



Careers in Art History

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

How can art history land you a job? Art history is a discipline that has many direct and indirect applications to a wide variety of careers. In this lesson, you will learn about employment opportunities that will allow you to use your knowledge about art history, such as:

1. [Museum Curator](#)
2. [Art Appraiser](#)
3. [Other Applicable Careers](#)

1. Museum Curator

Someone who decides to continue his or her art history education at the master's or PhD level could apply his or her finely developed skill set as a museum **curator**. Museum curators are responsible for much more than wearing sleek, modern clothing and interesting eyeglass frames. This job covers a wide range of duties that might include acquiring artwork, planning and managing art exhibits, managing the transportation of exhibits and works of art, and, in some cases, physical care of the artwork.



Claude Monet (1840-1926)

Reflections of Clouds on the Water-Lily Pond

1920

New York, New York, USA

Oil on canvas

On display at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

A curator can also be responsible for research and publishing at larger, higher-profile galleries or museums, such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York. At these larger galleries or museums, curators are usually focused on one particular area, such as ancient Egyptian art, as a subject matter expert. At the same time, all smaller regional museums also have curators who might be in charge of the whole museum or part of the collection.

Museum registrars track museum art collections. They create documentation when a museum receives a work of art into its collection. They also document loans of art to other museums when an exhibition takes place. Museums might want to borrow a work of art for an exhibition or loan a work to another museum. Registrars will write condition reports, documenting whether any damage has occurred in transit. They will also complete customs forms if the loan takes place between different countries. This documentation is very important in determining a work of art's provenance, or where it came from. Works of art that have been looted or stolen often have incomplete provenance, so their origin is unclear.

Larger museums might have their own conservators, or people who make repairs to works of art when they get damaged. They need to have a great deal of scientific knowledge to determine what caused damage to a work of art and how to fix it.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** If an artist made a drawing on paper that was not acid-free or made a painting using pigments that would fade over time, a conservator would study the chemical composition of the work and make a decision regarding how to treat it.

Knowledge of art history might help answer questions related to the medium of the work of art—the type of paint, for instance—and other aspects of production.

Museum educators also play an important role, one in which knowledge of art history is essential. They learn about the works of art in a museum and explain them to visitors. Their role is similar to that of a teacher or professor, except that they work for the museum, or even a museum school if there is one. They also might think about how to explain works of art and make them meaningful to specific audiences, such as young children, people with disabilities, the elderly, or people who speak foreign languages. They might be involved in writing label text for works of art, creating audio guides, or developing special programs.



TERM TO KNOW

Curator

A person who creates exhibitions for museums by grouping together works of art according to a common theme.

2. Art Appraiser

Another interesting career opportunity is as an **art appraiser**. An art appraiser has several main responsibilities. First, they authenticate artwork, or validate that a piece of art is indeed made by a particular artist. Art appraisers also evaluate works of art to determine a price for that particular piece.



Gustav Klimt (1862 - 1918)

Adele Bloch-Bauer I

New York, New York, USA

1907

Oil, silver, and gold leaf on canvas



DID YOU KNOW

Before it went on tour in 1962, the *Mona Lisa* was appraised at around \$750 million (a number adjusted by inflation). Its true value is priceless and irreplaceable, of course.

The demand for a particular piece of art is determined by key factors, such as the reputation of the artist and the number of works he or she has produced. This information is useful for auction houses in determining a reserve price, or the minimum price to be accepted at an auction.

Art appraisers can also find employment in museums, as independent contractors, and for insurance companies that protect the investments of owners of works of art.



TERM TO KNOW

Art Appraiser

Someone who determines the value of works of art based on their materials, beauty, and authenticity.

3. Other Applicable Careers

A career in art history is not limited to just art or art-related fields. Art history education encourages critical-thinking skills and the ability to analyze data, especially visual data. Creative problem-solving skills are also developed throughout an education in art history. These are all skills that are in high demand.



George Bowman Ferry (1851 - 1918) and Alfred Charles Clas (1859 - 1942)

Wisconsin Historical Society

Madison, Wisconsin, USA

1900

⇒ **EXAMPLE** Other jobs within art history include an **arts librarian** or a **graphic designer**, but an education in art history is transferable. Visual artists will find that knowledge of art history is required for a degree in fine arts and is also helpful in creating works of art that reference the past or other works of art. People who work in advertising, fashion design, costume design, and other fields will also find that knowledge of art history is essential to their work. Think about how movies that take place in the past involve sets and costumes that need to be historically accurate.

- What evidence would designers use and how would they find it?
- Where would they look?



TERMS TO KNOW

Arts Librarian

Someone who helps acquire and classify journal articles, digital sources, and books on art.

Graphic Designer

Someone who is skilled in the art of combining text and pictures in advertisements, magazines, or books.



SUMMARY

Some of the many career paths that have direct application to art history include **museum curator** or **art appraiser**. However, there are plenty of other **applicable careers** outside of the discipline where you will utilize the skill set you gained with an art history education. Attributes you need in the field of art history, such as data analysis, creative problem solving, and critical thinking, will be helpful in any career path you pursue, both inside and outside of art history.

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY IAN MCCONNELL AND ERIN ALDANA FOR SOPHIA LEARNING. PLEASE SEE OUR [TERMS OF USE](#).



ATTRIBUTIONS

- [Gustav Klimt 046](#) | Author: Neue Galerie New York | License: Public Domain
- [NYC - MoMA: Claude Monet's Reflections of Clouds on the Water-Lily Pond](#) | Author: Wally Gobetz | License: CC
- [State-historical-society](#) | Author: Jeff Dean | License: CC



TERMS TO KNOW

Art Appraiser

Someone who determines the value of works of art based on their materials, beauty, and authenticity.

Arts Librarian

Someone who helps acquire and classify journal articles, digital sources, and books on art.

Curator

A person who creates exhibitions for museums by grouping together works of art according to a common theme.

Graphic Designer

Someone who is skilled in the art of combining text and pictures in advertisements, magazines, or books.