History of Art

History of Art is a lively, stimulating and rigorous course for those with a committed interest in visual culture. The course places a high priority on first-hand study of works of art and architecture, both within Cambridge and further afield.

We take full advantage of the resources of Cambridge itself, teaching regularly in the University’s museums, especially the Fitzwilliam Museum and Kettle’s Yard, as well as studying the city’s historic buildings and the art collections held by individual colleges. The curatorial staff of the Fitzwilliam Museum take an active part in the teaching programme, as do staff in related disciplines around the University.

The History of Art course is designed to give students both a broad training in the history of art, and to allow for highly focused study in particular areas of interest. The one-year Part I lays the foundations with general survey courses in the ‘objects of art history’, the ‘making of art’, and the ‘meaning of art’. Towards the end of the year students write a short dissertation on a single object or building of their choice in Cambridge. This is followed by a two-year Part II course where students take a more focused approach to particular topics of their choosing, supplemented by courses on the history and methodology of art history, and on issues relating to art’s collection and display.

The Part II course is based on a menu of Special Subjects taught by individual members of the Department and invited speakers, with two studied in each year. The options offered make the most of the research interests and enthusiasms of the members of staff concerned. Each student is free to select his or her own individual choice of subjects, either concentrating on a particular period or country, or adopting a wider range of themes. The Special Subjects involve deep immersion and serious study at an advanced level. Students often surprise themselves in the standard that they can achieve at this level, and appreciate the rewards of such an ambitious and intensive approach. Each Part II student also submits a dissertation on a topic of his or her choice, allowing for original research and the development of an independent analytic approach.

History of Art at Peterhouse

Peterhouse is one of the best situated colleges in Cambridge for History of Art – it is not only next door to the Department’s buildings in Trumpington Street, but its extensive grounds encircle the Fitzwilliam Museum, which was built on land sold to the University for that purpose in 1823. As in other small subjects, most teaching is organised at departmental level, so students at the College can take advantage of the full range of teaching options.
Peterhouse’s Director of Studies is Dr Laura Slater. Her research is focussed on medieval Britain and Europe c. 1050-1400, including the cultural consequences of the crusades and interactions with the Holy Land. She also investigates the cultural patronage and political activities of medieval women.

**Course requirements**

Applicants to read History of Art usually have a broad range of intellectual interests, and arts and sciences A levels are equally welcome. There is no need to have studied the subject formally before, and no subjects are considered essential at A level (or equivalent). Essay-based subjects such as English, a modern foreign or classical language, History, History of Art and Religious Studies would be good preparation for the course. We would generally expect the A* part of the typical A level offer to be in such a subject.

**The application process**

Candidates should expect one longer interview or two shorter ones. At the interview, candidates are sometimes shown images of works of art. This is not a test of identification or art-historical knowledge, but rather to allow the relaxed, informal discussion of some of the issues raised by visual images. We ask all our History of Art applicants to send us two examples of recent written work. Whilst in Cambridge for your interview, candidates will be asked to sit a written assessment. This will be the same assessment across all Colleges and more information can be found on the University website.

**Typical conditional offers**

Our typical conditional offer for History of Art is A*AA at A level. IB offers are usually for a minimum of 40-42 points, to include 776 or 777 at Higher level in relevant subjects. Offers are designed to be realistic, taking into account individual circumstances, and to reflect potential and likely levels of achievement. Most of those who receive offers will attain the grades required.