

Art world internships

This guide, created by the Association for History, and endorsed by the Executive Committee of The Society of London Art Dealers is for those looking to do an internship. There are other ways to gain experience including volunteering, work shadowing and work placements, temping and apprenticeships; see below for more details.

What is an internship?

- A short-term period of employment aimed at providing you with professional skills and experience.
- Paid at least the minimum wage.

An internship differs from:

- A work shadowing scheme where you observe other people working (e.g. for a day)
- Volunteering, where you choose to give up your time to help a cause or an organisation.

Why do an internship?

- Internships give you a chance to try out different roles, enabling you to explore which area of the art world might best suit your skills and qualities.
- They provide the opportunity to meet and speak with professionals, ask about their pathway into the industry and what they enjoy doing day-to-day.
- A good internship provides an invaluable opportunity to develop professional skills, experience and confidence, and to apply classroom knowledge and training to real-world scenarios, which you can evidence on your CV.
- It may, in time, turn into a job or lead you to new opportunities, further down the line. However, it's not advisable to approach an internship with this expectation.

How to find internship opportunities?

Commercial galleries

- Email the gallery directly.
- Some post internships on job listings sites—see the links below. Increasingly, galleries post opportunities on Instagram and LinkedIn.
- Others may recruit via your university careers service.
- [Lacey West Art International](#) lists some internships on their website. Most art recruiters only advertise jobs, though they may privately help galleries with finding interns, drawing on candidates on their books.
- Attend Private Views. These are free events packed with industry professionals, as are gallery talks and public programmes. [Sebs Art List](#) and [New Exhibitions](#) provide listings of upcoming private views.
- Art fairs can also be a great way to identify galleries of interest—look through their lists of exhibitors online, although tickets may be expensive and a barrier to entry. If you can attend, they can also offer a chance to meet potential gallery owners. Try visiting at quiet times (e.g. late evenings) and speak to stallholders but do be very sensitive to the fact that they may be busy with clients. If appropriate, try to strike up rapport through discussion of the art, enabling a less pressured conversation for both parties than if you were to directly ask for an internship. You might also ask to meet

for a coffee after the fair as a way of building a relationship with the gallery. This can be arranged via a subsequent email conversation with your CV attached.

Art fairs

- Art fairs such as London Gallery Weekend and Mayfair Art Weekend often require temporary staff or interns. Besides learning about art fair management, working for a few days at an art fair gives you a chance to meet staff from exhibiting art galleries, which could lead to further opportunities.
- Approach the fair manager around three months prior to the fair taking place.

Auction houses

- Can be great for getting hands-on experience relevant to the wider arts world.
- Larger companies like [Christies](#) and [Sotheby's](#) have established, well-structured internship schemes. These are highly competitive for very few places.
- Smaller or regional auction houses may have opportunities for paid interns or for a few days unpaid work experience.

Museums and galleries

- Local museums and galleries, in particular, often have volunteering roles (such as supporting a museum archivist with digitalising documents or a curator with cataloguing objects), as well as offering short-term work experience and internships.
- See the museum [jobs desk](#) for opportunities
- Roles are not always advertised, so do write to the relevant curator or staff member and ask.
- Don't discount smaller organisations—if there are fewer employees you can be given more responsibility and gain real insight into the way the organisation is run.

Other organisations

- It's worth thinking beyond the well-known auction houses, galleries and art fairs. There are many other employers in the art world or supporting the art world. These include arts public relations and communication agencies, artists' studios, art transportation and logistics companies, collections management companies, art advisories and art wealth and investment companies.
- See for example, the exhibitors list at the annual [Museums and Heritage](#) show to get an idea of the many periphery organisations out there.

Read more about careers in the art world [here](#)

Use your network

- Brainstorm who you already know that might be able to help you.
- Ask your contacts if they know of anyone—you never know who might be in their network. For example, perhaps your university supervisor knows art dealers or curators in their specialist area. Ask them to put you in touch.
- Having a LinkedIn profile can help you keep track of your contacts, as they progress in their own careers. It also gives you a means to contact them, if you don't have their email address. Employers often use LinkedIn to 'check out' potential staff and their work experience, so keep your profile updated and professional.

What to include in your application

- Be clear on your availability / preferred start date and ideal duration of your internship
- Highlight any areas of special art interest / experience you may have and, if applicable, explain why this could be of value
- Highlight any experience / skills you have with systems commonly used in the art sector e.g. Art Logic or other CRM systems
- Highlight your awareness of the importance of confidentiality and your willingness to sign any reasonable policy documents on confidentiality and cyber security
- Confirm / evidence as necessary that you have the right to work in the UK
- If you need to work from home or work in a hybrid mode flag this – many internship roles are gallery based and do not lend themselves to working from home.

What is the difference between an intern and a volunteer?

- Volunteering is not the same as working as an intern. As a volunteer you give your time and help on your own terms. You agree your hours and responsibilities to suit your working arrangements. Often, responsibilities or duties are mutually agreed and are not imposed on you as if you are a worker. As a volunteer you may give your time to enhance your skills and experience, but you are also likely to do so to help a cause which you care about.
- Interns are workers with set duties you must fulfil and fixed times of work.

Remuneration

- With the exception of charities and voluntary organisations, all employers are required by law to pay interns at least [National Minimum Wage](#) if they're fulfilling [worker status](#) – whatever their title describes them as.
- If you have a list of duties you must fulfil and fixed times when you have to work, you are likely to be a worker and entitled to be paid.
- If you are being paid an amount that is less than the National Minimum Wage, but more than expenses, this is illegal.

Those NOT entitled to the [National Minimum Wage](#) are:

- Students required to do a placement with an employer for less than one year as part of a UK-based further or higher education course
- School pupils of [compulsory school age](#) undertaking work experience placements
- Those below school leaving age
- Anyone undertaking job shadowing whatever your age or education status.

Get help

- To discuss anonymously whether you think you qualify for the National Minimum Wage, phone the **Pay and Work Rights Helpline** for advice on **0800 917 2368**.
- See [here](#) and [here](#) for information about pay and working hours for people under 18.
- More information on employment rights and pay for interns can be found on the [government's website](#).

How much time can you commit to?

- If you are a college or university student, do check with your course tutors as to whether they advise a limit on hours for paid work and internships.

- Be realistic as to what you can commit to, bearing in mind that course work can take longer than expected, and you will want to have some social life and time to relax too!
- Make sure that the employer will support you if you need time off for exams or to meet a coursework deadline.

What makes a good internship?

A contract

- This should explain details of your pay, responsibilities and what else you can expect to get out of the internship. You should have a clear role description.

An induction

- Expect to be given an induction to the organisation (its history, mission and structure), introduced to relevant staff members, and to be given an explanation on how the workplace functions and which resources will enable you to carry out your role. This should also cover basic Health and Safety (e.g. fire procedure).

Support

- Interns are valuable members of staff who should be treated with the same duty of care as regular employees. You should be allocated a supervisor.

Challenge

- The work must offer a challenge, an appropriate learning experience and an opportunity for development. You should be assigned meaningful work.

Supervision

- You can expect to be given guidance and feedback to help you carry out your role effectively, meet your learning goals, and support your development.

Getting the most out of your internship

An internship is a great opportunity to test your abilities and for you to develop your transferable skills. To make the most of it:

- Get to know the expectations of your role, the organisation, and the broader sector
- Challenge yourself. Set yourself learning objectives to maximise your development and widen your skills set
- Identify your strengths and thinking about where you can add value to the organisation
- Ask questions to find out as much as you can about the organisation and sector
- Reflect on your learning—perhaps by keeping a journal. Make notes on all of the tasks and skills that have been required and any achievements you have had this will be an invaluable reminder when you come to update your CV or apply for job
- Become one of the team and build your network of contacts
- Ask for feedback and take time to reflect on the experience.

Moving on

An internship can offer a great first step—but should be a short-term experience, with an agreed end date.

- If you feel under-used, unsupervised, within your comfort zone or without opportunities to learn or build relationships, and you have been doing the work for more than three months, it's time to move on.
- Avoid becoming caught in a never-ending succession of internships. Once you have some experience under your belt, it's time to apply for jobs.

- When you come to the end of your internship, thank the employer and ask for feedback and advice for your next steps.
- Keep in touch. Maintaining contact and a good relationship is key for asking for a reference in the future and helps them to keep you in mind for future opportunities.
- Don't forget to update your CV and LinkedIn page at the end of the internship.

Alternatives to internships

Create your own opportunities

- Can you capitalise on your dissertation research or an area that you have researched during your art history studies? For example, if you want to be a curator, why not approach a café, community space or library with a proposal? Make sure it's realistic—for example, a small display drawing on the work of local contemporary artists or a library's existing special collections.
- Alternatively, if you are interested in gaining experience in public programmes, you could propose to their learning team or curator an event idea, such as a talk, tour or workshop. This should be an appealing event for the general public, relating to their permanent collection or an upcoming exhibition. Programmers plan events several months in advance, so try to use your growing network to hear of exhibitions before they are publicised.

Volunteering

- English Heritage offers volunteering opportunities in various roles and across the country.
- The National Trust also have volunteering and internship positions across the country.

Work shadowing

- Why not ask an employer if you could work shadow a junior member of staff for a morning or day? Observing someone at work, attending meetings with them or being at their side at the installation of an exhibition or on auction day could be a great way to get an insight into an organisation, without it being too big a commitment for either party. Be sure to ask lots of questions during quieter moments.

Apprenticeships

- Apprenticeships involve real-world projects and experience working with an employer such as a museum, gallery or archive. Read more here: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/careers/courses-guide/apprenticeships/#>

Youth Programmes

- Some museums and galleries also have youth programmes (see [Ikon's youth programme](#)) where you can get involved with projects like curating, public programming (perhaps running a Friday late), creating learning resources or giving talks and tours or making digital content for social media.

Mentoring

- Mentoring programmes offer a great way to seek guidance and enter a professional network. It can be particularly useful if you don't have a clear or existing point of access into the art world, or if you come from a background underrepresented in the

art world. Mentors volunteer a few hours to discuss with you any challenges and opportunities you are facing and what next steps you might best take.

- For more information see:
 - [Art Market Mentors](#)
 - [Arts Emergency](#)
 - [Creative Access](#)
 - [I Like Networking](#)
 - [Mentoring for all – Museums Association](#)

Jobs listings and career support communities

- Bear in mind that advertised roles may have several hundred applicants, so these are not always the easiest route, when applying for internships.
- [33 Union Square Jobs Page](#)
- [Alchemy](#) (commercial art world roles)
- [Antiques Trade Gazette magazine jobs page](#)
- [Art Jobs](#)
- [Artisan People](#) (museum and gallery roles)
- [Arts Council jobs](#)
- [Arts Hub](#)
- [Arts Professional](#)
- [Association for Art History](#)
- [Association of Women in the Arts \(AWITA\)](#)
- [Creative Access](#)
- [Creative Lives in Progress](#)
- [Creative Opportunities – University of Arts London Jobs Board](#)
- [Culture24](#)
- [Draw Recruitment](#)
- [Guardian jobs](#)
- [H-ArtHist](#)
- [I Like Networking](#) – (see also their resources)
- [If You Could Jobs](#)
- [Lacey West Art International](#)
- [Leicester Museum Jobs Desk](#)
- [Mediargh](#)
- [Museum jobs](#)
- [Museums Association](#)
- [Non-Viable Jobs](#)
- [Run the Check Jobs](#)
- [Sophie Macpherson Ltd](#)
- [The Dots](#)
- [Working Arts Club](#)

Internship programmes

- [Bold Tendencies Creative Learning](#)
- [Christie's](#)
- Edel Assanti–sara@edelassanti.com
- [October Gallery](#)–internships and youth collective
- [Peggy Guggenheim Internship, Venice](#)

- [Sotheby's](#)
- [Upgrade Yourself – Creative Careers at Somerset House](#)
- [V&A Museum](#) (Apprenticeship)
- [V&A Museum](#) (internship)
- [Youth Guides on The Line](#)

Sources

[Arts careers | Back on trend: volunteering in the arts | Ruth Millington](#)
[Best Practice Code for High Quality Internships](#) (UK Government guide)
[Careers | Why you need work experience in the arts | Ruth Millington](#)
[Making internships work: an intern's guide](#) (UK Government guide)
[Starting a Career in the Art World – Sophie Macpherson Ltd](#)
[What work should I get paid for?](#) (Art Quest)