ART HISTORY PROGRAM

GRADUATION MAY 2021
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Left and Cover Photo Credit: Denny Henry
Program History

Courses in Art History at George Washington University were an early and ultimately significant component of the curriculum. The discipline’s distinguished past is essential and timely as Columbian College of Arts and Sciences moves forward in the twenty-first century. Founded in 1821, and predating the Art History curricula of Princeton (1832), Yale (1869), and Harvard (1874), the Art History Program has evolved and reached maturation, while vigorously sustaining its core mission of providing students an exceptional education in Art History and connoisseurship.

From its inception, a major focus has been establishing cooperative ventures with cultural institutions in Washington, DC, initially with the Smithsonian American Art Museum (1829) and later with the Corcoran Gallery of Art (1869)/Corcoran School of Fine Art (1878), and the National Gallery of Art (1937).

Responding to contemporary thoughts and needs, the curriculum now includes courses in Islamic Arts, Asian Arts (India and Indonesia, China, Japan, Korea), History of Photography, History of Textiles, and Afro-American Art. The Art History program also has expanded its links to other disciplines in the Arts and Sciences (Anthropology, Classical Archaeology, Philosophy, History, Judaic Studies, etc.). The Art History program provides a firm foundation for further innovative advancement in response to changing educational needs.
2020-2021 was an academic year of challenges which upended our world and caused us to have a mixture of thoughts regarding the past, the present, and the future. *The World Turned Upside Down* was first published in London as a broadside to criticize Parliament under Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1653-1658). Created in the wake of the Puritan revolution against the Stuart King Charles I, illustrations of *The World Turned Upside Down* in inexpensive pamphlets or ephemeral posters specifically addressed the government’s radical banning of popular festivities – often ribald and lavish – which typified municipal celebrations during the Christmas season.

The wood engraving’s figure with a spherical body elicits the memory of Hieronymus Bosch’s complex world of human folly yet resonates with an uncomplicated message for today’s audience – a person may obtain a fresh perspective when the world is overturned and see intangible benefits.
Adjusting to a new environment has changed everything customary. For some it has been traumatic, for others inconvenient. It has been difficult to share either sorrow or joy. For far too many, the world will never be the same because a loved one has been lost. Daily tasks have been a formidable challenge and sometimes it has felt like the world not only is upside down, but also whirling in circles. The friendships sustained in online classes and informal virtual meetings and telephone conversations have served as a tether to keep us from psychologically spinning away with the wind.

Seventeenth-century Antwerp frequently portrayed Fortune as a goddess standing on a globe with a billowing sail to suggest good weather for navigators, and at the same time, Flemish artists represented Hope as a standing female with an anchor. There is no crystal glass to forecast the future, but the Art History faculty of GW wishes our graduating students good fortune casting off in unchartered waters and always know you are welcome back anytime to visit your port on the Potomac, Smith Hall of Art.

Warmest wishes on behalf of the Art History Program Faculty, Barbara von Barghahn (BvB), Chair
Faculty & Staff

Full Time Faculty

David Bjelajac, Professor
Alexander Dumbadze, Associate Professor
Director of Undergraduate Studies
Philip Jacks, Professor
Lisa Lipinski, Assistant Professor
Cristin McKnight Sethi, Assistant Professor
Mika Natif, Associate Professor
Bibiana Obler, Associate Professor
Lilien Robinson, Professor
Director of Graduate Studies
Barbara von Barghahn, Professor
Program Head

Part Time Faculty

Susan Arensberg, Adjunct Professor
Gillian Elliott, Adjunct Professor
Christiane Joost-Gaugier, Adjunct Professor
Divya Kumar-Dumas, Adjunct Professor
Katherine Markoski, Adjunct Professor
Lynn Matheny, Adjunct Professor
Dianne Pierce, Adjunct Professor
Paul Reuther, Adjunct Professor
Alan Wallach, Adjunct Professor
Elizabeth Weber, Adjunct Professor

Staff

Andy Johnson,
Program Administrator, Corcoran Art History
Director, Gallery 102

Paul Reuther, Visual Resources Specialist
Award Winners

Outstanding Senior in Art History
Caitlin Chan

Mel Lader Outstanding First-Year MA Art History Student
Emma Veon

The Melvin Lader prize fund supports an annual award to an art history master’s candidate in their first year of study. Melvin Lader received his PhD from the University of Delaware and joined the faculty during the 1970’s. A specialist in modern and contemporary art, and for many years the Advisor for the Art History graduate students, he was active on University, College, and Department Committees and served one term as Department Chair. Modest and unassuming he made sustained and considerable contributions through his research and publications receiving formidable professional recognition, especially for his pivotal works on Achille Gorky and Jackson Pollock. Dedicated to his students as teacher, academic advisor and mentor he was also an exceptional and beloved colleague.

Laurence Leite Outstanding Second-Year MA Art History Student
Leah Brand & Malarie Zaunbrecher

The Laurence Leite Prize Fund was established in 1996 in memory of Laurence Leite. The fund supports an annual award to an art history master’s candidate in their second year. Professor Leite received his PhD from Johns Hopkins University and joined the GWU faculty in the late 1950’s, retiring after over 25 years of teaching. He was a specialist in Italian Baroque art, but taught an amazing variety of courses: Northern and Southern Renaissance; Medieval Art; 18th Century Art; 19th Century Art; 20th Century Art, Iconography, as well as the Survey course. He was a brilliant scholar and teacher, a generous mentor beloved by generations of students, undergraduate and graduate. His lectures were legendary in both content and delivery. His impact was such that many of his students were so inspired that they pursued careers in Art History. This award was endowed by one of his former students, who followed Professor Leite’s path of research and teaching – Diane Apostolos Cappadona, a member of the Faculty at Georgetown University.
Arthur Hall Smith Prize for Outstanding Research Paper in 19th/20th Century Art
Gary Calcagno

The Arthur Hall Smith Prize was established in memory of Arthur Smith, Professor Emeritus of Painting. This fund supports an annual award presented to an Art History graduate or undergraduate student who has demonstrated exceptional research and writing skills in the area of nineteenth and twentieth-century art. A native of Norfolk, Virginia, Professor Smith received his initial training in drawing from his father who was a naval engineer. Concurrently, teachers at his school and local artists provided additional instruction. Enrolling at Illinois Wesleyan University, he excelled as a scholar and artist. In the case of the latter, his rigorous training was based on master works and techniques. Upon graduation, Professor Smith was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to continue his arts study in general and painting, specifically, at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and private studios in Paris. There he further advanced his thematic, technical and stylistic explorations in concert with a program of intellectual study, especially of French art history, literature and language. His further study was interrupted by the outbreak of the Korean War, and, consequently, enlistment in the army. An infantry sergeant, he was stationed in Korea, making his contribution as a soldier, while taking advantage of first-hand exposure to Asian art and techniques which made an indelible impact, fully evidenced in his later drawings and paintings. Following his military service, Professor Smith settled in Seattle, Washington, where he worked with Mark Toby, who became both mentor and friend, encouraging his younger colleague’s study of new philosophies and stylistic explorations, especially that of Abstraction. What defined Professor Smith’s mature work was the underlying base of references: master drawing and painting, Korean and Japanese prints and painting, especially sumi black ink painting, and contemporary Abstract painting and prints.

Inevitably, his art was also built on an astounding command of intellectual thought, history, literature, music, and Art History. Throughout his career at George Washington University, he remained a serious and accomplished student of the latter. Each discipline – Fine Arts and Art History – not only informed the other but ultimately formed a perfect synthesis in his paintings and drawings. The Arthur Hall Smith Prize represents recognition and confirmation of outstanding scholarly achievement at George Washington University of graduate and undergraduate Art History students. While it fully recognizes and honors their laudable academic accomplishment it speaks with confidence to each recipient of sustained dedication and ultimately meaningful professional contribution to the study of Art History.
Sons of the Revolution Award
Leah Brand, *Grasping an Abstract Utopia: Visions of American Scientific Progress in the Pages of Life and Time*

Megan Ortman, *A Ragtime Opera? Scott Joplin, Treemonisha, and a Phantom Genealogy of “Black Opera“*

The Sons of the Revolution Award is given for an outstanding and substantial research paper on a topic in American art and history. The prize was founded by the Washington, D.C. chapter of the Sons of the Revolution to foster a critical appreciation for the role of art in American history, through the study of American art, design, or architecture from the Colonial era to the present. The Sons of the Revolution was founded in 1876 by members of the Society of the Cincinnati wishing to broaden participation in preserving the American heritage on the eve of this country’s centennial. Its mission is to promote knowledge and appreciation of the achievement of American independence and to foster fellowship among its members.
In my junior year I recreated Fragonard’s painting in Professor Paul Reuther’s class, Materials, Methods & Techniques. After spending so much time on one painting I have a real connection to it. Fragonard’s vibrant colors are reminiscent of the passion I feel for art, the modern brushstrokes marry my interest in traditional Italian and French art with my love for 19th century painters, and the subject — well, I’ve certainly found myself doing a lot of reading over the past four years!

**Areas of Interest**
Italian Renaissance Art; 19th. and 20th C. French Art
This image affirmed a deep interest in art and artistry and, perhaps more formatively, introduced me to the multidimensional world of art history. Judith is, according to who you’re reading, a powerful symbol of femininity or a manifestation of repressed trauma, among other things. And Artemisia, the noble creator, is similarly represented in a variety of ways that are often presented as mutually exclusive. This painting communicated the diversity of opinion and range of interests present in the art history community, and, as important as this image is in my life (I even have a sword tattoo a la Gentileschi!), the conversation surrounding the artwork is what brought me to art history and kept me here.

**Areas of Interest**
- Contemporary and Modern Art;
- Performance Art;
- Vienna Actionism
In studying Pamela Singh’s *Treasure Maps*, a series of painted photographs, I realized art history to be both rich and incomplete. In this study, I used the conceptual framework of the flaneur to highlight how Singh’s work resists the male privileging aspects of the Western dominated world, as she positions herself dwelling in both private and public worlds. Thus, Singh’s *Treasure Maps* resonates in a historical lineage of traditional craft, being the painted photograph, while also critically departing from such norms. I carry this work in my reflective approaches to art and my own practices of creating.

**Areas of Interest**
Contemporary Art

HEATHER HERBSTRITT

Vincent van Gogh’s *Self Portrait* at the National Gallery of Art has always captivated me. Regardless of my initial reason for going, I always visited Vincent. He drew me in completely with his kaleidoscoped sienna beard, the motion and emotion of his brushwork, and his azure fixated gaze. There was a deep emotion to viewing the portrait, as if I could see all of his mania and genius laid out on the canvas. His vulnerability and emotion drew me in. First as an artist, then as an art historian. Studying art history at GW awoke my desire to unravel his story. I wanted to learn about the artist who captured passion and frenzy so concisely and eloquently in a single canvas. I wanted to bear witness to his life and if possible give voice and new interpretations of this animated portrait.

**Areas of Interest**

Italian Renaissance; Impressionism; Post-Impressionism

Vincent van Gogh, *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas, 1889
In 1970, Lee Lozano left the art world as a piece, one that would continue until her death in 1999. Defined by the severing of interpersonal connections, *Dropout Piece* resonated with my own senior year isolation and growing disillusionment with the force of art. But despite its rejection of the art world, *Dropout Piece* is held together — earns its title as a piece — by Lozano’s unshakeable faith in art. I decided to write my senior thesis on *Dropout Piece*. Researching Lozano’s extended withdrawal in the name of art has helped me rekindle my own faith in art.

**CAITLIN CHAN**

**Areas of Interest**

Contemporary Art and Critical Theory

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*Lee Lozano, Dropout Piece, 1970-1999*
A work of art that resonated with me during my time at GW was the illustrated folio from a Haft Awrang by Jami. In the story, Layla and Majnun fall in love but due to outside circumstances are unable to be together. This illustrated folio encapsulates the love and longing for each other that Layla and Majnun have. The intricate patterns highlight the distress that the lovers feel being separated. While audiences might be able to pinpoint who Majnun is (the man on the left in blue and brown) it is practically impossible to locate Layla, sending us on the same fervent search that he is in. This illustrated folio shows the way that emotions and stories can be captured through art.

ALEJANDRA VELAZQUEZ STAMATIO

A work of art that resonated with me during my time at GW was the illustrated folio from a Haft Awrang by Jami. In the story, Layla and Majnun fall in love but due to outside circumstances are unable to be together. This illustrated folio encapsulates the love and longing for each other that Layla and Majnun have. The intricate patterns highlight the distress that the lovers feel being separated. While audiences might be able to pinpoint who Majnun is (the man on the left in blue and brown) it is practically impossible to locate Layla, sending us on the same fervent search that he is in. This illustrated folio shows the way that emotions and stories can be captured through art.

Areas of Interest
Latin American Art; Modern Art; Islamic Art
This work reminds me of why I am so passionate about art history. Through candidly depicting people enjoying themselves, Renoir truly captures a moment of leisurely life in the latter-half of 19th century France: lively, freeing, exciting. During the past four years studying art history I have come to realize that, for me, art is about capturing the raw feelings of the era, and dissecting them to get beyond the superficiality of conventional historic accounts. This presents itself differently throughout different periods, with different mediums and techniques, in a way that provides a true looking glass into what life was like — through the good and the bad.

Areas of Interest
Contemporary Art; French 19th Century Art; 20th Century Art Déco

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Luncheon Of the Boating Party*, oil on canvas, 1881
Manet, *Masked Ball at the Opera*, oil on canvas, 1873

**YUZhou He**

*Masked Ball at the Opera* contains stories in each figure. Manet invites his friends to be models in this work. When I look at the work, I can’t stop but to figure how the 19th century masked opera would unravel behind the painting.

**Areas of Interest**
East Asian Art
The unique artistic world of Xul Solar has served as a constant source of inspiration throughout my time at GW and this work in particular embodies the radical individuality of an incredible artist while also representing the evolution of art towards a new and unpredictable future, which is what I have come to love about art history. The dynamic scene reminds me that a constant state of movement is what prompts new ideas which are essential to the creative process and this work consistently reminds me of the hope and optimism I have for the future of this field.

**Areas of Interest**
Latin American Avant-Garde Art and Contemporary Art
There is something about Eva Hesse’s work that just makes sense to me. I have kept *Sans II* close to my heart; its immediacy has been both a point of stability and a catalyst for growth as I’ve developed as a student of art history.

**Areas of Interest**
Institutional Critique and Contemporary Art

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*Eva Hesse, Sans II, fiberglass and polyester resin, 1968*
Graduate Student Features

photo credit Denny Henry
Spending my second year interning at SAAM, I have always enjoyed this portrait because of the way that Sargent captures the elegance and excess of the Gilded Age. Considered a “society portraitist,” Sargent depicts the sitter’s class through her sumptuous gown and setting, but also shows the turmoil she faced in her personal life through her stiff posture and anxiously intertwined fingers. Chanler, the painting’s subject, was one of four women discussed in Sargent’s Women, a book that I read before coming to GW and whose author, Donna Lucey, was a VASC lecturer in the program in Spring 2021.

Areas of Interest
American Art
In my last year at GW, I wrote about the Sahkulu Sultan Cemevi for my Qualifying Paper. This is the prayer house that my family visited every week when growing up in Istanbul. At the Art History MA program, I had the opportunity to write about my culture, research the historical intricacies of Bektasism and Alevism, and develop research that I hope to continue with a Ph.D. The inside of the prayer room is designed in a dodecagonal shape to represent the Twelve Imams from the Shi’ite and Hurufi tradition. The centrally located column is a quintessential representation of the dar-i Mansur philosophy from the Bektasi practice. To this day, Alevi/Bektasi prayer homes do not receive any taxpayer money for restoration or research. As Alevi spaces are not recognized as prayer homes by the current Turkish government, I needed to research this monument’s typological importance to Istanbul’s visual culture and conduct research to further the academic interest in Turkish Shi’ite spaces.

**Areas of Interest**
Islamic Art
ERIN JONES

While *Court Lady* is neither a 19th century French painting nor a Pop artwork, this work continues to resonate with me throughout my time at GWU. When I feel like every artist, artwork, and idea has already been documented by other art historians, this work reminds me that there is always more to be investigated, written, and said about art.

**Areas of Interest**
Pop Art and 19th century French painting

*Court Lady*, opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper, ca. 1620
XIAOYU “OWEN” CHEN

As a significant visual source in my Qualifying Paper, this image most clearly helps identify a case of mislabeling in Francis Frith’s collection. This kind of Western mislabeling over East Asian artworks in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries not only provides significant evidence of incomplete understandings on East Asian culture, but also gives me a chance to further study the complicated relationships among nations such as Britain, China, Japan, and so on.

Areas of Interest
East Asian Art

Francis Frith, Tomb of 1st Ming Emperor China, Photograph, 1850s to 1870s.
Levine’s rendition of Fountain was the centerpiece for a talk I gave at SECAC 2020. At first I was struck by the deadpan humor of Levine’s work, but after diving deeper into the implications of copying I felt that I was going in circles trying to form a water-tight argument. I began talking to my peers, my professors, and even my parents about these contradictory conclusions and eventually the point of the work came to me: contradictions in art history exist and that’s okay. It was a very liberating moment in my understanding of art history.

Areas of Interest
Early Modern Art

Corrine Helman

Sherrie Levine, Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp), cast bronze, 1996
This work has such economy of content but everything about it, from the placement as a public object to the ubiquitousness and anonymity of the empty bed, makes viewers connect to this piece. Gonzales-Torres’s work has stuck with me because he managed to put so much intimacy into his works, many of which are ephemeral. It helped develop my passion for art history because it has shown me how I can come back to the same work of art at different points in my life and take something different away each time.

Areas of Interest
Modern and Contemporary Textiles and Collections Management

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled” (billboard of an empty bed) printed billboard, 1991
Dynamic swirling planets and astrological charts overlay the artist’s original self-portrait, unfocused almost to the point of abstraction. The stark, rusty-orange tones counterbalance the ethereal steely-blues, representing the heavens and Earth. This photograph – part of a more extensive series titled *Tantric Self-Portrait in Jaipur* by the contemporary Indian photographer, Pamela Singh – creates an enigmatic, dreamlike illusion that suspends the artist in space and time. For me, this photograph offers a poetic rhythm to the contemplation of the self in the cosmos. Its ambiguity impresses how we, as art historians, continually question and discover meaning in an ever-changing, impermanent world.

**MEGAN CULLER**

**Areas of Interest**
South Asian Art and Architecture; Indian Astrology and Tantra

Jim Dine’s depictions of tools were the first exposure I had to his work. I loved how he took mundane, everyday objects and used them as inspiration for his art. He saw the power and significance these objects had in his personal life and believed that they could have the same importance within fine art. My interest in Dine and his everyday items became an academic paper that later became the foundation for my Qualifying Paper. Ultimately, Dine and his tools brought me to an area of Art History that I had little knowledge of before, an area I now love.

Areas of Interest
Early 20th Century Art; Postmodernism

Jim Dine, *Five Paintbrushes (Fourth State)*, etching with drypoint, mezzotint, aquatint on copperplate de Luxe paper, 1973
I resonate with this botanical pattern for its simple, infinite beauty. I appreciate Morris’ artwork for everyday life, available to those who wish to partake in its various forms. In the past two years I have learned of art and the places that house it, in ancient cathedrals in remote villages; in private collections of the wealthy; in the art museums right within reach here in Washington. And yet, the place which art seems to resonate with me the most is the home, where belief and vision are formed. The art which surrounds us in this space is profoundly important.

**Areas of Interest**
Theology and Art

*William Morris, Willow Bough, block-printed wallpaper, 1887*
I stumbled upon this photomontage by Dora Maar while working on my Qualifying Paper, and it has not left my mind since. There is something hypnotic about the image. You can spend hours unravelling it and still not breach the surface. Though the primary objects of my Qualifying Paper are magazine advertisements, the affinity that I found between Maar’s “hand-shell” and those images seemed to further blur the lines between art and visual culture. That the images made for wartime advertisements could echo the complexity of this photomontage solidified my desire to integrate visual culture into my art historical practice.

**Areas of Interest**
Modern & Contemporary Art and Visual Culture

Dora Maar, *Untitled (Hand-Shell)*, Photomontage, 1934
This painting shook me from my comfort zone and shot me into the fascinating world of Mughal art, which was entirely new for me. I was able to examine this page at the National Museum of Asian Art, where an archival board covered the entire page aside from the central image. When the board was removed and the full splendor of the text and border was revealed, I knew it was a special object. Working with this painting was the first time in my academic career that I felt I had contributed useful insight to the field.

Areas of Interest
Medieval Art and Architecture; Reliquaries and Pilgrimage Art

Young Akbar Recognizes his Mother, folio from an Akbarnama, attributed to Madhava, ca. 1596-1600 or 1604, Mughal India. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper. 12.9x12cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., F2939.57
Watson and the Shark depicts the dramatic moment after a shark attacked Brook Watson. The painting, however, means so much more. I first viewed Copley’s work at the National Gallery of Art when I was fourteen. Nearly a decade later, when I arrived at GWU, I realized I would never escape it. In my seminars with Professor Bjelajac — Art Historiography, and Magic, Religion, and Hermetic Tradition in the Arts — we discussed the painting at length considering its history, symbolism, and astrological meanings. For that reason, whenever I wander through the American Art galleries of the NGA and walk by Watson and the Shark, I fondly recall Professor Bjelajac’s fascination with Copley and the hours we spent contemplating the work as first year graduate students.

**Areas of Interest**

18th and 19th Century Art; American Art
While difficult to choose a single work, I always seem to find myself returning to this work when I am at the National Gallery of Art. A traditional subject that is able to hold its own in a gallery filled with exquisite works, this painting immediately caught my attention the first time I visited the gallery with my Dutch art class. It was the first painting I wrote about after coming to GW, and it was this class that really drew me to art history. While my interests seem to constantly change, I always try to make it back to this work when at the NGA to revisit my initial plunge into art history.

**Areas of Interest**
Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture

*Descent from the Cross*, Rembrandt Workshop/Constantijn van Renesse, 1650-52
Gallery 102

Gallery 102 is committed to the exhibiting of contemporary art, including work from GW & Corcoran students, D.C.-area artists, and nationally recognized artists of all mediums. The gallery provides practical curatorial experience to the student body. Students have the opportunity to exhibit work, curate shows and install exhibitions. The Student Exhibitions Committee consists of GW and Corcoran students – undergraduate and graduate, majors and non-majors, artists and art historians – who both develop innovative, original, and thought-provoking exhibitions and invite a select group of guest curators to present exhibitions each semester.

VASC (Visiting Artists & Scholars Committee)

The Visiting Artists and Scholars Committee brings respected established and emerging practitioners in the arts to present public lectures, conduct one-on-one critiques, lead small seminars or reading discussions, and share informal meals with students. All VASC lectures are free and open to the public. The lecture programs are organized by the Visiting Artists and Scholars Committee (VASC). Run by BA, MA, and MFA students, the committee brings six to eight artists and scholars to speak on campus each year.

Graduating students not featured:

**B.A. in Art History**
- Jordan Anger
- Emma Blanchard
- Lea Belland
- Margaret Cece
- Caroline Eisenhuth
- Xueer Hao
- Jordan Villatuya
- Zixuan (Gwen) Zhang
- Shivaani Gardner
- M Goldberg

**M.A. in Art History**
- Jillian Stelow
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the faculty, staff, and students of the Corcoran Art History Program for adapting and making this academic year successful, despite the distance.

Corcoran Art History Leadership

Barbara von Barghahn,
Program Head

Lilien Robinson,
Director of Graduate Studies

Alexander Dumbadze,
Director of Undergraduate Studies

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