As its name suggests, the Department of Art Theory and Practice explores both the making of contemporary art and the ideas and theories that drive it. Faculty and students pursue the visual arts as a theoretical discipline that pushes the boundaries of aesthetic and cultural experience. The department offers a range of courses that apply traditional approaches, adopt newer media, or use alternative strategies. The study of art practice in traditional media, such as painting, drawing, sculpture, and photography, is the core of the undergraduate course structure, enabling students to develop a solid foundation in the field's traditions and established forms. Studio art classes address both technique and critical thinking about contemporary art; these are complemented by classes in contemporary art theory. Other courses expressly look forward, exposing students to experimental approaches and a foretaste of future developments in visual art making. This dynamic curriculum incorporates digital technology, video, and conceptual art practice, thus blending new trends with traditional practices.

The Teaching of Art

Weinberg College students pursuing a major in art who also wish to be certified for secondary teaching must be admitted to the Secondary Teaching Program (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/education-social-policy/secondary-teaching) in the School of Education and Social Policy and complete all requirements as outlined in the SESP chapter of this catalog. Students are urged to contact the Office of Student Affairs in SESP as early as possible in their academic careers.

Program of Study


ART 101-6 First-Year Seminar (1 Unit)  
WCAS First-Year Seminar

ART 210-0 Introduction to Drawing (1 Unit)  
Introduction to basic drawing techniques and problems in line, space, perception, and the expressive use of various graphic media. No previous experience necessary.

ART 220-0 Introduction to Painting (1 Unit)  
Introduction to problems in oil painting and visual thinking. Includes surface preparation, color mixing, and composition. No previous experience necessary.

ART 230-0 Introduction to Time Based Arts (1 Unit)  
Introduction to a wide range of time-based art practices as used in the visual arts, including performance, sound, and video. No previous experience necessary.

ART 240-0 Introduction to Sculpture (1 Unit)  
Introduction to basic sculptural materials and techniques and issues of three-dimensional form. No previous experience necessary.

ART 250-0 Introduction to Photography (1 Unit)  
Extensive darkroom instruction focusing on aesthetic problems and the production of high-quality black-and-white prints. No previous experience necessary.

ART 260-0 Studio Practice (1 Unit)  
Exploration of varied techniques and strategies geared toward the development of an individualized and self-directed studio practice. Prerequisite: junior standing in the major or consent of instructor.

ART 270-0 Contemporary Art Survey (1 Unit)  
Forms and concerns of art from the 1960s to the present, introduced in slide lecture format. Literature Fine Arts Distro Area

ART 272-0 Critical Methods for Contemporary Art (1 Unit)  
Introduction to basic key terms, concepts, and analytical categories of theoretical discourses relevant to an informed and critical engagement with contemporary art. Literature Fine Arts Distro Area

ART 360-0 Senior Critique (1 Unit)  
Students complete a body of work to be shown in the senior exhibition, develop their critical skills, and learn to give articulate verbal and written expression to the concerns their art explores. Prerequisite: ART 260-0 or consent of instructor.

ART 372-0 Seminar (1 Unit)  
Content varies. May be repeated for credit with different topic.

ART 382-0 Studio/Seminar (1 Unit)  
Content varies. May be repeated for credit with different topic.

ART 390-0 Studio (1 Unit)  
Content varies. May be repeated for credit with different topic.

ART 399-0 Independent Study (1 Unit)  
For advanced majors pursuing projects outside the context of regularly offered courses. Prerequisite: consent of department chair.