The application and interview do not require special preparation, other than the ability to respond to objects verbally and in writing. We look for enthusiasm for the visual arts, intellectual curiosity, and flexibility in discussion. Specific knowledge of Art History is not expected; but an interest in visual detail is important. If you have access to museum collections or exhibitions, you will have the opportunity to discuss these at the interview. My colleagues and I always enjoy meeting candidates at interview.

Gervase Rosser, University Lecturer in the History of Art

What do we look for in Art History applicants?

The Department holds two Open Days every year in June/July and September which introduce prospective applicants to the Department, provide an opportunity to meet staff and current students, and include tours of the Department and its Visual Resources Centre and a University collection. Dates and booking information can be found at www.hoa.ox.ac.uk

The University runs week-long Summer Schools which are open to UK state school students currently in the lower sixth form and studying A levels (or equivalent). The History of Art programme introduces the study of Art History via a series of structured tours of University museums, collections and buildings – including colleges – led by members of the Department. Further details can be found at www.ox.ac.uk/uni

How do I apply to study Art History at Oxford?

Information relating to how to apply, entrance requirements and funding can be found on the University Admissions website: www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/

How do I find out more about studying Art History at Oxford?

Information about the Department, links to the main collections and museums, an overview of the programme and guidance for History of Art applicants can be found at www.hoa.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergrad.html

Further information: www.ox.ac.uk
email: admin@hoa.ox.ac.uk
phone: +44 (0)1865 286830

Front cover: Tessellated Marble. Ashmolean Museum.
Front cover: First Greek Art Class. Ashmolean Museum.
Front cover: First English Art Class. Ashmolean Museum.

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Why Art History?

Art History is concerned with all aspects of our visual environment. It engages with paintings, sculpture and architecture – ‘art’ in the sense usually understood – but also with design wherever it is found in the decoration of the body or the home, or in the features of a city square. It asks why certain images shock, why a painted landscape moves us, why some people kiss, and others wish to destroy the portraits or statues of known individuals. Historical context is vital to understanding the power of images in a given period. In a modern world that is drowning in images in diverse media, Art History explores both where these visual stimuli come from, and how we react to them. If we are to manage the flood of imagery which surrounds us, we need to understand it: Art History is a valuable starting point. Art History undergraduates at Oxford times and places, Art History could be the course for you. An open mind and a lively interest in all things visual, encompassing anything and everything from the planning of a street to the design of the body or the home, or in the features of a city square. It asks why certain images shock, why a painted landscape moves us, why some people kiss, and others wish to destroy the portraits or statues of known individuals. Historical context is vital to understanding the power of images in a given period. In a modern world that is drowning in images in diverse media, Art History explores both where these visual stimuli come from, and how we react to them. If we are to manage the flood of imagery which surrounds us, we need to understand it: Art History, ranging from ancient to contemporary examples, sets out to do this.

You do not need to have studied Art History before. Anyone interested in opening their eyes wider and broadening their horizons might be attracted to the subject. The main credential is a lively interest in all things visual, encompassing anything and everything from the planning of a street to the form of a chair. If you’re interested in fine art practice, and in the way art is made and presented to us, Art History is a valuable starting point. Art History undergraduates at Oxford times and places, Art History could be the course for you. An open mind and a lively interest in all things visual, encompassing anything and everything from the planning of a street to the design of the body or the home, or in the features of a city square. It asks why certain images shock, why a painted landscape moves us, why some people kiss, and others wish to destroy the portraits or statues of known individuals. Historical context is vital to understanding the power of images in a given period. In a modern world that is drowning in images in diverse media, Art History explores both where these visual stimuli come from, and how we react to them. If we are to manage the flood of imagery which surrounds us, we need to understand it: Art History, ranging from ancient to contemporary examples, sets out to do this.

Why study Art History at Oxford?

The scale and diversity of the University also means that the Department of Art History is able to offer an intellectually wide-ranging course in liaison with relevant specialists in anthropology, archaeology, classics, English, history, modernism in a non-European context. The course is taught in very small groups (often in pairs), enabling tutors to respond to the particular interests and talents of students. Because only a small number of students is admitted each year, students work closely with tutors and with one another. The small size of the group makes the Department a natural focus and much of the teaching takes place here. Additionally, each of the colleges in which students are based has its own tutor responsible for Art History. A complete overview of the degree is available at www.hoa.ox.ac.uk/admissions/overview.htm

Optional courses available in the Second and Third Years are extremely diverse, here is one student’s individual path and experience:

“I came to Oxford with some particular interests which I have been able to satisfy here, but the course also helped to broaden my horizons. A course in Chinese art of the twelfth century challenged certain preconceptions about modernism in a non-European context. Classes in the very diverse University collections led me to write my first year ‘object essay’ on the design of the new Ashmolean Museum. As my architectural interests grew, I took a special subject on English baroque architecture. My final year thesis was on the representation of artworks in television film, using programmes produced by the BBC. Open University and Arts Council in the 1970s and 1980s. This was a high point in a course which was, overall, both challenging and rewarding.”

Neal Shasore, Undergraduate in Art History

What can I do with a degree in Art History?

A great range of professions relies upon a sophisticated understanding of how images shape our environment and our response to it. The Art History course at Oxford provides training in close and critical looking, the interpretation of material and written evidence, and the verbal and written presentation of arguments: all skills valued in diverse contexts. The employment sectors in which Art History offers vocational preparation include public and commercial galleries and museums, the heritage industry, and art education. Graduates of the Oxford course have also pursued careers in relevant areas of publishing, advertising and media, the law, the writing of artists’ lives, the theatre, fashion, and the finance of art investment.