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Hiding in the Archives: The History of the Art History Department at Dominican University of California

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Hiding in the Archives: The History of the Art History

Department at Dominican University of California

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Department of Art, Art History, and Design

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Dominican University of California

2018

Abstract

When students register for classes, they often take for granted the subjects that they register for. To these students their classes represent a means to an end. However, in the midst of the registration rush, when the registering student takes a moment to consider the time and work that had to be invested in to establishing these subjects, they might find a new appreciation for the classes that they are taking. This work is a tribute to the work of Dominican University faculty members who had to work hard to bring to fruition the Art History department as it exists today and the work that continues to go in to it to grow to in the future.

This paper is the culmination of a year's worth of research utilizing the Dominican University archives. The purpose of this research was to piece together a comprehensive timeline documenting the work of developing the current Art History program at Dominican University. In conjecture with this research project, I also curated and installed a display in Archbishop Alemany Library in San Rafael. The purpose of the display was to show my research findings to the student body as well as display some of the archival materials that were so vital in researching and writing my paper.

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Introduction

“We are not talking about ‘art appreciation’ but the HISTORY OF ART...

The History of the Visual Arts stands as an academic study of the great monuments of our cultural heritage... Many times, works of art offer a more accurate image of our past than battles, treaties, and even sometimes books. The study of the visual arts, of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting, is a scholarly and legitimate field of research and knowledge along with the political and social sciences, literary, musical and philosophical histories. What the German historians call the *zeit geist* is (in broad translation) the Time Spirit, from which spring all the aspects of civilization; the visual symbols of civilization are found in the studies of the History of Art.”¹ *Hal T. Wilmeth*

There are a plethora of departments on college campuses. A student preparing to continue their educational journey can hope to study anything from math and science to philosophical thought. Some majors, though, are able to artfully combine a multitude of studies. These fields of study turn out students with a well-rounded understanding of a multitude of topics and the ability to look at the world around them through a lens completely unique from how many of their fellow classmates understand their world. The study of Art History is one such major. It allows students the opportunity to see new

¹ “The Department of the History of Art” *Alumnae News*, Vol. 8 Issue 2 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1966), 1.

meaning in every aspect of the world around them, be it through the arts or through a deeply embedded need to question how everything around them came to be.

According to the first official Art History professor at Dominican, Hal Turner Wilmeth, the study of Art History began in 1764 with the publication of a study of Greek and Roman artifacts written by a German scholar named J. J. Winkelmann.² After the publication of this book the study of Art History steadily spread through universities across the globe including institutions like Harvard, Princeton, and Yale.³ It would take time, but eventually Dominican would join the ranks of these other renowned universities when, in due course, Art History would be introduced to the Dominican curriculum.⁴

This introduction was not a quick or an easy one. After Dominican College of San Rafael's founding in 1890 it would take another sixty-nine years to help the subject gain footing in this ever-expanding university and another three years of patience and steady support after that to finally establish an independent department at Dominican University. Without the help of the teachers who advocated and worked to continue developing the Art History program, this subject that embodies the liberal arts mission would never have made it to where it is today.

The Art History Department today might not be as large as it was in its conception, but through the course of its existence it has been refined and continues to evolve in to a subject that intrigues students and invites them to question the visual world around them. It is a valuable part of the Dominican education and will continue to be so

² "The Department of the History of Art", 1.

³ "The Department of the History of Art", 1.

⁴ "The Department of the History of Art", 2.

as long as there are faculty present willing to advocate for its continued presence on
campus.

The Origins of Art History

The building blocks of the Dominican University Art History Department existed on campus before the idea of an Art History Department was ever conceived, but it was years before there was anyone to advocate for its creation. Without someone to sponsor the development of an Art History Department it was thought that there was no need to establish such a department on campus. It was only a matter of time, though before a faculty member decided that it was time to begin pulling the pieces of the department together and began creating the Art History Department.

When all that Dominican had were the raw elements of what it would take to create an Art History Department, these elements existed only in the Art Department. Students were given the hopes of pursuing Art History related career paths, but they would not be given the opportunity to specialize in studying Art History for quite some time. The 1950 Spring edition of the Dominican Alumnae Newsletter published an article titled “Know Your College”. In this article, the editor detailed careers for which the Art Department at Dominican worked to prepare students.⁵ The department focused mainly on training students in the fine arts and the “Know Your College” article draws specific attention to the weaving and ceramic programs available to students at Dominican in 1950.⁶ At this time, the training provided by the Art Department focused mainly on preparing students for commercial success in the art world rather than institutional work.⁷

⁵ “Know Your College” The News Letter, (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1950), 5.

⁶ “Know Your College”, 5.

⁷ “Know Your College”, 5.

In part due to this business-centered focus on art, liberal arts studies like Art History could not yet exist at Dominican because there was no business training in such fields of study.⁸ Today institutional jobs including museum assistant, art shop owner or curator, and teacher are jobs that are recommended to students graduating with a degree in Art History but in 1953 these were all career paths that Dominican University suggested to Art majors and to History majors.⁹ It would take another nine years before Art History would be introduced to the Dominican curriculum and before the commercial focus of career paths available to students of Art History, Art, and History was widened.¹⁰

Although it was not yet a part of the curriculum, by 1951 an interest in Art History was beginning to surface amongst the Dominican faculty. Dr. Catherine Rau, the chair of the French Department at the time, published a book titled *Art and Society: A Reinterpretation of Plato* in which she discussed Plato's aesthetic opinions and studied the philosopher in an artistic light.¹¹ One year earlier, in 1950, Rau had published two other books pertaining to Art History; one was titled *Psychological Notes on the Theory of Art as Play* and the other, *The Aesthetic Views of Jean-Paul Sartre*.¹² Clearly, although there was not yet a course equivalent to the study of Art History, there was a genuine interest in the subject amongst the faculty. This raises the question: if the faculty was

⁸ "Know Your College", 5.

⁹ "Know Your College", 5.

¹⁰ "Know Your College", 5.

¹¹ "Among the Faculty at Dominican" The News Letter, (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1951), 4.

¹² "Among the Faculty at Dominican", 4.

interested in and willing to study Art History related subjects, why did it take Dominican so long to create a curriculum to meet the interest? Perhaps it was because the professors who showed an interest in the history of art were not faculty of an art-related Department; they assumed that this study was one better taught by a professor of art or maybe the reason was simply that someone who would advocate for the establishment of such a major had not yet joined the Dominican faculty. Regardless, the seeds for the eventual introduction of the study of Art History were planted amongst the Dominican faculty.

Come the year 1959, a teacher in the French department, Etel Adnan, arranged a new summer course on the study of “Modern Culture”.¹³ As part of this course, students would study the development of modern art as well as study several modern artists, including Paul Klee.¹⁴ While it was only a summer class and not a fully fleshed out program, the introduction of this course marks the first time that the student body of Dominican University was directly introduced to the study of Art History in class.

While the interest that some faculty members took in Art History were the seeds to growing an Art History department, the Modern Culture summer class was the water that hydrated those seeds and allowed them to sprout. Two years later, in September of 1961, a new major inspired by the Modern Culture course was introduced to the

¹³ “Summer Session to Offer Modern Culture Course” The News Letter, Vol. 10 Issue 1 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1959), 5.

¹⁴ “Summer Session to Offer Modern Culture Course”, 5.

Dominican curriculum.¹⁵ The major was called “American Civilization”.¹⁶ As was the case with the Modern Culture summer class, the American Civilization major focused on the development of America’s history, literature, art, music, and thought.¹⁷ Since the major included the study of American art, it included the study of the development of American art and, therefore, included Art History as part of its curriculum.¹⁸ It appears that Art History developed not so much out of an expansion of the college itself but out of the genuine interest of the faculty involved in its teaching.

The American Civilization major was designed to train students for careers in curatorship, teaching, research, librarianship, and government.¹⁹ The major did require that students select a specific field to focus their research within the larger curriculum of the major. While the seeds of Art History had been present at Dominican University for some time, the introduction of this class signaled that the Dominican faculty was beginning to nurture these seeds and help them to grow, allowing for the development of Art History as its own department.

¹⁵ “Summer Session to Offer Modern Culture Courses”, 5.

¹⁶ “Summer Session to Offer Modern Culture Courses”, 5.

¹⁷ “Summer Session to Offer Modern Culture Courses”, 5.

¹⁸ “Summer Session to Offer Modern Culture Courses”, 5.

¹⁹ “New Major Field Focuses on American Culture” *Alumnae News*, Vol. 3 Issue 1 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1961), 3.

Developing the Department

Now that the American Civilization major had established a niche for Art History at the Dominican campus it was time to expand on the influence that this niche had on the popularity it held with the student body. As the American Civilization major gained popularity and so, too, did the study of Art History within that department, it allowed the Art History program the freedom to begin planning more permanent roots on the Dominican Campus.

Art History is not a subject that can be studied strictly within the confines of a classroom. It is a subject that must be experienced as much as it must be read about. According to the 1961 school newspaper, teachers in the language departments on campus began to arrange inter-cultural field trips for Dominican students.²⁰ Mrs. Rina Bess, an Italian language teacher and Italian club moderator at Dominican, was the first to attempt such a trip by arranging a “European Culture Tour” with the help of the Orrick Travel Bureau of San Anselmo.²¹ The working itinerary for this trip outlined that students would have explored Capri, Rome, the Vatican, Venice, Naples, Paris, Versailles, and Switzerland to give students an immersive experience of France and Italy and give students a chance to really practice their language skills.²² The trip planned to include a short Art History session in which students would study the works of Italian Renaissance

²⁰ “European Culture Tour Offered to Dominican Girls” *The Carillon*, Vol. 15 Issue 3 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1961), 1.

²¹ “European Culture Tour Offered to Dominican Girls”, 1.

²² “European Culture Tour Offered to Dominican Girls”, 1.

masters including Michelangelo, Raphael, and Giotto in Italy, and in Switzerland the students would have visited the museum of Lausanne and the Lausanne University art collection.²³ However, the planned trip fell apart due to a lack of enrollment. Out of fourteen possible slots available on the trip, only one student enrolled and the trip was officially cancelled in April of 1962.²⁴ Though it was not the focal point of the trip, the language teachers recognized that one cannot visit the cradle of Western Art History without experiencing some of it firsthand.

Oddly enough, the same year that Mrs. Bess's European Tour was canceled the Dominican school newspaper, "The Carillon", started a regular column in which the student authors discussed various art exhibits on display in San Francisco, usually at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, and exhibits showcased in the San Marco Gallery on the Dominican campus.²⁵ The authors of the columns always made some sort of introspective or historical review on the installation.²⁶ Though it is not clear if these students took Art History classes as part of the "American Civilization" major, what is clear is that they were deeply interested in the exhibits and even more so in gaining a deeper understanding of the content of these exhibits.²⁷

²³ "European Culture Tour Offered to Dominican Girls", 1.

²⁴ "Bess Tour Cancelled" The Carillon, Vol. 15 Issue 7 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1962), 4.

²⁵ "Art of Today Has Meaning as Seen in History's Light" The Carillon, Vol. 15 Issue 6 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1962), 2.

²⁶ "Art of Today Has Meaning as Seen in History's Light", 2.

²⁷ "Art of Today Has Meaning as Seen in History's Light", 2.

As of the winter of 1961, a gentleman by the name of Hal Turner Wilmeth had been hired to the Dominican faculty as the Assistant Professor of Art History. Mr. Wilmeth taught all of the Art History courses for the Modern Culture and American Civilization majors and was also given the monumental task of curating the slide collection for the Art History department (Image 1).²⁸



*Hal Turner Wilmeth selecting
art history slides*

*Figure 1: Hal Turner Wilmeth Selecting Art History
Slides, 1966*

In the Spring of 1962 publication of the Alumnae News magazine, the editors compiled a “Mid-Spring Appraisal” of the courses offered at Dominican at that time. The American Civilization major was the first on the list of majors discussed. Though the original purpose of the course was to prepare students for specific careers in which a knowledge of American culture would prove useful, in the months between the major’s introduction and the appraisal, the emphasis of the course became more that of the humanities. Students were now able to study all that American culture had to offer, including the development of art, music, literature, and institutions.²⁹ By their senior year students were asked to narrow their research to focus on one specific aspect of American

²⁸ “College News: Faculty Additions” *Alumnae News*, Vol. 3 Issue 3 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1961), 8.

²⁹ “A Mid-Spring Appraisal” *Alumnae News*, Vol. 4 Issue 1 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1962), 4.

culture and prepare to write their culminating research project on that topic.³⁰ Hal Wilmeth and Anne O’Hanlon were the professors that headed the Art and Art History components of the American Civilization major.³¹ Etel Adnan, who was the professor to originally introduce the teaching of Art History at Dominican as part of her Modern Culture summer course, was still a part of the American Culture major.³² By this time, though, she seems to have moved away from teaching Art History and instead focused her energies on teaching the American Culture courses on American thought.³³

As exciting as the development of Art History within the American Culture major was, even more exciting changes were in store for Art History at Dominican. In May of 1962 the student newspaper announced that, starting in the Fall semester of 1962, Art History would officially be offered a minor.³⁴ Students had the opportunity to earn twelve upper division units with the new minor and had their choice of three new art history courses which supplemented those already offered at Dominican at this time as part of the American Culture major.³⁵ “19th and 20th Century Art”, “100 A-B”, and “American Civilization: The Visual Arts in America” would all be replaced with new courses including “The Arts of the Renaissance”, “Baroque Art: the 17th and 18th Century”, and

³⁰ “A Mid-Spring Appraisal”, 4.

³¹ “A Mid-Spring Appraisal”, 4.

³² “A Mid-Spring Appraisal”, 4.

³³ “A Mid-Spring Appraisal”, 4.

³⁴ “Art History Minor Joins Curriculum, Future Major?” *The Carillon*, Vol. 15 Issue 8 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1962), 1.

³⁵ “Art History Minor Joins Curriculum, Future Major?”, 1.

“Romanesque Art in Italy”, all of which were to be three unit courses.³⁶ As is natural with any major change like this one in a university, there was some initial trepidation on the part of the students already enrolled in some of the old courses. There was particular concern on the part of the Art majors on campus as to whether the expanded Art History minor would affect their major requirements, but it made no effect and Art History’s introduction as a minor on the Dominican campus went as smoothly as could be expected.³⁷ Art History had officially bloomed from its initial seeds and had expanded beyond its niche in American Civilization to become its own independent field of study on the Dominican campus, soon to become its own department entirely.

With the Art History minor established and the potential for an independent department on the horizon, Hal Wilmeth began trying to accomplish what had previously failed to thrive when Rina Bess had attempted it. By the spring of 1962 Hal began attempting to arrange a European tour, the majority of which would be spend studying the art of the ancient Europeans and the Renaissance.³⁸ Because Mrs. Bess’s attempt at a European tour had unfortunately failed in 1961, Hal’s tour was the first one of its kind offered at Dominican University.

³⁶ “Art History Minor Joins Curriculum, Future Major?”, 1.

³⁷ “Art History Minor Joins Curriculum, Future Major?”, 1.

³⁸ “European Tour Offered” *Alumnae News*, Vol. 4 Issue 1 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1962), 7.

Hal's 1962 trip was a success, so Professor Wilmeth decided to try and arrange a second even longer European tour set for June 7th of 1965.³⁹ This trip was designed for 28 Dominican students, would be forty-four days long, and the students who participated in the program would receive three upper division units for their Art History minor, two units given for attending lectures and museum visits and one unit for attending a weekly seminar.⁴⁰ The itinerary for the trip detailed a departure from San Francisco and a stop in New York before continuing on to Paris, the Swiss Alps, Florence (where the group would visit the Uffizi Gallery), Pisa, Assisi, Rome (where the group would have an audience with Pope Paul VI), Venice, Vienna, Munich and Heidelberg in Germany, the Berlin Wall, Copenhagen, Holland, and London.⁴¹ It was reported to alumnae in the Dominican College Alumnae Newsletter that all of the attending students enjoyed

³⁹ "European Tour" Alumnae News, Vol. 7 Issue 2 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1965), 12 and 13.

⁴⁰ "European Tour", 12 and 13.

⁴¹ "'DC Travelers' to Tour Five Countries" The Carillon, Vol. 18 Issue 3 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1965), 1 and 4.

themselves immensely.⁴² Hal would not be able to offer another such trip until 1967, by which time the Art History department was established at Dominican.⁴³ On the 1967 rendition of the Dominican “Grand Tourismo”, the students toured Europe from mid-June to early August representing fifty five days of immersion in to Europe’s past and present. By the time of this third European Tour, Hal was the chair of the Art History Department and was joined on the trip by Associate Professor Margaret Walpon from the Education Department.⁴⁴

The year before Hal’s third installment of Dominican’s Grand Tour was a monumental one for Art History at Dominican. In 1966 the Art History Department was finally established at Dominican with Hal Turner Wilmeth as the department head for the



Figure 2: European Tour, 1967

⁴² “Faculty Activities” *Alumnae News*, Vol. 8 Issue 1 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1965), 8.

⁴³ “Grand Tourismo ‘67” *Alumnae News*, Vol. 9 Issue 2 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1967), 7.

⁴⁴ “Grand Tourismo ‘67”, 7.

Department of Art History and Humanities at Dominican.⁴⁵ Art History was now offered as a major and a minor at Dominican University. In a long address to the Dominican alumnae, Hal explained his opinion on why Art History is an especially important field of study for Dominican University.⁴⁶ In large part, he argued that it is because it is such an interdisciplinary study which encourages students to not look at history or the present as a linear chain of events.⁴⁷ Rather, Art History encourages its students to view history as a tapestry of interwoven thoughts, emotions, and actions which combine to create the events that shape the world.⁴⁸ By 1968, Dominican University was officially advertising a Bachelor's of Arts in the field of Art History, no longer as part of the American Civilization major but instead as its own, independent field of study.⁴⁹

The same year as the department's birth, Hal began to expand the new Art History Department by hiring new faculty to join him in teaching. Elisabeth de Gall, nicknamed Sissi, was welcomed to the Art History department before the start of the school year. Having attended the University of Budapest, the John Gutenberg University, and having earned a Ph.D. in Fine Arts from the University of California, de Gall was more than prepared to teach Aesthetics, the History of Ornamental Art, and the Humanities Honors

⁴⁵ "Grand Turismo '67", 7.

⁴⁶ "The Department of the History of Art" Alumnae News, Vol. 8 Issue 2 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1966), 1 and 2.

⁴⁷ "The Department of the History of Art", 1 and 2.

⁴⁸ "The Department of the History of Art", 1 and 2.

⁴⁹ "Do You Know That...?" Alumnae News, Vol. 10 Issue 2 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1968), 3.

course in Fine Arts for freshmen and sophomores.⁵⁰ De Gall would go on to inherit the Art History department from Hal Wilmeth upon his retiring and relocating to Florence, Italy.⁵¹

It takes years of dedication and hard work to make a dream become realized. The development of the Art History department at Dominican University is not unique in this sense. It took years of nurturing and hard work to help the dream of the Art History department bloom in to what it was when Sissi de Gall inherited the department from Hal. The department has continued to grow and bloom and spread its roots throughout Dominican in the time that it has existed on campus. The Department has exchanged hands a few times since its conception, but all department chairs continue to share the dream and the goal of maintaining Art History as a pivotal part of the Dominican campus makeup and continue to develop the department to keep it so. Today the department continues to turn out students who are, as Hal hoped they would be, well-rounded and open minded in their views of the world around them. Through the work of today's department chairs and tomorrows, the department will continue to do so for the foreseeable future and will continue to turn out such students that Dominican University can be proud to call their own.

⁵⁰ "From the President's Desk" *Alumnae News*, Vol. 9 Issue 2 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1966), 10.

⁵¹ Leslie Ross, e-mail message to author, May 7, 2018.

Conclusion

“... how could we graduate from college without a knowledge of the High Renaissance and Baroque styles and how they manifested themselves in the building of the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome?... We hope that the student of Art History will gain a greater knowledge of what she is seeing and will carry with her after graduation an eternal open mind and a path of exploration which will influence her ‘seeing’ as a lifelong creative experience.”⁵² *Hal T. Wilmeth*

Dominican University had expanded by 1968. With a student to faculty ratio of one to ten and the campus expanding to include more classrooms, it was time for the Art History Department to expand as well.⁵³ This time, instead of expanding to include more subjects the department expanded to include a Bachelor’s program.⁵⁴ Students now had the option to earn a Bachelor’s degree in Art History.

From the 1970s to the early 2000s, the Art History program was part of the Humanities’ Cultural Heritage program. Some of the Art hHistory courses taught during this time included “The Meanings of Mount Tam: Part, Present, and Future; the Gendered Body; War and Peace; Race, Gender, and Politics in American Art and Music; Roots to Present Reality.”⁵⁵ However, as the department continued to expand it became necessary

⁵² “The Department of the History of Art”, 1.

⁵³ “Do You Know That...” *Alumnae News*, Vol. 10 Issue 2 (Publications Collection, Dominican University of California Archives, Dominican University of California, San Rafael, 1968), 3.

⁵⁴ “Do You Know That...”, 3.

⁵⁵ Leslie Ross, May 7, 2018.

to adopt new courses and to broaden the topics covered by the Art History department including “History of Photography; the History of Gardens and Landscape Design; Structures of Faith; Women, Art, and Culture; Contemporary Asian Art; Latin American Art; Art Crime.”⁵⁶

Leslie Ross, the current head of the Art History department, continues to work to keep the Art History Department contemporary with the goals of Dominican University and the interests of the student body. She is a graduate of Dominican University herself, a student of all three of the heads of the department before her, Dr. Ross continues to build upon and improve all that Hal Wilmeth, Sissi de Gall, and Wood Lockhart began before her.⁵⁷ Wood Lockhart was the professor who initially contacted Leslie to encourage her to return to Dominican to pick up the departmental torch and continue the ever-arduous task of continuing to grow the Art History Department.⁵⁸

Big changes remain on the horizon for the Art History Department. In the coming years, the department’s name will change from Art History to Visual Studies.⁵⁹ The new Visual Studies program’s curriculum will focus more intensely on what the Art History Department’s long term goals were at the very beginning of the department.⁶⁰ The Visual Studies curriculum will cover a wide variety of studies, including the history of artistic production in various cultures, the role that visual arts play in shaping cultures, and the

⁵⁶ Leslie Ross, May 7, 2018.

⁵⁷ Leslie Ross, May 7, 2018.

⁵⁸ Leslie Ross, May 7, 2018.

⁵⁹ Leslie Ross, May 7, 2018.

⁶⁰ Leslie Ross, May 7, 2018.

effect that the visual arts have on social actions.⁶¹ Although the study of Art History has always been an interdisciplinary one, under the new title of Visual Studies Department the department will attempt to more completely embody the interdisciplinary nature of Art History by including perspectives from “sociology, psychology, economics, politics, environmental studies, gender studies, race and ethnic studies, communication studies, and public health studies,” as described by Dr. Ross.⁶²

The Art History Department at Dominican University has gone through many changes since its conception. Since its first expansion to an independent department the Art history department continued to grow and change. The changing heads of the Art History department expanded the curriculum, cycled through the various classes offered, and have even retitled the department.

Though the study of Art History itself was not a new field of research to the scholastic world, in the scheme of Dominican University’s history, it is newly available to students at Dominican University of California. The introduction may have been slow, starting with summer sessions and the development of a new major which would grant students the scholastic freedom to explore the humanities. When the study of Art History finally blossomed at Dominican, students were invited to participate in a study like no other, from the overseas trips that they would have otherwise never had the opportunity to take part in to the the opportunity to enjoy a completely unique way of understanding how the modern world came to be. Through these trips and new fields of studies, students

⁶¹ Leslie Ross, May 7, 2018.

⁶² Leslie Ross, May 7, 2018.

have been offered the opportunity to become well-rounded humanities students and, after graduation, well studied and adaptable creative thinkers.

It was a struggle to establish this department at Dominican, and at times it can be a struggle to maintain it as an independent entity. However, the heads of the Art History Department will continue to work to keep Art History available for future students to partake in and enjoy as much as all previous students have.

Showcasing the Department

Introduction

When learning to write a research paper, students are constantly reminded to “know their audience”. By the time this paper is completed, who will be reading it? How will readers access it? What will readers gain from reading the final product? In the case of this research paper, it was this author’s understanding that this paper would most likely not be accessed by a great many. Aside from teachers and faculty, it is safe to say that there is not usually a wide audience for archival research papers on the development of exiting departments on university campuses. This seemed a shame, though, as the history of the Art History department really was an interesting and, in some ways, a unique one. Therefore, in order to reach a wider audience with the information obtained during this research project, I felt that this paper would do well to be accompanied by a display in the Archbishop Alemany Library on the Dominican University campus in San Rafael. In this way, not only would I be able to share my research findings and some of the physical artifacts used in my research to visually convey the development of the Art History Department to the student population and potential students on tour in the library, but I would also be able to show what I am personally capable of as a curator of my own research findings. In this section of “Hiding in the Archives: The History of the Art History Department at Dominican University” I will discuss some of the decisions that I made in curating my show as well as what I learned through the experience of being able to have complete command over the display that I curated. It was a truly unique and challenging experience that I am thankful to have had.

Designing the Show

The first challenge that I faced in curating my display was deciding what order made the most sense for my display arrangement in. The space that I had to work in was a somewhat unique one (Image 3). With a bulletin board and nine cases arranged with two pairs of tables in the shape of a capital L and four table clustered in the middle of the L to work with I had to decide how I wanted the story of the Art History Department to flow through the space that I was given.

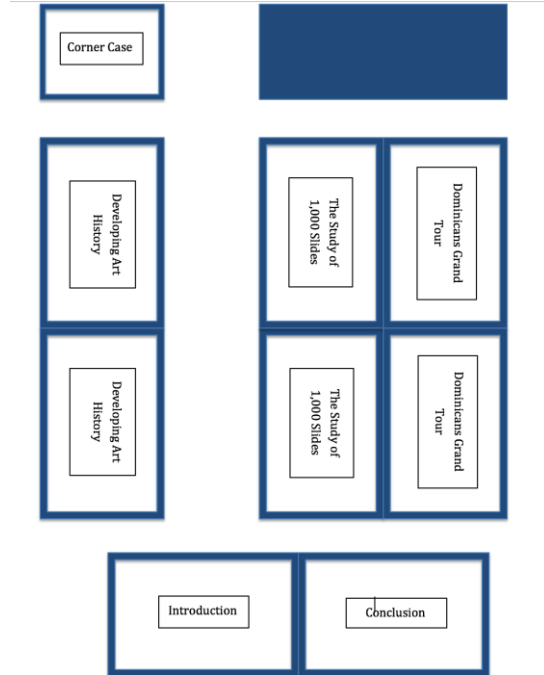


Figure 3: Library Case Layout

I decided that the best way to design my display would be to group like information together. My display was not going to be able to be as detailed as the paper half of my paper would be but I knew that I could condense my findings to best convey some of the most important aspects of the Art History Department's history. In condensing my information, I was also able to pick out which parts of my research were most conducive to a visual display.

In looking at the information that I had obtained through my research, I decided that the most concise and logical way to work with what I had was to divide my research in three sections with two cases allotted to each section: "Developing Art History", in which I would use archival material to convey how the Art History Department grew out of the Modern Culture courses; "The Study of 1,000 Slides", where I could use the slides

from the Dominican slide collection to show how the first head of the Art History Department worked to begin to curate the slide collection and then later and current head of the department, Leslie Ross, built from that; and my final section I decided should be “Dominican’s Grand Tour” so that I could use some of the lovely pictures from the old Art History office of the overseas trips that Hal Turner Wilmeth started for Dominican.

I felt that in dividing my research in to these three categories I could make my display the most informational and easily digestible display I could for passersby who might not even be aware of the study of Art History. However, the next challenge that I was faced with in curating my display was far more difficult than deciding how to divide my information. My next challenge was to decide which archival materials I would use to convey the Art History Department’s story and what supporting information should I include.

Developing Art History

For the part of my display that would discuss the development of the Art History Department I had to decide where in the development of the department I would start building the history. It would have been entirely possible to have started from the very beginning when the department wasn’t even a thought but Dominican faculty still showed an interest in the study of Art History. It was decided, though, that a case full of Art History-related books by faculty members that were long gone from the Dominican campus seemed like it might be a confusing way to begin the display. Instead, I decided to begin the show with the first mention of an Art History class at Dominican as part of the American Civilization major. It would have been entirely possible to have started with the Modern Culture summer classes; however, given the space that I had to work with I felt that it made most sense to start discussing the department’s history with the

subject's introduction to the regular student body and with the introduction of Hal Turner Wilmeth to the Dominican campus.

The first case for the “Developing Art History” had three archival pieces in it

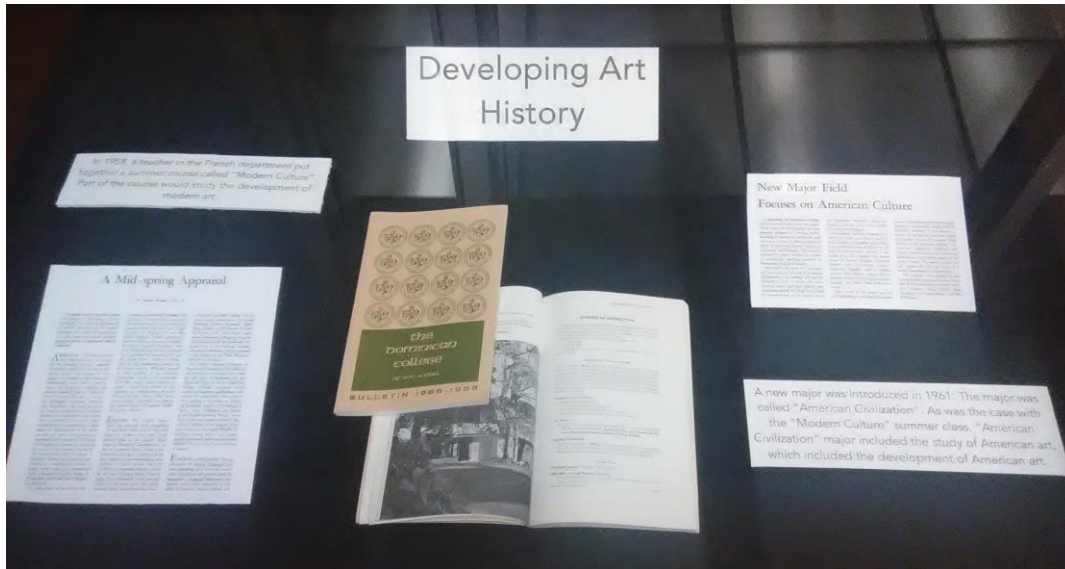


Figure 4: "Developing Art History" First Case

(Image 4). Two pieces are enlarged clippings from the Alumnae newsletters, one announcing the American Culture major and the other detailing what students taking the American Culture major could hope to have a career in after graduation. I also included two copies of the same course catalogue. One opened to the page with details on registering for the Art History courses under the American Civilization major, one closed so that viewers know that they are looking at a hard copy of a course catalogue. I also included some supporting material that I wrote up using the information from my paper so that I could clarify the relationship between the American Civilization Department and the eventual development of the Art History Department.

In the next case for this topic I jumped from the American Civilization major to when the Art History minor was introduced (Image 5). I enlarged a clipping from the Dominican school newspaper, The Carillon, with the title “Art History Minor Joins

Curriculum... Future Major?" to get the help convey the excitement over the new minor on the Dominican campus from the student's perspective. I also included two Art History newsletters that Dr. Leslie Ross once made for the Art History majors to discuss the new courses being offered and to update all of the students from the department on each other's accomplishments and activities. I also included a clipping from the Alumnae Newsletter discussing the hiring of the second head of the Art History Department, Elisabeth "Sissi" DeGall, and a thank you letter to her from Redwood School for a presentation that Mrs. DeGall gave on Art History.

I arranged the entire section so that the oldest materials were at the far left of the

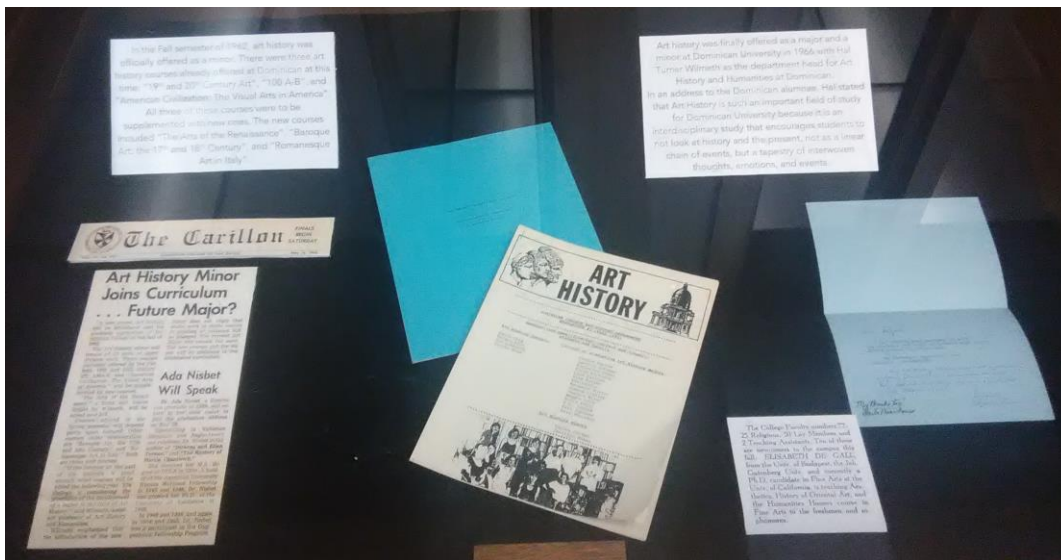


Figure 5: "Developing Art History" Second Case

section and the newest materials were at the far right. Since most students at Dominican traditionally read from left to right I decided that it made the most sense to read the visual history of the department the same way. Each item that I selected to be included in the display was chosen because I felt that they clearly and interestingly showed how the Art History Department developed. I wanted to be sure that viewer's eyes would move smoothly through the cases and they would stay engaged with the material. Though the

finished section of the display was concise, it was the most visually clear and interesting way that I could convey the development of the department to individuals who might be passing by.

A Case of Books

The third case in the row alongside the “Developing Art History” cases is in an awkward position. It’s smaller than the other cases and is pushed back in a corner, away from the rest of the cases. Initially, I planned on leaving this case empty because I couldn’t conceive of a way that I could make the case cohesive with the collection when it was in such a strange location. After conferring with the head archivist, though, she convinced me that it would be smarter to put something, anything, in the case. I decided, then, to use some of the textbooks left in the old Art History Department office to fill the case (Image 6). They are colorful, they are bold, and offered interesting things to look at while still allowing viewers to easily switch between learning about the department’s



Figure 6: A Case of Books

development and learning about the development of the Dominican slide collection. I also opened them all and layered them so that the case was dynamic and looked as though

it could belong to a student who discarded their books in the middle of finals. I also opened to well-known pieces and colorful ones so that viewers would feel comfortable looking at pieces they're familiar with, not like they're in over their head trying to understand Art History. I feel that this was the best use of this case that I could have come up with to help complete my display.

The Study of 1,000 Slides

Making the transition from the academic beginnings of the Art History Department to the fun overseas trips that started as a part of the Art History Department that would evolve into a lasting part of the Dominican experience seemed like a difficult transition to make. The Dominican slide collection seemed like a good way to bridge the Art History Department's development and the European Art History tours.

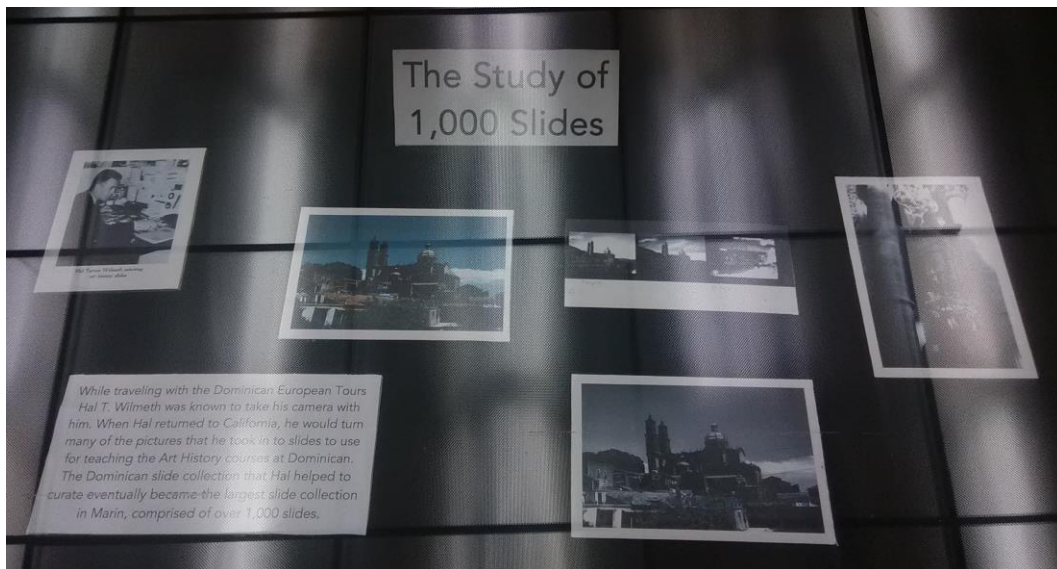


Figure 7: "The Study of 1,000 Slides" First Case

This was initially one of the sections that was a struggle for which to arrange a display of (Image 7). Through my research, though, I was able to match some original photographs taken by Hal Turner Wilmeth on a school trip to Mexico to some of the slides in the collection. I was then able to enlarge all of these images for the display so

that I could demonstrate the development of the film into slides. I also included an image from the Alumni Newsletter of Hal T. Wilmeth working to make slides. In this case I also included a sign that I wrote based on my paper explaining that Hal was the first person to start the Art History slide collection at Dominican and that he started out making the slides using images that he took on European tours.

For the next case, I wanted to utilize an interview that I had with Leslie Ross in which she discussed the advancements that she made to the slide collection (Image 8). In the interview, Leslie talked about the way in which she contributed to the development of the slide collection. While she kept the original slides in the collection she contributed to it by using a camera to take pictures of images in Art History textbooks. Later, when the

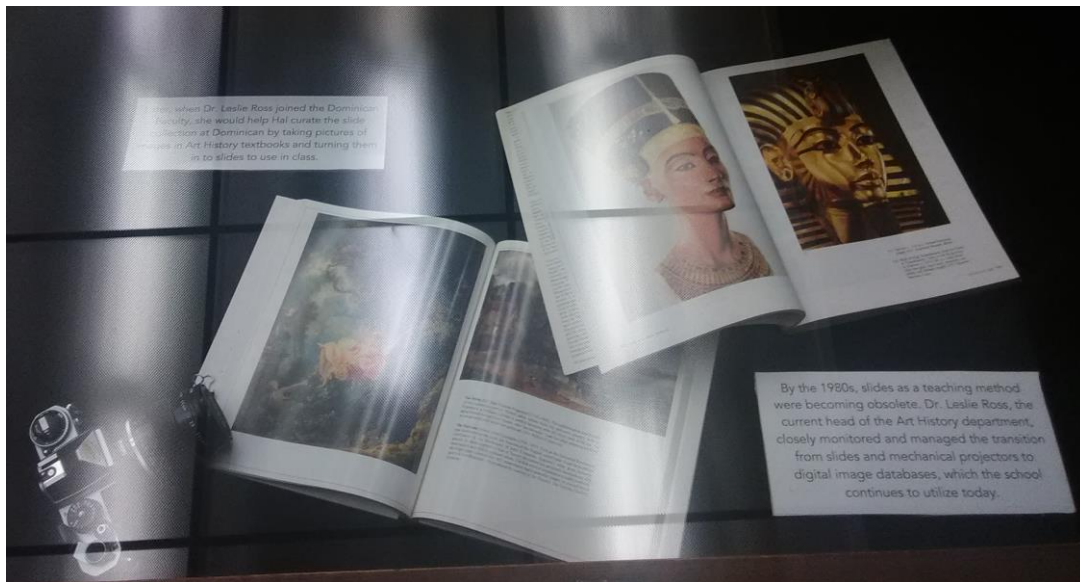


Figure 8: "The Study of 1,000 Slides" Second Case

old method of using slides to teach Art History started to become obsolete she began using databases to select the images used to teach Art History. In this second case, I left two textbooks open to images of well-known artworks and positioned Leslie's old camera on them to look as though they had been set down while being worked on. I also included

two informational cards off to the sides of the books to explain the changes made to the slide collection over the years and explain what it is like now.

Dominican's Grand Tour

This was one of the parts of the display that was most exciting to research. In large part it was exciting because the majority of the information about the Dominican European trips came from student newspapers. The excitement from the students surrounding these trips was nearly palpable in their writing. There was also a plethora of photographs in the old Art History Department office of some of the first trips that the Art History Department was able to take. The pride that Hal T. Wilmeth took in the accomplishment of organizing these trips was clear. Through my display I wanted to be able to help viewers feel some of the excitement and pride that surrounded those first trips and continues to follow them in the versions of these overseas trips that still exist today.

Part of what made this section so exciting was also what made it so difficult to curate. A lot of what was exciting about this section were written materials and people walking past this display would not be intrigued by a case full of written materials. There needed to be a balance between written materials and images to be sure that people would stop to look at the display before being encouraged to read the written materials.



Figure 9 "Dominican's Grand Tour" First Case

In keeping with the rest of the display, these cases needed to continue to be read chronologically and flow from left to right. I started this section with the earliest visual record of the European tours, starting in 1962 and ending with a mention of today's overseas trips (Image 9). The next problem that I encountered was that after the first and second trips to Europe there wasn't much written or photographed about them. In order to keep both cases interesting, despite the lack of visual materials, I was able to spread out the pictures taken on the trips so that there was still a balance between the copied newspaper and newsletter clippings and pictures was to put more images in the second case (Image 10).

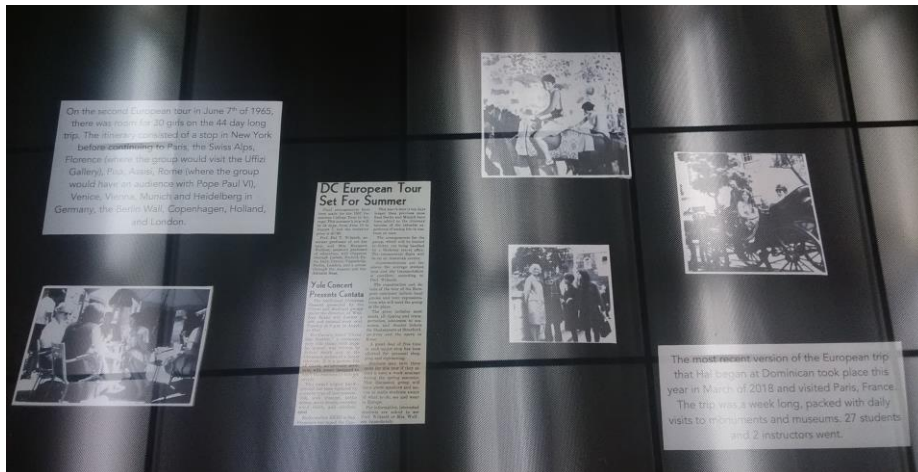


Figure 10 Dominican's Grand Tour" First Case

The finished product was as dynamic and engaging as I had hoped it would be. Through the layout of photographs and the incorporation of written materials with exciting headlines, this set of cases was very interesting and did pull viewers in from the library.

Introduction and Conclusion Cases

The final two cases that needed completing were the introductory and concluding and introduction cases. Both cases sat side-by-side along the walkway where library visitors enter and exit the library. By choosing to have my introduction and conclusion of the display side-by-side, the goal was to create a circular flow amongst the other displays and end the show with a sense of a conclusion rather than allowing viewers to wander off at some corner case.

In each case I use materials found around the old Art History office. The books, posters, and flashcards were all materials once used for studying and teaching Art History. The introduction case was comprised of three information cards that were important to understanding the department at its start and where it is today but didn't

necessarily fit well in any of the other groups of information (Image 11). Surrounding the



Figure 11 Introduction case

information cards were bright, legible flash cards from the stores in the old Art History office. The goal in spreading them around haphazardly was to create a sense that the cards were in the process of being used to study. In

creating a somewhat more dynamic display for an introduction, I felt that it helped to demonstrate what goes in to the study of Art History on the student's end.

The conclusion case was meant to be a simplified but less finished version of the introduction case (Image 12). This case was meant to look like a teacher's desk, with all of the scholarly materials and notes spread out as though the teacher were in the process

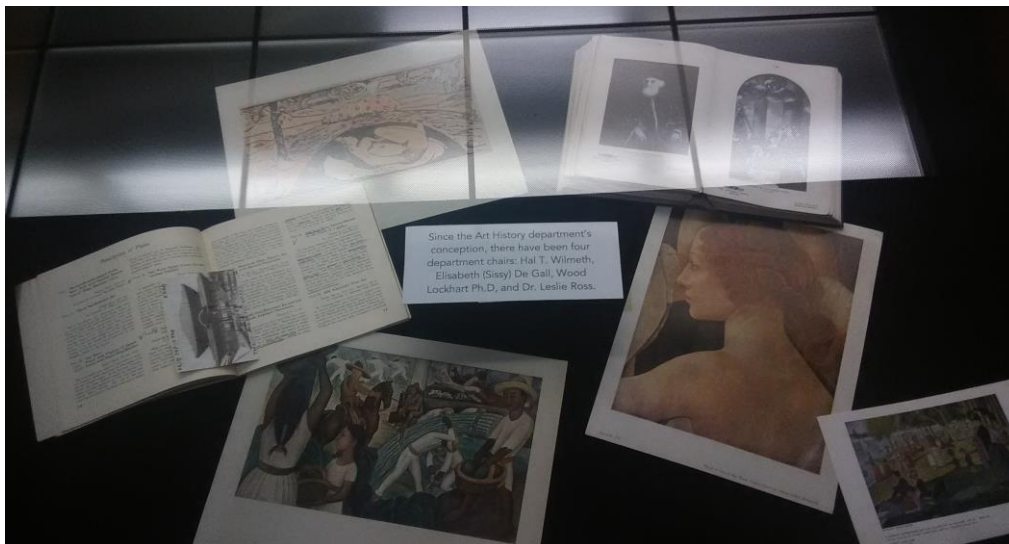


Figure 12: Conclusion Case

of putting together lessons.

Both the introduction and conclusion cases acted as bookends for the entire display. They also toyed with the relationship that creates the study of Art History: that between the teacher and the student. I see these cases as an homage to my experience in studying Art History: to the work that I did and the work that the teachers before and during my time did to curate the courses that comprise the Art History Department

Conclusion

Altogether, the finished display to accompany “Hiding in the Archives: The History of the Art History Department at Dominican University” was but a snap shot of the story of the Art History Department. So much work and passion went in to developing the department. Even conceiving the idea took work and passion that the teachers who conceived of it might not have even been aware that they had. There is only so much that can be shown in a visual display, much of what is learned about the history of a department has to be read. However, in this collection I feel that I accomplished a fitting companion project to accompany my paper.

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