Program Overview

Our highly selective doctoral program in art history, founded in 1967 and offered in collaboration with the Cleveland Museum of Art, provides unique training for museum and academic careers. The object-grounded approach to the study of art history, based on the encyclopedic collections of the CMA and other area institutions, affords an exceptional opportunity to fuse the varied practices of the discipline pursued within the museum and the academy. Through study rooted in careful examination of the specific properties and idiosyncrasies of art objects, students can contribute concretely to a broader cultural and theoretical academic discourse. Graduate students are trained in both traditional and newer, theoretically-based art historical approaches in classes taught by faculty renowned for their expertise in a diversity of fields, all of whom maintain an object-oriented approach to teaching and research. Many CMA curators and museum educators hold adjunct faculty positions and teach courses for the program. Classes are frequently held at the CMA, where students have access to the permanent collections and a rotating schedule of exhibitions as well as to the Ingalls Library, the third largest art research library in the United States.

The innovative CWRU-CMA doctoral program in art history trains flexible and creative professionals who have the tools to achieve excellence in museum and academic careers. The pace of the program is accelerated; full funding for five years of tuition in addition to a generous yearly stipend enables our doctoral students to work full time on their degrees, with the goal of finishing in five to six years. Many aspects of the current curriculum were developed through two generous grants given jointly to CWRU and the CMA in 2013 and 2019 by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation as part of a program to further collaborations between art history graduate programs and art museums.

An MA in art history and reading knowledge of one approved foreign language (such as French, German, Italian, Japanese, or Chinese) are prerequisites. Very rarely, an exceptionally well-prepared applicant may be considered for admission with a BA degree only. Admission preference is given to applicants whose scholarly interests coincide with the interests of a department faculty member, those who wish to focus on distinctive holdings in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art, and/or those planning to pursue topics in museum or collecting history or the history of the art market. Admission to the program is made on the basis of academic record and scholarly promise, recommendations, experience, and personal interviews. Applicants must also submit GRE scores and two art history research papers. Students whose MA was awarded more than five years prior to application for admission may be required to pass a qualifying examination and/or foreign language examination administered by the department before being admitted to full standing in the PhD program.

PhD Policies

For PhD policies and procedures, please review the School of Graduate Studies section of the General Bulletin.