

Welcome to History of Art at Pembroke!

Hello! Firstly, congratulations on gaining a place at Pembroke, I hope you find it as friendly, welcoming and as nice a place to study as I have during the course of my first year. My name is Sapphire Paston and I'm going into my second year of the History of Art degree, so hopefully I can give you plenty of useful advice since first year is still reasonably fresh in my memory!



Hi and welcome to Cambridge, I hope you'll love it here as much as I do! I'm Mikaela, your third-year subject rep. I've been around the Department for two years now and am happy to answer questions, recommend books, or just chat about what the next few years will be like- don't hesitate to get in touch!

Together we are your subject representatives, and we aim to make settling into life as an Art Historian at Pembroke as seamless and enjoyable as possible by answering any questions, and allaying any fears you might have.

As you probably know, the year is divided into three terms, Michaelmas, Lent and Easter, each of roughly eight weeks length. In Michaelmas, you will cover the Meaning of Architecture (for four weeks), and the Meaning of Art (for four weeks). In Meaning of Architecture you'll explore the origins and development of architectural forms, with regard to their symbolism and meaning. If you haven't ever studied architecture before (which neither of us had), the new architectural language can be daunting at first, and the department certainly throw you in at the deep end in this regard! Don't worry though, because due to the intense and focused nature of the topic, you'll find you soon pick up the architectural terms and before you know it you'll find yourself subconsciously analysing buildings on the street (or maybe that's just me).

Meaning of Art deals mainly with painting, prints and drawing, looking specifically at subject matter and how factors affect the meaning of an artwork. Like Meaning of Architecture, this topic only lasts for four weeks, so you cover a large time period and a large range of genres (grouped loosely into sacred and secular), the emphasis being on developing skills that will enable you to deduce some idea of meaning from any image you may encounter.

In Lent term, you spend the whole eight weeks exploring the Making of Art. In this topic, you'll learn all about the different materials and techniques used by artists, as well as the development of techniques over time and the reasons behind the artist's choice of media for certain effects and purposes. I really enjoyed this part of the course because you get to explore a great range of materials and techniques, including tempera, oil painting, drawing, illuminated manuscripts, watercolour, prints, sculpture, photography and much more, and because this topic lasts for eight weeks, you can really go into great depth. If you have any inclination for practical art you will love this topic too, since there are opportunities to try out a few materials for yourself to get a feel for them, such as making your own quill pen or trying out a bit of stone carving, and these classes were good fun.

Easter term is mainly occupied by revision for the exams (!!). I was terrified about these, but having been through them, I can honestly say that they weren't that bad, and by that point in the year you are well prepared for them. However, additionally, you will attend Objects classes

throughout all three terms, where you will visit pieces of art and architecture in and around Cambridge, looking into their making, meaning, and significance within their display context. During my first year, visits included a trip to Ely Cathedral, visits to college chapels and other university buildings, college art collections (such as the women's art collection at Murray Edwards), as well as some sessions at Kettle's Yard (a modern art gallery) and countless trips to the Fitzwilliam Museum (your new home from home!).

Alongside these topics, which you will be examined on, you will produce a Short Dissertation of no more than 5000 words, on a piece of art or architecture in or around Cambridge. At first, this can seem like a mammoth task and it can be tricky choosing just one artwork to write about from the wealth available in Cambridge. However, I really enjoyed it, since although you have little choice of what topics you study in your first year of History of Art, the SD allows you to explore in great detail an area that you are particularly interested in and passionate about, and the end result will be a really good piece of writing that you can be proud of.

As for workload, in the average week, you will usually attend three lectures, two Objects classes, one seminar (where you will present and discuss specific topics usually related to the week's lectures with your classmates), and one supervision. You will also produce one essay a week, which you will hand in to your supervisor in advance of your weekly supervision. Supervisions last an hour, in which you, a supervisor and up to two other students will discuss each other's essays and build upon the material taught in the lectures that week. You may have heard horror stories about supervisions, but I can assure you that they are absolutely nothing to worry about. Supervisors are often friendly and helpful, and want to work with you to get the best out of you. As long as you hand the work in, you shouldn't have any problems and might actually enjoy this unique part of the course, which is part of what makes learning at Cambridge so special.

We hope that this helps and very much look forward to meeting you in October! In the meantime, if you have any questions or need further advice, feel free to email us or add us on Facebook. Enjoy the rest of your holidays!

Best wishes,

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