

**ARTH 400/401: Honours Seminar & Honours Research Paper
Fall 2023**



Time/place: Thursday, 11:35 AM-2:25 PM, Ferrier 230

Instructor: Prof. Matthew C. Hunter

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:15-2:45 by [Zoom](#) or in person by request

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This seminar is designed to accompany and support the writing of the honours thesis in art history (ARTH 401); enrollment is limited to students formally enrolled in the art history honours program. The assignments are meant to help you deliver a “capstone” project and to prepare for advanced study in art history. Thus, we will consider techniques of art-historical knowledge production, along with varieties of evidence the discipline has traditionally privileged and excluded. Examining topics of current urgency facing the discipline, the course foregrounds practical activities key to advanced art-historical study: grant writing, concise presentation of research, and critical evaluation of sources, among others.

METHOD OF EVALUATION: ARTH 400

Participation: 10%

Includes attendance in class; respectful, generous and constructive engagement with classmates/assignments; contribution to in-class work and to overall seminar environment

First Draft of Proposal: 10%	Preliminary version needs to be brought to class on Sept. 14; revised first draft to be submitted via the course site by 11:59 PM on Sept. 15
Critical Bibliography Assignment: 15%	Bring to class on Sept. 21; submit via course site by 11:59 PM on Sept. 22
Second Draft of Proposal: 20%	Bring to class on Sept. 28; submit via course site by 11:59 PM on Sept. 29
Group Presentations of Readings: 10%	Each student will readings present once (in groups of 3); expectations for presentations to be posted on course site
Museum/archives Assignment: 10%	Details TBA; short paper to be uploaded by 11:59 PM on Oct. 6
Presentation of Individual Research: 25%	Expectations for presentations to be posted on course site

Method of Evaluation: ARTH 401

Written research paper: 100%	Due by 11:59 PM on Dec. 11; formatting and other specifications to be posted on course site
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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

McGill University is sited on unceded lands that have long served as places of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous peoples whose continuing presence marks this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR/EMAIL POLICY

I am a recovering artist and father of two young children. I am entering my eleventh year of editing a quarterly journal of art, architecture, media and politics. I play in two bands and am currently the chair of the Department of Art History and Communication Studies. I do not own a mobile phone. In short, my hours may not be your hours. Kindly allow 24 hours for a response to email. I do not check academic email during weekends and holidays.

Generative AI Policy

The point of ARTH 400/401 is to give you space and means to write a capstone project in art history. The thesis is meant to integrate and expand concepts, methods and concerns

encountered previously in your undergraduate coursework; it might sound the potential for future research at the postgraduate level. Understood in that light, all writing submitted for this course must be your own. Any/all sources referenced in submitted work must have been read/processed by you. And while you might consult generative AI to locate sources in a manner roughly comparable to, say, Wikipedia, research submitted for this course must not be produced by generative AI.

COURSE POLICIES AND GENERAL INFORMATION

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

Many students may face mental health challenges that can impact not only their academic success but also their ability to thrive in our campus community. Please reach out for support when you need it; wellness resources are available on campus, off campus, and online: <https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/>

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme of this course is subject to change.

SYLLABUS

Week 1) [August 31] Introduction

Please come to our first meeting prepared to share your ideas/work to date on your honours thesis topic and your career/professional goals. Be ready to sign up for group reading

presentations (each student needs to present readings once; four possible weeks are marked ** below), and for presentations of your own thesis research at the end of term.

Week 2) [Sept. 7]: Description

Why do art historians describe things? Is description a form of argument? Are acts of describing always already comparative? How has description been understood to serve in the constitution of art-historical evidence?

For this week, please read the following texts:

Michael Baxandall, "The Language of Art History," *New Literary History* 10, 3 (Spring 1979): 453-465

Sharon Marcus, Heather Love, and Stephen Best, "Building a Better Description," *Representations* 135, 1 (2016): 1–21

Zeynep Çelik Alexander, "Looking: Wölfflin's Comparative Vision," in *Kinaesthetic Knowing : Aesthetics, Epistemology, Modern Design* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 63-96

Then, locate a work of art-historical description that you find to be either particularly effective (it should be at least one substantive paragraph, but no longer than one page) or especially terrible.

Bring your description to class and post an image of the work described to the course site by 10 AM on Sept. 7.

In-class activities: We will discuss the readings in the first half of class. After a break, we will present/discuss (either in pairs or as a group) the descriptions you've located, then share with the group. To do this, please be prepared to discuss the description you've chosen in light the readings and thematic questions above and the following particulars: where does your chosen passage occur in the body of the text (i.e. page X of Y)? Does the language used by the author actively seek to "cook the books" (i.e. advance a particular argumentative agenda)? Or, does the language evince effort to restrain argumentative impulses (if so, where do you see evidence of that effort)?

Week 3) [Sept. 14] Proposal Boot-Camp, Part 1

Writing proposals is fundamental to advanced study in art history. Acquiring this skill will help you to get into graduate school and to fund your dissertation research. While writing a proposal will provide some points of direction for the development of your Honours thesis, grant writing will be a constant feature your future life in the academy or in the art world.

We will begin three sessions dedicated to the subtle art of proposal writing in a gentle manner. First, read through the following recommendations on grant writing here:

Prof. Haidee Wasson, “Writing a Grant? A Basic Guide”

Adam Pzeworski and Frank Salomon, “On the Art of Writing Proposals” (Social Science Research Council, 1995 rev., 1988): <https://www.ssrc.org/publications/the-art-of-writing-proposals/>

Then, familiarize yourself with both the criteria, key dates, and guidelines for both the federal and provincial funding agencies: SSHRC (https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/students-etudiants/pg-cs/cgsm-bescm_eng.asp) and FQRSC (<https://frq.gouv.qc.ca/en/program/frqsc-masters-training-scholarships-b1z-and-a2z1-fall-2023-2/>)

While all students planning to pursue graduate school are encouraged to apply for external funding, it is your responsibility—not the Department’s—to understand the granting agency’s rules, criteria, procedures, and deadlines.

Second, begin drafting your own proposal. The final version will need to include:

- a title
- a succinct account of the subject of your research (object/phenomenon/discourse/artist, etc.)
- the “state of the field” related to your topic
- a concise synopsis of the intervention/basic argument you wish to advance
- account of the steps and procedures you plan to employ to support your knowledge-claims (i.e. an account of your methodology)
- an articulation of the stakes (political, theoretical or otherwise)
- length limit: one page single-spaced, not including the bibliography (of at least 10 scholarly sources)

Bring your proposal draft—whatever state it is in—to class on Sept. 14.

N.B. Grant writing takes a ton of time and many, many iterations! The point is to embrace the process, not letting the proverbial pursuit of perfection get in the way of the good. This draft should represent your best effort at all of the components listed above; emphasis here is on effort and not expectation that all will be “done and dusted.”

In-class activities: In the first half of class, we will discuss the key recommendations on grant writing outlined in the readings. Then, we will break into groups to review successful past examples of grant applications prepared by students in the department. You will act as the grant evaluation committee and we will discuss criteria for assessment. In the second half of class, we will workshop our own applications-in-progress.

Submit: proposal draft, revised in light of in-class discussion, via the course site by 11:59 PM on Sept. 15.

Week 4) [Sept. 21] Proposal Boot-Camp, Part 2: Critical bibliography assignment

At least ten scholarly sources will be required for the bibliography of your final research proposal. Having begun to work on our proposals, this week asks you to reflect critically on our sources. How do we know that the sources on which we make our arguments are reliable? What happens when sources turn out to be mistaken, fraudulent or even delusional?

To make this all concrete, read:

Nick Wilding, "Forging the Moon," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 160, 1 (2016): 37–72

Vladimir Nabokov, "Foreword," in *Pale Fire* (New York: Random House, 1962), 13-29

Then, use the readings above as prompts to reflect on the three most important sources for your own project. As such, our challenge for the week is not just to develop an annotated bibliography; instead, it asks you to reflect critically on how you know your featured sources are important to the field in which your research intervenes and the ways in which the evidence/arguments of those contributions will support or depart from your own.

For class: Prepare a document using proper citational protocols (posted on the course website) in which you identify the three most important sources for your research. After each citation, you will need to: 1) explain how you have established the significance of the source to the field of your inquiry; 2) succinctly state the key arguments made and the evidence used in that source; and 3) concisely summarize how you anticipate extending or revising the contributions of each key source.

Assignments should be 3 single-spaced pages. Bring this with you to class on Sept. 21.

In-class activity: we will discuss the readings, their implications (if any) for our work, and then take turns presenting our key sources.

Submit: revise critical bibliography assignment (3 single-spaced pages) in light of class discussion, and submit via course site by 11:59 PM on Sept. 22.

Week 5) [Sept. 28] Proposal Boot-Camp, Part 3: Proposals, Revised

Revise your proposal in light of the insights/discussion from the previous two weeks. Per the above, it should include:

- a title

- a succinct account of the subject of your research (object/phenomenon/discourse/artist, etc.)
- the “state of the field” related to your topic
- a concise synopsis of the intervention/basic argument you wish to advance
- account of the steps and procedures you plan to employ to support your knowledge-claims (i.e. an account of your methodology)
- an articulation of the stakes (political, theoretical or otherwise)
- length limit: one page single-spaced, not including the bibliography (of at least 10 scholarly sources)

In-class activity: Bring proposals to class on Sept. 21 and be prepared to read them aloud/workshop them using the rubrics shared in Week 3.

>Note: this session will be open to all students interested in applying for grants.

Submit: revised version of the proposal by 11:59 PM on Sept. 29.

Week 6) [Oct. 5] Museums/archives

Visiting museums is a standard component of art-historical pedagogy; histories of collecting and museum display are now lively subfields. But, what of the archives housing the vast populations of museum objects that never go on show? Particularly when attending to the work of racialized and Indigenous actors so frequently effaced from the historical record, is there an imperative to treat the archive imaginatively—or to refrain from doing so? This assignment asks you to read, look and reflect both upon what/how we learn from museums and their archives, and to think about what each hides. Details of the assignment will be shared upon confirmation of permissions from the Musée des Beaux-arts de Montréal where the assignment will be staged.

Carol Duncan, “The Art Museum as Ritual,” in *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 7-20

Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14

Submit: short paper (details TBA) by 11:59 PM on Oct. 6

October 12 – Fall Break/no class

Week 7) [Oct. 19] What is “Fair Use”?**

When—if ever—is it necessary to obtain permissions to reproduce images in scholarly publications? Is there a politics to paying for image use or in refusing to do so? This week’s readings will consider the practical and the political ends of the question from a range of

perspectives, both inside and beyond the Anglo-American ambit in which “copyright” informs the traffic in art.

College Art Association, “Code of Best Practices in Fair Use in the Visual Arts”

Warhol v. Goldsmith (US Supreme Court, 2023)

Boatema Boateng, “Introduction: Indexes of Culture and Power,” in *The Copyright Thing Doesn't Work Here : Adinkra and Kente Cloth and Intellectual Property in Ghana*. First Peoples: New Directions in Indigenous Studies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 1-33

In-class activity: Following the introduction by collaborating presenters, we will discuss the readings and their implications for our own art-historical knowledge production.

Workshop: Applying to grad school

In the final hour of class (1:30-2:30), our class time will be opened (via Zoom) to a brief presentation with question and answer on considerations and best practices relating to graduate school applications. This presentation may be recorded for broader circulation; the Q&A will not be.

Week 8) [Oct. 26] Numbers**

Much ink has been spilled defending or denying the kinship of art to language. “Ut pictura poesis” per Horace, images become “bibles of the illiterate” in the Christian formulation of Gregory the Great in the sixth century. More recently, visual art’s resistance to—its existence outside of—text has found countervailing support in the post-structural writings of Roland Barthes among many other theorists. This week considers art’s relation to numbers. How are the algorithmic formulae of AI changing contemporary image-making? What impels—what tools enable—art historians to turn exhibition checklists, catalogues and other conventional evidence used by the discipline into “datasets”? What knowledge claims do such techniques generate? And what are the arguments for embracing or resisting digital tools?

Antonio Somaini, “Algorithmic Images: Artificial Intelligence and Visual Culture,” *Grey Room* 93 (forthcoming)

Diana Greenwald, “The Historical Data of the Art World,” in *Painting by Numbers: Data-Driven Histories of Nineteenth-Century Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 23-51

Paul B. Jaskot, “Digital Art History As the Social History of Art: Towards the Disciplinary Relevance of Digital Methods.” *Visual Resources* 35, 1-2 (2019): 21–33
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2019.1553651>

Claire Bishop, “Against Digital Art History,” *International Journal for Digital Art History* 3 (July 2018). <https://doi.org/10.11588/dah.2018.3.49915>.

In-class activity: Following the introduction by collaborating presenters, we will discuss the readings and their implications for our own art-historical knowledge production.

Week 9) [Nov. 2] “Mixture”**

Much recent research in the history of art has privileged objects, practices, discourses or other enterprises forged through cross-cultural or transregional “mixture.” This week’s readings focus attention on the terms in which that mixture is framed and the stakes (theoretical, political or otherwise) claimed thereby.

Kristel Smentek, “China and Greco-Roman Antiquity: Overture to a Study of the Vase in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Journal18*, issue 1 (Spring 2016), <https://www.journal18.org/497>. DOI: [10.30610/1.2016.3](https://doi.org/10.30610/1.2016.3)

Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, “Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 12, 1 (2003): 5-35

Holly Shaffer, *Grafted Arts: Art Making and Taking in the Struggle for Western India : 1760-1910* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art), selections

Ralph Bauer and Marcy Norton, “Entangled trajectories: Indigenous and European histories,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 26, 1 (2017): 1-17

In-class activity: Following the introduction by collaborating presenters, we will discuss the readings and their implications for our own art-historical knowledge production.

Week 10) [Nov. 9] Trans Art History**

What is “trans art history”? Is it an extension of older currents in studies of feminism, gender and sexuality that have proven crucial to art-historical knowledge? Or does it represent an important break from that work?

David J. Getsy and Che Gossett, “A Syllabus on Transgender and Nonbinary Methods for Art and Art History,” *Art Journal*, 80, 4 (2021): 100-115

Cyle Metzger and Kirstin Ringelberg, “Prismatic Views: A Look at the Growing Field of Transgender Art and Visual Culture Studies,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 19, 2 (August 2020): 159–170

Leah DeVun and Zeb Tortorici, “Trans, Time, and History,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, 4 (November 2018): 518–539

Ace Lehner, "Critical Questions and Embodied Reflections: Trans Visual Culture Today—A Roundtable," *Art Journal*, 80, 4 (2021): 38-52

In-class activity: Following the introduction by collaborating presenters, we will discuss the readings and their implications for our own art-historical knowledge production.

Week 11) [Nov. 16] Presentations I: Four students will present honours thesis research in progress. Expectations/format for presentations will be posted on the course site.

Week 12) [Nov. 23] Presentations II: Second group of four students will present honours thesis research in progress. Expectations/format for presentations will be posted on the course site.

Week 13) [Nov. 30] Presentations III: Final four students will present honours thesis research in progress. Expectations/format for presentations will be posted on the course site.

Getting it Published workshop: optional; date/time TBA (circa early December)