of Modernism's temporal boundaries and aesthetic categories and encouraged to test these models against case studies from North Africa, Latin America, Asia and other non-western art histories.

### **High Renaissance and Mannerism in Italy: 1481–1598**

This course explores the development of Italian art from the emergence of the High Renaissance in the late fifteenth century to the complexities and experimental expressions of Mannerism in the late sixteenth century. The course will consider how artists across Florence, Venice, Rome, and other major centres redefined visual representation through the study of classical antiquity, naturalism, and humanist thought. Attention will be given to the work of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo, exploring their influence on contemporary artistic theory, practice, and patronage. The second half of the course will turn to the emergence of Mannerism in the mid-sixteenth century, examining how artists such as Pontormo, Rosso Fiorentino, Parmigianino, and Bronzino challenged the harmonious ideals of the High Renaissance with new visual vocabularies of distortion, ambiguity, and elegance. Students will be introduced to primary sources (such as Vasari's *Lives*) as well as recent scholarship on style, authorship, and the historiography of the Renaissance canon. Wherever possible, students will be encouraged to study objects firsthand in Oxford's museums. The course will include a tour and discussion with the Curator of the Christ Church Picture Gallery that has an extensive collection of works from the period.

### **Korean Modern and Contemporary Aesthetics**

This course presents an overview of Korean art and aesthetics, with a focus on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Each of eight weeks introduces a different theme around which to center reading, writing, and thought in the Korean context: modernism, art under authoritarianism, queerness, film criticism, North Korea and the DMZ, diaspora, contemporary art and activism, and the Hallyu (K-Wave). A combination of readings with intersecting connections to history, art, aesthetics, sociology, literature, cultural studies, queer studies, media studies, film criticism, critical theory, and other fields provides background for writing and further study. Overall, the considerations and impacts of Koreanness and Korean identity are explored, deliberated, and questioned through the various theoretical lenses advanced by this syllabus.

### **Modern and Contemporary Art in Japan: 1952–2022**

This course unpacks the development of modern and contemporary art in Japan from the post-occupation era to the present day. Beginning with the reconstruction period following World War II, students will examine how artists negotiated rapid social, political, and technological transformations from the U.S. military occupation and the trauma of Hiroshima, to the rise of consumer capitalism and Japan's evolving global identity. Key movements such as the Gutai Art Association, Mono-ha, and Superflat will be studied in depth, alongside the work of individual artists including Yoshihara Jirō, Yoko Ono, On Kawara, Takashi Murakami, and Chim↑Pom. Students will also consider the significance of performance, conceptual practices, feminist interventions, and responses to natural disasters such as the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and Fukushima nuclear crisis. The course will include a tour of the Ashmolean's collection of contemporary Japanese art and a discussion with the Curator of Contemporary Art whose speciality is 20th century Japanese Photography.

### **Theories and Methodologies of Art History**

This course provides students with a sophisticated set of methodological tools, as well as a historiographical apparatus for analysing texts, images and objects encountered in their other studies. The student will learn to combine visual analysis with critical engagement and to put theory into practice when applying wide-ranging approaches to specific images and objects. One of the purposes of this course is to understand how a historiography of the discipline of art history has been constructed – its canon of texts, historians and practitioners. However, we will reflect on how these narratives can be re-thought, in particular through the lenses of gender and post-

coloniality. Can we construct alternative historiographies of the modern discipline? How and why have certain historiographical narratives endured?

### **Photography, the Document and Spectatorship**

The idea that a photograph is, by its nature, evidence of what it depicts, has shaped the history of photography since its inception. Following the inventor William Henry Fox Talbot's proposal that photographs be used to testify in a court of law in 1844, the medium's supposed indexicality has been placed in service of a wide range of documentary claims. From its first practitioners in nineteenth century Britain, to the emergence of documentary in the Depression-era United States and its subsequent postmodern critiques, the discussion of the photograph's evidentiary function, and of the role of the spectator, have remained central. Examining the conceptions of photography put forth in the writings of Walter Benjamin, Allan Sekula, Ariella Azoulay and others, we will analyse the work of photographs within archives, newspaper reports, protest movements and the work of different artists in order to question how photographs have served both to exert power and to mount resistance in a range of settings.

### **Curating Contemporary Art: 1970–Now**

This course explores the history, theory, and practice of curating contemporary art from 1970 to the present. It examines the changing role of the curator and the evolution of exhibition-making in response to shifting cultural, political, and aesthetic contexts. Students will study landmark exhibitions, curatorial manifestos, and critical debates that have shaped the field, ranging from institutional critique and relational aesthetics to postcolonial and decolonial strategies. Emphasis will be placed on case studies from diverse global contexts, including Europe, North America, Asia, and Africa, to reflect the transnational dynamics of contemporary art. The course will also consider the emergence of biennials, artist-run spaces, and digital platforms as curatorial sites. Topics include curatorial authorship, spectatorship, ethics of display, participatory and socially engaged practices. The course will be particularly useful for those interested in curatorial studies, museum practice, and include a visit to Modern Art Oxford and a discussion with the Senior Curator.

### **Travel, Empire, and Orientalism**

This course looks at the intersections of travel, tourism, imperialism/colonialism, and the visual arts during the 18th and 19th centuries. The course will examine the ways in which the works of (largely) European artists were intertwined with contemporary discourses on race, history, and civilization and how these works could function as justifications for imperial exploitation and evidence of preconceived ideas about nonEuropean cultures. The course will focus primarily on Orientalism, that is, the representation of people and places from the "Orient," usually designating the modern-day regions of North Africa and the Middle East, but also encompassing representations of South and East Asia. We will consider diverse textual and visual media such as travelogues, paintings, illustrated books, photographs, and maps in order to understand the persistent borrowing of images and tropes between genres and to track if and how representational schemas shifted over time. The course will also foreground the production of non-European artists on the "other side" of the Orientalist gaze so as to consider how these individuals could, in the works of Zeynep Çelik, "speak back to Orientalist discourse."

### **Understanding Museums and Collections**

The classes will provide students with an introduction to four main areas in the study of museums and collections: the history of museums; museums and time; museums, culture and nature; and collections as practices. These areas will be explored through examples drawn from the earliest archaeological evidence for collecting (including hoarding and deposition) through the first museums in the ancient world, to medieval, early modern, modern and contemporary collections and museums. The development of 19th- and 20th-century ideas of preservation and heritage will also be introduced. The tutorials will provide students with the opportunity to explore aspects of particular museums and collections through a series of themes, including the history of ideas of assemblage and collection; art and aesthetics; science and the natural world; objectivity and knowledge production; curiosity, performance and colonialism; identity, politics and cultural repatriation; material, digital and virtual museums; and preservation and heritage.

A **supervised extended essay** course option focusing on a building, object or image in Oxford is also available in any term as a full or half course and if you already know the area you would like to focus on please indicate this on your application. This can also be discussed further with your personal tutor once in Oxford.

### **Pre-requisites**

Visiting students applying to study History of Art need to already have a background in the subject, although in some cases an introductory background may suffice. You may also be studying a related subject such as anthropology, archaeology, classics, English, fine arts, or history.

### **Additional information**

Department website: <https://www.hoa.ox.ac.uk/>