

Honors in Art History

Regulations and Procedures

Rationale and purpose: The Honors Program in art history is designed to meet the needs of students who wish to pursue a long-term scholarly research project in an area of particular interest. The research project, a year-long senior thesis, demands a substantial investment of both time and intellectual resources. For those students who are well prepared and self-motivated, the project can be a uniquely rewarding experience. It provides an opportunity to pursue original art historical research, of a scale and at a level of sophistication that is not normally possible even within a semester-long seminar.

Procedures for initiating an honors project: Students wishing to consider an honors project must discuss their research interests with a member of the art history faculty and secure the professor's agreement to serve as tutor for the project by the last day of classes of the student's junior year. After consulting with the tutor, the student is expected to carry out preliminary research during the course of the summer, with the goal of further defining the scope of the project, identifying the problems to be investigated, and developing a strategy and a schedule for research. By the first day of classes in the fall semester of the senior year, the student presents a formal proposal for the project to the faculty tutor, who approves it with his or her signature, and then submits it to the Art History Program Director, who must authorize all honors projects within the program. Students must be registered and on campus at Wesleyan in order to pursue an honors project in art history.

Requirements for the award of honors: The award of honors is meant to provide recognition to those students whose work in the major field of study has been of exceptional quality. Accordingly, honors candidates are required to: complete their research project successfully; earn a minimum GPA of B+ for their major coursework; and be compliant with the University's General Education expectations (through Stage II). High honors are awarded to those students who have achieved the highest level of distinction in their work; therefore, this grade will be awarded sparingly.

Senior Talks in Art History: Each year's honors candidates will present 20-minute public talks in late April based on their theses. All honors candidates will present a talk.

Procedures for double majors: Double majors who want to write a single thesis for honors consideration in both their majors register for the tutorial in one department or program but must obtain approval from both departments/programs. The thesis or project will be evaluated by members of both departments/programs, whose recommendations are independent of one another. Nomination for University Honors must be endorsed by both departments/programs. In rare cases, double majors may choose to write a separate thesis for each department/program.

Thesis Length

Theses vary in length, and their effectiveness is not necessarily related to the number of pages. Individual thesis writers must consult with their faculty tutor regarding the optimal page length for their topic. The length of theses should ideally range from 60–120 pages (text and notes).

Criteria for a successful honors project: It is difficult to generalize meaningfully about what makes honors projects successful, but most successful projects share the following qualities:

they present an original thesis. The successful honors project should not simply present information, but it should make an argument about a clearly defined topic, and the reader should become persuaded of the truth and reasonableness of that argument by the time they reach the end of the work. As for the criterion of originality, the thesis can be original for many different reasons (often a combination of such reasons): the thesis is based on the discovery of new evidence; the thesis is based on a reassessment of long-familiar evidence; the thesis arises from asking new questions about well-known phenomena; the thesis is suggested by the application to familiar problems of new methods or theoretical frameworks for investigation, and so on.

they present an explicit review of earlier literature on the subject. No matter how original or compelling a thesis is, most readers will not be able to fully appreciate its originality unless the author clearly situates their contribution within the existing scholarship on the problem they are addressing. By reviewing and assessing previous work on the subject, the author enables the reader to see more clearly what is original and distinctive about their contribution.

they are theoretically situated and methodologically sound. The thesis should include an explicit discussion of the theoretical positions upon which the research is founded. The methodological approach should also be discussed explicitly, and this discussion should leave the reader persuaded that the research has been conceived and carried out in a manner that is methodologically appropriate.

they demonstrate a mastery of the relevant material. The written work should leave the reader with the impression that the author has truly mastered the subject matter and materials relevant to the project. This mastery should extend not only to works of art, but to relevant historical documents as well. The work should also demonstrate that the author has a good understanding of the historical context(s) surrounding the works, issues, or processes being investigated.

they are clearly argued and thoroughly documented. The importance of presentation cannot be overstated. A rather pedestrian thesis can still strike the reader as impressive and significant, provided that it is presented clearly and argued persuasively. The opposite is rarely true. The most brilliant thesis will remain the author's well-guarded

secret if it is not presented clearly, accessibly, and persuasively. Thorough bibliographic documentation is also essential. Providing systematic and consistent citations and references not only helps support your argument, but also permits the reader to learn from your work and to investigate further those points or matters they find to be of interest. A consistent format for citations should be employed throughout.

they are effectively illustrated. Illustrations, whether high-quality black-and-white and color images or hand-executed maps and line drawings, are an inevitable necessity in most art history theses. Not only should the illustrations be reproduced clearly, but they should also be consistently numbered and captioned, and referred to explicitly by figure number in the text wherever appropriate.

If you still have doubts as to what makes for a successful honors project, discuss the matter with your faculty tutor. You may also find it helpful to consult some past thesis projects that were awarded honors. Archival copies of all earlier honors projects are kept in the Art History Program and in Special Collections at Olin Library, and although they do not circulate, they may be consulted there. The following titles may be recommended as particularly good examples:

- Eric Gustafson, *Creating God's House: Mendicant Spirituality and Architecture in Medieval Siena*, 2001
- Rachel Schwartz, *Alfred Stieglitz, Teaching America to See: From African Art to a Primitive American Identity*, 2003
- Anna Seastrand, *Fabric of the State: Dress and the Language of Politics at the Imperial Mughal Court*, 2003
- Emma Alpert, *Re-examining the Alfred Jewel: New Approaches in Iconography and Function*, 2004
- Benjamin Goldsmith, *The Yamai no soshi: The Scroll of Illness and Deformity in Heian Japan*, 2004
- John Blakinger, *Andy Warhol Paints Death in America: Cultural Critique in the Cold War*, 2006
- Daniel Zolli, *Re-Reading Poliphilo: The Hypnerotomachia Poliphili (1499) and Aldus Manutius' Humanist Literary Enterprise*, 2007
- Sarah Leonard, *The Bower of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 2009
- Meera Bhardwaj, *Transposing the Goddess*, 2010
- Jeffrey Katzin, *Barnett Newman's "Stations of the Cross" Series*, 2010
- Alexandra Provo, *Notions of Method: Text and Photograph in the Methods of Connoisseurship*, 2010
- Yongneng Conan Cheong, *In a Borrowed Garden: A Rhizomatic Theory of Transnational Tibetan Art*, 2012

- Grace Kuipers, *Progressive Arrangements: Citizenship and the Modernist Museum at the Barnes Foundation*, 2013
- Brandon Eng, *"Time is Now": Paul Thek in the 1960s*, 2015
- Penny Snyder, *Museums After Bilbao: Neoliberal Public Space at the Denver Art Museum*, 2016
- Louise de Verteuil, *The 2015 Galleria Vittorio Emanuele Restoration: Expo Milan's Legacy and the Revival of Civic Identity*, 2016
- Sharifa Lookman, *Reconsidering the Dante Series: Botticelli's Artistic Process as a Deconstruction of Vasarian Linearity*, 2017
- Sabrina Rueber, *Beyond the World in White: Identity and Resistance in the Visual Language of Li Yuan-chia*, 2018
- Juntai Shen, *Constructing Nostalgic Futurity: Architecture, Space, and Society in the Chinese Village, 1978*, 2018
- Charlotte C. Pitts, *Reconstructing Sites, Reclaiming Narratives: The Architecture of Weiss/Manfredi as Critical Practice*, 2018
- Rachel Rosin, *Mary Cassatt, Impressionism, & La Jeune Fille: Defining 19th-Century "Girlhood"*, 2019
- Emma Frohardt, *Art as Cultural Critic: The Work of Equipo Crónica*, 2020
- Olivia Samios, *The Nordic Peasant Vision: Codifications of Nationalism in Norwegian Art in the Nineteenth Century*, 2021
- Nia Felton, *Constructing a Lineage: Kawanabe Kyōsai, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, and the Hell Courtesan*, 2021
- Maya Hayda, *Glimpses of the Minescape: Mining and Photography in Recent American Art*, 2021
- Riley Richards, *Earthenware as Education: Pottery as an Object Lesson at H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College, 1886-1910*, 2021
- Annie Kidwell, *Encounters: Constellations of Creation and Perception in the Sculptures of Auguste Rodin*, 2022
- Aiden Malanaphy, *The Brooklyn Tower: A Contentious Conversation of History and Modernity in the Tallest Building in Brooklyn*, 2022
- Josh Merkin, *The Museum Embodied: 1980s Performance Art as Institutional Critique*, 2022
- Ann Zhang, *Reimagining & Reconstructing 1920s Shanghai in 2020: The Preservation of Wukang Mansion in the Former French Concession*, 2022
- Mim Pomerantz, *Jacques-André Boiffard and the Photographic Program of Documents (1929-1930)*, 2023
- Emma Flaherty, *Jan van Scorel as Artist-Pilgrim: The Anatomy of a Pilgrimage*, 2024
- Valerie Gottridge, *"Jane in Peepland": Re-presenting Jane Dickson's Times Square, 1992-1993*, 2025
- Emily Petersdorf, *Weaving in the "Liebes Look": Dorothy Liebes and Her Contributions to Modern Architecture*, 2025
- Sophie Raiskin-Wood, *Practices of Care: Reproductive Labor in Simone Leigh's Social Sculptures*, 2025

Bound copies of most of these theses can be consulted in the Visual Resources Center (VRC). Bound copies of all theses written through 2023 can be consulted in Special Collections & Archives; as of 2024 SC&A no longer acquires bound theses. All theses from 2007 onward can be accessed electronically via: <http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/>

Timetable for Art History honors projects:

during summer between junior and senior year: carry out preliminary research.

Fall semester:

during the beginning of the term: work with your thesis advisor to develop a schedule for researching, writing, and revising the thesis/essay with them.

by first Monday after classes begin: submit proposal and bibliography to faculty tutor. Complete "Application for Admission to Candidacy for Honors" form and secure tutor's signature; submit to the administrative assistant in the Program office. Receipt of returned copy with Program Director's signature constitutes formal approval of your project.

by end of Drop/Add Period: register for ARHA 409 (thesis) by submitting a tutorial enrollment request through the Drop/Add system.

mid-September: Thesis Writers Workshop. Thesis writers meet with the art librarian and VRC curator to discuss research resources and the VRC.

during third week of classes: check with the Honors Coordinator in the Registrar's Office to make sure your name is on the list of Honors Candidates.

during week before fall break: Fall Honors Colloquium. All honors candidates make a preliminary presentation to fellow candidates and faculty, discussing their projects and findings to date (approximately 15-minutes long). This is an important occasion on which you can receive constructive feedback and suggestions from a friendly audience.

Spring semester:

by end of Drop/Add period: register for ARHA 410 and submit a Work in Progress Form by submitting a tutorial enrollment request through the Drop/Add system. Candidates are asked to submit a brief description of their project; the tutor then writes a brief assessment of whether the work thus far seems likely to result in an Honors thesis/project. The Program Director then approves the student for continued honors

candidacy at the same time that the thesis tutorial is approved in the drop/add system.

throughout the semester: Stick to your schedule for writing and revising. Continue gathering images for your project, working as appropriate with the Visual Resources Center.

February: Spring Honors colloquium. All honors candidates present a more detailed interim report on their project, indicating progress, methodological and thematic, since October. This is a final opportunity for direct feedback from faculty members other than your thesis advisor.

beginning of April [check with Honors Coordinator in Registrar's office for exact dates]: upload your thesis; begin preparing for your senior honors talk.

(usually day before Senior Talks in Art History): dry-run practice session with images for talks.

usually around April 20th: Senior Talks in Art History; readers and tutors send comments to the Art History administrative assistant; program faculty meet to award honors and prizes.

usually by April 30th: all candidates informed as to status of their project (Credit Only, Honors, or High Honors); students will receive copies of the written evaluations from all their readers.