

I am applying to the graduate program at Columbia University to study American art with Elizabeth Hutchinson. In particular, I am interested in aspects of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century American art and culture in relation to the emergence of consumerism and capitalist art markets as well as to the formation of discourses on gender and sexuality. My decision to apply to Columbia is based on the belief that your program provides the optimal environment for me to both refine my interests and skills and to prepare for a career involving a combination of independent research, teaching and curatorial work within the realm of twentieth-century American art history and visual culture.

During my undergraduate career at the University of Wisconsin, I had a number of academic, research and work experiences that strengthened my desire to pursue graduate work in art history while molding my specific areas of interest within the field. Perhaps the most formative experience was my senior honors thesis, entitled “Marketing Modernism: Charles Demuth and the Development of the Art Market in Early 20th Century America,” which earned me the Tricia Nordby Hamrin Research Award. Under the advisement of Professor Anna Andrzejewski, I incorporated my additional major in economics and explored a little-studied facet of American art history: the development of the twentieth-century art market and its subsequent impact on artistic production. Specifically, I examined how Charles Demuth attempted to negotiate the complexities of an increasingly commercialized art market by tailoring his work to distinct audiences of dealers, collectors and critics. By considering the relationship between artistic production and market forces, my study offered a model and starting point for further evaluation of twentieth-century American artists and their work.

Although I am proud of my thesis and eager to explore the topic further in graduate school, I should also stress that I am equally, if not more, interested in exploring issues in queer and gender studies as well as cultural history in relation to visual artifacts. I settled on this after enrolling in a graduate seminar taught by Professor Nancy Rose Marshall in the spring of 2005. My research paper in this class examined the photographic work of F. Holland Day along with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourses on homosexuality. Uniting the analysis of historic materials, visual artifacts and theoretical concepts, I argued that Day, along with many turn-of-the-century artists and writers, attempted to transvalue theories of degeneration, atavism and infantilism linked to homosexuality by associating homosexual desire with youthfulness, nature and Arcadia.

My decision to enroll in Professor Marshall’s course came during the year after I graduated, when I focused my attention on expanding my horizons through work and travel and honing my interests before applying to graduate school. I continued to work as an exhibitions assistant at the Chazen Museum of Art in the fall of 2004, after which I spent time traveling in Europe. During the spring term, in addition to taking a graduate course in the Department of Art History at Wisconsin, I began working at the University of Wisconsin Press as an editorial assistant—an experience that has improved my writing skills and acquainted me with the rigors of academic publishing.

This hiatus from school has been invaluable in terms of further developing both my interests and skills and solidifying my decision to pursue a graduate degree in art history. Therefore, I am now eager to begin a more active pursuit of my long-term goals by commencing graduate study that emphasizes and integrates all aspects of art history: research, teaching and curatorial work. It is the diverse training in all three of these capacities that draws me to the graduate program at Columbia. Columbia's ample resources and cross-disciplinary approach, would foster, I hope, discussion with other departments and institutions, thus broadening and enriching my research and general knowledge of twentieth-century American art and culture.