University of Bern
Institute of Art History

Bachelor of Arts in Art History (BA)
Master of Arts in Art History (MA)

Special qualifications in:
— Curatorial Studies and Museology
— Curatorial Studies, Museology, and Provenance Research
— Cultural Heritage
— History of Textile Arts

Doctorate (Dr. phil.)

Through a program of engaging lectures and seminars, the Institute of Art History provides in-depth knowledge of the global history of art and architecture from early Christian times to the present day. The Institute’s extensive international network and close partnerships with museums and research institutions provide a unique opportunity to acquire knowledge from an array of sources. In the course of your studies, you will deal with all genres of the arts, including architecture, painting, sculpture, and handicrafts, as well as photography, film, and digital media.

Studying art history is primarily comprised of the research and analysis of artistic production in its historical and cultural context. This includes the investigation of the social, cultic, and aesthetic functions of works of art; the differentiation of forms and types of works and monuments; research into their history; the interpretation of content; the investigation of artistic and literary reception; as well as art theory, art historiography, and methodology.
You are interested in studying art history because you want to deal with art at a professional level.

At the Institute of Art History (IKG), you will learn how to address effective questions to your objects of study:

— Who defines what art is?
— Is art also a craft?
— Is art always political?
— What kind of analysis is art criticism?
— Who actually owns the pictures in a museum?
— Does art have limits?
— In what ways does architecture count as an artform?

The Institute consists of five Chairs:

ÄK Pre-Modern Art History
KN Early Modern Art History
MG Modern and Contemporary Art History
AD History of Architecture and Monument Preservation
TK History of the Textile Arts

The program is enriched through additional events offered by visiting instructors with experience in a range of professions, as well as project seminars and a variety of excursions. The entire spectrum of Western art and its history is conveyed from early Christianity through to the present. Aside from such classical art genres as architecture, painting, sculpture, graphics, and crafts, forms of expression specific to modernity and the present – including new media – will be dealt with. The objects of study also include the historical and social conditions of artistic practice, as well as the cultic, social, and aesthetic functions of art and buildings, their forms and types, content and meaning, up to and including their artistic and literary reception. The analysis and history of art theory and art history are also an important component of the comprehensive program.

Key features

— A Bachelor’s program offering a broad education in all areas of art history from the Middle Ages to the present
— A career-oriented Master’s program with a range of optional focal points
— Monomaster programs: curatorial studies and museology; curatorial studies, museology, and provenance research; monument preservation and monument management; history of the textile arts
— Innovative courses and individual support
— Project- and practice-oriented learning, participation in exhibitions and publications
— Handling of historical artefacts and texts, archive holdings; experience in working with library holdings and databases
— The Institute operates within an international network and maintains close partnerships with research institutions and museums in Switzerland and abroad
— Extensive range of excursions to New York, Shanghai, Venice, Copenhagen, Lisbon, Prague, Istanbul, Warsaw, and more

Career Development

Exhibition curator, museologist, monument conservator, academic, art dealer – studying art history qualifies you for entry into a variety of attractive professions. Classical fields of work include art historical research, exhibitions and museums, the art market and art criticism as well as mediation and provenance research. With the choice of supplementary subjects, career-oriented internships and a wide range of continuing education opportunities, you can also focus on specific topics that will help you to become a sought-after specialist on the job market. Alongside experience in other humanities disciplines, knowledge of pedagogy, law, economics, and additional foreign languages will increase your employment options.
Pre-Modern Art History

The Chair of Pre-Modern Art History is devoted to the study of medieval visual culture. Prof. Beate Fricke's teaching focuses on the relationship between various artefacts, materials, and cultural contexts in the medieval arts, as well as the creation and circulation of objects in sacred and profane spaces, both private and public. The production of objects is as much of a research focus in the department as the staging and reception of artworks. The program of study provides students with knowledge about materials, techniques, genres, styles, and themes related to the history of the European art in the Middle Ages. Equipping students with the methodological tools of the discipline is fundamental to the program, as is the investigation of new research approaches.

We place emphasis on interdisciplinarity and the study of global entanglements of the medieval world. The members of the current ERC-project “Global Horizons in Pre-Modern Art” (2018-24) investigate the historical meanings and functions of the horizon in visual and intellectual cultures of the pre-modern world on a global scale. We are teaching and researching in close collaboration with museums and research institutes in Switzerland and abroad. Excursions and our collaboration with the Bern Center for the Middle Ages (BMZ), bring students into direct contact with interdisciplinary research and non-European histories of art. The Chair fosters students’ participation in international research programs, with the support of the Ellen J. Beer-Foundation.

Early Modern Art History

The Chair of Early Modern Art History offers an insight into the broad spectrum of media, genres and materials used in European arts and material culture in their global interdependencies. Seminars and lectures provide a foundation in the history, theory and historiography of art historical and interdisciplinary research (15th to 19th century). The Chair’s emphasis lies on questions posed within the frameworks of visual studies and the anthropology of art: How do images function in sacred and profane contexts? Which tasks were delegated to artefacts in different periods?

The teaching comprises established fields of modern art history (Italian Renaissance, cult and art image questions, questions on the relationship between image and body, political iconography), as well as more recent themes of a constituent global art history (art and expansion, global image transfer, trans-cultural intertwining processes). In addition to Italy as an important point of reference for modern art, the focus is on the art and material culture of Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands, as well as on pictorial and object cultures in non-European territories, especially Portugal. The critical examination of historical and contemporary approaches to art history in modern times is an integral part of the Chair’s research and teaching.

Cooperation with museums and participation in interdisciplinary and international research programs is strongly supported.

Modern and Contemporary Art History

Starting with the modernist movement, art began to engage with reflexive questions, reinventing itself on various occasions, and opening itself up to exploration in all conceivable directions. The ever-expanding field of contemporary art is rich in innovative approaches. The research questions it necessitates can be posed to artists, gallery owners, and intermediaries such as curators alike: Who defines what art is, how much is it worth to a society, and what role does art history play in the reception of art? The Chair of Modern and Contemporary Art History approaches such questions through its conception of art as a constant process of social negotiation.

The task of creating critical instruments for describing and investigating the development of art requires contextualisation, art theoretical knowledge and an awareness of the social conditions of contemporary practices. Interdisciplinary approaches, in collaboration with philosophy, psychology, sociology, film, literature, theatre studies, and other disciplines, are proving to be essential to the further investigation of our objects of study. Such an approach is all the more important since art history itself, through its historiographical achievement, is directly integrated into the process of aesthetic and social value creation. The full range of visual media and genres are taken into account.

History of Architecture and Monument Preservation

The Chair offers a broad overview of the history of architecture and architectural theory from early Christian architecture to the present. Interdisciplinary cultural-historical, socio-historical, and political methodologies are deployed to analyze the social meaning of architecture and the built environment. The Chair’s teaching and research focuses primarily on the architecture of Europe, North America, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Gulf region, in particular on the architecture of Switzerland, medieval architecture, and modern architecture from the first half of the twentieth century. A particular emphasis is placed on twentieth- and twenty-first-century architecture shaped by processes of migration, exile, and globalization that is analyzed as a common ground for diverse (building) cultures.

The Chair’s combination of the history of architecture with monument preservation as offered in the Master’s program “Monument Preservation and Monument Management” is unique in the Swiss educational landscape. In this program, students study the history and theory of historic preservation, scholarly methods of assessment and preservation of architectural remains, as well as the social responsibility for architectural heritage. They also gain practical experience by working closely with Swiss and international institutions in the field of historic preservation.
The new History of Textile Arts section (Chair endowed by the Werner and Margaret Abegg Foundation) offers an internationally unique focus in research and teaching. The Master's program in History of Art with a focus on textiles conveys in-depth knowledge of the materials, technical conditions and creative possibilities of these artforms (above all silk weaving, embroidery, tapestry, costume). Students will be familiarised with methods of scientific investigation and the various discourses surrounding textile arts. Other genres of handicrafts (furniture, glass, porcelain, etc.) and their functions in interior design, liturgy and ceremony are also treated as objects of research. The historical range covers the early Middle Ages through to the present, taking in a broad geographical and cultural perspective. An intensive examination of original works is enabled through excursions and museum internships, and cooperation with museums of textile arts and crafts – including the most important international research centre for the history of textile arts, the Abegg Foundation, Riggisberg. Such opportunities enable active participation in current research discourses, which in turn, promotes a professional approach to questions surrounding the preservation, presentation and communication of works of historical craftsmanship.

What role can art history play in a world in which global processes are becoming increasingly important for understanding transcultural exchange and interaction? What approaches to modernity and cultural politics have developed in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America? Can contemporary art teach us anything about decolonisation, migration and the formation of identities?

The Master’s program in World Arts and Music at the Center for Global Studies enables the combined study of various media and artistic forms of expression from different cultures and “art worlds” under the unifying framework of cultural studies. The section of World Art History was established at the Institute of Art History and in affiliation with the Chair of Modern and Contemporary Art History. It enables reflection on cross-cultural exchange with a global perspective. The focus of teaching and research is on non-Western art and architectural history, in particular the cultural spaces of the Middle East. Through the study of objects and discourses, World Art History explores alternative art histories, which are interwoven with Western art history through transnational and transregional cultural interactions and new historiographies.

The SNSF professorship is dedicated to exploring the construction of the exotic in the Age of Enlightenment. How was foreign material culture introduced to Switzerland and France in the 17th and 18th centuries and integrated into local collections, interiors and the applied arts? The research project also investigates artistic practices of exoticisation, such as the imitation of non-Western techniques and iconographies in lacquer, porcelain and textiles. The aim is to analyse how Switzerland was placed within an international network of commerce, arts and sciences. Of particular interest is how the emergence of the disciplines of anthropology and ethnology in French-speaking Switzerland came about and are evidenced by certain collections and publications. The project results in the exhibition “Exotic? Switzerland looking outward in the Age of Enlightenment” (Lausanne, Palais de Rumine, September 24, 2020 – February 28, 2021).

The teaching program examines the role of art in cross-cultural exchanges across different political contexts. Critical thinking strategies and the application of historical, methodological and theoretical knowledge provide a basis for the study of the material culture of the Enlightenment era.
Contact

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John Baldessari
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