History of Art and Archaeology, School of Arts

Graduate destinations
A Masters from the department provides students with expertise in the History of Art and/or Archaeology of Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Our postgraduates progress to work in arts, culture and heritage roles, including employment in museums, galleries and the international art market. The large portfolio of transferable skills they acquire enables them to forge careers in a range of other fields across the world.

Our Masters programmes are also an excellent foundation for MPhil/PhD research.

Contact information
If you are interested in studying in the History of Art and Archaeology department at SOAS, contact the Student Recruitment Office:

Email: mastersadmissions@soas.ac.uk
Tel: +44(0)20 7898 4361

For other enquiries, contact our Masters Tutor, Dr Lukas Nickel:

Email: ln2@soas.ac.uk
Tel: +44(0)20 7898 4454

Follow the School of Arts on Twitter and Facebook:

Twitter: @SOASArts
Facebook: SOASArts

"SOAS is a vibrant place filled with diversity. Pursuing the MA in History of Art and/or Archaeology has given me a deep understanding of the subject, theoretically as well as practically. With the guidance of an eminent team of professors, and the support of the various resources SOAS has to offer, my time here has indeed been very productive, academically and professionally."

Vaishnavi Patil (MA History of Art and/or Archaeology)

www.soas.ac.uk/art

Masters Study in the History of Art and Archaeology

The Department of the History of Art and Archaeology, School of Arts is a vibrant community of students and scholars interested in the arts, architecture and material culture of Asia, Africa and the Middle East and their global diasporas from ancient times to the present day.

From sculptural traditions and performance masquerade in West Africa and monumental architectural complexes in northeast Africa to the visual cultures of China and Japan; from the archaeology of Morocco to the temples of South East Asia; from the sophisticated book cultures of South Asia and the Middle East to questions of identity in museums, and diasporic art studies, our degree programmes cover a diversity of themes and theoretical approaches.
Why study the History of Art and Archaeology?

The department is renowned as an alternative voice to Eurocentric art history, challenging the categories often taken for granted in the study of other cultures. Students benefit from the unparalleled knowledge and enthusiasm of staff and from the unique position of SOAS as an institution for the study of Asian and African languages, history, religions and cultures.

As part of the School of Arts, the department profits from the insights of scholars and students studying Music, Film and Media of Asia, Africa and the Middle East in historical and contemporary contexts.

"My learning experience at SOAS has been very rewarding. We can learn from eminent scholars and experts not only during lectures in class, but also during seminars and talks which SOAS organises frequently. It is really interesting to learn about the history and art of my country, Indonesia, and Southeast Asia in general."  

Wieske Octaviany Sapardan  
(8MA History of Art and/or Archaeology)

The department is unique in its coverage of the arts, archaeology and visual cultures of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. No other university in the world offers such a range of teaching in these areas.

Staff are renowned globally as experts in their fields. More than 80% of their research was judged either world-leading or internationally excellent when it was last assessed externally. The research of members of staff informs and is informed by their teaching.

The department’s teaching is excellent. 92% of students are satisfied with their teachers according to the last National Student Survey. 95% think that staff are good at explaining things.

Our graduates stand out for their expertise in the arts and cultures of a wide geographical area. Many progress to work in arts, culture and heritage roles, including employment in museums, galleries and the international art market.

The large portfolio of transferable skills that our students acquire enables them to forge careers in a range of other fields across the world.

Our resources are world class. SOAS has an outstanding library housing major collections of books, archives, manuscripts, photographs, and audio and film material. 9 out of 10 students believe that library and IT resources meet their requirements.

The department is located in the Brunei Gallery on the Russell Square campus. The Gallery hosts regular exhibitions of contemporary and historical art from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, often in collaboration with the department.

Our location in central London allows fantastic access to museums, galleries and cultural events. The department collaborates with leading institutions in the art world, including the British Museum and the V&A Museum.

"Studying Islamic Art History at SOAS has been one of the most engaging, pleasurable and rewarding pursuits I have undertaken. The SOAS academics I encountered were exemplary. Their scholarship, first hand experiences and enthralling anecdotes brought their subjects to life. Within this rich and rigorous environment, also supported by access to other SOAS departments and the numerous co-curricular resources available in London, it is inevitable that students strive for excellence."  

Elizabeth Kelly (MA History of Art and Architecture of the Islamic Middle East)

Degree programmes

MA History of Art and/or Archaeology  

This programme is a unique opportunity to study the History of Art and/or Archaeology of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Students concentrate on architecture, sculpture, painting and the decorative arts and have the option of pursuing topics and approaches more archaeological in focus. They consider theoretical and methodological questions and are invited to question the relevance of the disciplinary distinction between History of Art and Archaeology to the study of the non-Western world. Courses cover a time period spanning from antiquity to the present-day.

MA Contemporary Art and Art Theory of Asia and Africa  

On this programme students engage with some of the most dynamic and contemporary aspects of Asian and African art, as well as issues of collection, display, representation, tourism, and shifts between regional, national and global identities. By focusing on theoretical and methodological questions, they are equipped with the terms and approaches needed for in-depth study of contemporary art. This is combined with the study of contemporary art from a range of Asian and African contexts.

MA History of Art and Archaeology of East Asia  

This programme is an unrivalled opportunity to study the arts of China, Korea and Japan. Students consider a wide range of East Asian arts, from Chinese archaeology to Japanese prints, Korean installation works to Buddhist monuments, exploring their specificity and the links between them, in historical and contemporary periods. In many parts of East Asia archaeological evidence is key to understanding early societies. The programme therefore relates excavated materials to the history of art.

Students have the option of pursuing this degree over a two-year period combined with intensive language study in Japanese or Korean.

MA History of Art and Architecture of the Islamic Middle East  

The Islamic Middle East has given rise to an impressive material culture that continues in the present. This programme covers an area stretching from Islamic Spain through the Arab countries, Turkey, Iran and Central Asia in diverse historical periods. It offers students an unmatched opportunity to study particular regions or categories of art, including Fatimid art; the architecture and urbanism of Morocco, Arab, Persian, and Turkish painting; the calligraphy and illumination of the Qur’an; Mamluk art and architecture; the arts and architecture of the Ottomans in Turkey and the Balkans; and the material culture of western Iran. Archaeological issues of the Islamic Middle East are also considered.

In addition, the degree engages with trans-regional topics that extend beyond the Middle East, such as cultural and artistic relationships between the Islamic Middle East and Europe. Students can decide to study complementary courses on non-Islamic traditions of the Middle East and/or the Islamic traditions of other regions.

Students have the option of pursuing this degree over a two-year period combined with intensive language study in Arabic.

MA Religious Arts of Asia  

This is the only history of art and archaeology degree in Europe focused on the great religious traditions of Asia. It includes within its scope diverse countries, regions and time periods from antiquity to the present, with a particular emphasis on Buddhism in South, Central and Southeast Asia, the Hinduism in India, the Chinese, Korea and Japan, Hinduism, Shinto and animistic and syncretic practices are also studied. Students consider iconography, ritual, faith and pilgrimage in their multiple regional and historical guises. They study temple buildings, statues and paintings, formal, informal and popular.

The department’s staff also contribute to the MA Arts of Asia and Africa, a programme drawing upon the unique strength of the School of Arts as a centre for the study of the art, film, music and media of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and their global diasporas. Students select courses from across the school, developing a cross-discipline understanding of the arts. They have the option of specialising in a particular interdisciplinary field, such as popular music and film in the Middle East; art, archaeology and music of the Silk Road; or music, media and development in Africa.