The Department of Art History offers programs leading to the master of arts and the doctor of philosophy in art history with emphasis on African and African diaspora art, American material culture and vernacular architecture, ancient art and archaeology of the Mediterranean world, Chinese art and archaeology, Japanese art, medieval European art, Byzantine and Islamic art and architecture, early modern European art 19th-century art and print culture, modern and contemporary European and American art and visual culture. The department encourages the study of the global history of art, and material and visual culture while investigating works in all media from a wide range of periods and a variety of world cultures.

Students enjoy close interaction with their mentors and profit from superb resources for interdisciplinary research. Faculty members have international reputations in their specialties, regularly receive prestigious awards, lecture widely, and serve on major professional boards. Graduates of the department teach at the postsecondary level or pursue careers in museum and curatorial professions, private galleries and auction houses, library or archival work, architecture and historical preservation, and conservation.

The department is housed in the Conrad A. Elvehjem Building with the Chazen Museum of Art, which has a broad historical collection with several areas of particular strength, an active acquisitions program, and facilities to host major traveling exhibitions and exhibition courses. Graduate students use these collections for research and publishing projects. They may also have the opportunity to work on exhibitions in special classes or as project assistants. The building is also home to the Kohler Art Library, which contains an excellent collection of published materials and full range of periodicals. The department possesses a large image collection and access to ArtStor.