

Harvard Art Museums

Fogg Museum
Busch-Reisinger Museum
Arthur M. Sackler Museum

Summer Institute for Technical Studies in Art June 3–14, 2024

Call for Participation

The **Summer Institute for Technical Studies in Art** (SITSA) is an intensive, two-week workshop for Ph.D. students of art history from diverse backgrounds and research areas whose training to date has given them limited access to object-focused technical inquiry, methodologies, and instruction. It aims to expose participants to the interdisciplinary approach and tools that are core to technical studies while fostering relationships that further collaboration, enrich research, and enhance scholarship across the field of art history and beyond.

As the field of art history continues to evolve toward a more interdisciplinary, inclusive practice, the role of scientific inquiry and technical study is increasingly valued. And as art history students contemplate careers in academia as well as in the museum field, they will appreciate the important role that the dynamic dialogue with conservation professionals and artists plays both in fostering a fuller understanding of the physical nature and life story of objects and in informing decisions about their preservation and stewardship.

Throughout the course, participants will engage with conservators, conservation scientists, curators, art historians, artists, and other makers in the collaborative environment of the Harvard Art Museums and the neighboring Department of History of Art and Architecture as well as other academic and cultural venues in the Greater Boston area. Under the direction of Francesca Bewer, Research Curator for Conservation and Technical Studies Programs at the Harvard Art Museums, SITSA will unite an expert faculty to engage a cohort of 15 students in close looking, art making, and the scientific investigation of objects from the museums' collections. Students will take part in peer-to-peer teaching, discuss technical art history writing, and have opportunities to question their assumptions about the physical realities and lives of objects. The cohort will explore ways in which the skills and knowledge they acquire during the course can meaningfully contribute to their research, be applied in teaching, and be communicated in different museum contexts.

Each participant will be provided with housing and a stipend of \$1,800 to help cover round-trip travel costs, food, and incidental expenses for the duration of the program.

This workshop is made possible with support from the Mellon Foundation.



Course Topic: Time

How much time does it take to make an artwork? How does its meaning and identity unfold through material and contextual changes over time? How do nature's cycles inform art making? What understanding of time underpins the different approaches to conservation and preservation? What is a time-based artwork, and is not all art time-based? How do shifts in technology lead to new discoveries that shape the relationships between time, materials, and the creation of artworks? How do decay and obsolescence implicate a certain understanding of time? What time does conservation of artworks and heritage discourse operate with as a system of values and practices that shape what remains and how?

This year's SITSA will ask these and other questions around the theme of time. Whether it's the materials and making of artworks, the alterations that these artifacts experience, or the value attached to their condition, the theme offers a unique perspective into the stories that objects can tell. From the formation, extraction, and manipulation of raw materials to the choreography of gesture, we will first explore the role of time involved in art making. We will also consider the colliding scales of time in artworks: the overlapping lifespans of an artwork and its material encompass geological orders, cultural and historical contexts, and chemical and physical composition. And while dating artworks or materials implies an understanding of time as a linear progression, cultural relationships with time are not necessarily linear, especially when they are looked at through non-Western, post-colonial and post-imperial perspectives. Exploring varied relationships with time provides for a more comprehensive encounter with artworks and their histories.

Unbound by any historical period and embracing an expansive scope for temporal inquiry into a variety of media and materials, SITSA will thus question the notion of time as it applies to technology, technique, media, and methods of making and also to different methods of inquiry. Hands-on practice will afford students a chance to compare the pace and range that selected techniques or materials allow. Through repeat interaction with materials and concepts, one acquires an ever deeper understanding for how they respond to external stimuli, whether physical, temporal, or chemical. Experiments with the length observation—and other elements of any technical investigation—of artworks will also sensitize students in a more embodied way to the importance of time for such endeavors.

Participants will be exposed to the tools and methods used in conservation and in contemporary artistic practices. A greater awareness of these will contribute to a more nuanced consideration of issues of transience/permanence, obsolescence, degradation, and decay, and other time-related topics concerning the creation and life of artworks and artifacts. Finally, the rich history of conservation represented in the Harvard Art Museums collections and the introduction into conservation discourse and practice of notions of active and vibrant matter and slow care will allow for discussions about varying attitudes toward durability, change, and preservation.

Eligibility and Application Process

Art history students currently enrolled in or completing a doctoral program in North America are eligible to apply. No background in science or conservation is required, and any specialization is welcome. A maximum of 15 participants will be admitted to the program. Applicants will be evaluated on the basis of their expressed interest in integrating technical studies in their own scholarly pursuits and in the field more broadly, as well as their academic accomplishments to date.

Applicants should submit a cover letter addressed to the Director of SITSA, Dr. Francesca G. Bewer, Research Curator for Conservation and Technical Studies Programs, Division of Academic and Public Programs, Harvard Art Museums. It should include a statement detailing what questions and unique perspective the applicant would bring to the program and a brief explanation of how the program would enrich their work (maximum

1,200 words). The statement should be accompanied by an academic and professional CV, as well as a letter of support from a faculty advisor that addresses the applicant's academic standing and their interest in the topic. **The application deadline is February 6, 2024**, and applicants will be notified of selection by March 17. Please submit application materials in electronic format to francesca_bewer@harvard.edu.

Further information about SITSA can be found [here](#).