

PhD Position, Modern Painting and the Lesbian Gaze, University of Basel

Institute of Art History, University of Basel, Jul 1, 2026–Jan 31, 2030

Application deadline: May 20, 2026

Charlotte Matter, Kunsthistorisches Seminar der Universität Basel

The SNSF project *Modern Painting and the Lesbian Gaze: Queer Women Artists in Europe, 1900–1950*, hosted at the University of Basel's Institute of Art History and led by Prof. Dr. Charlotte Matter, offers a full-time doctoral position for the duration of 3.5 years.

In analyses of artworks from the first half of the twentieth century, feminist art history has largely overlooked non-heterosexual sexuality and desire, while queer art history has primarily focused on the works of gay men. Against this background, the project proposes the notion of the 'lesbian gaze' as a methodological provocation to decentre the male and heterosexual gaze as dominant frameworks for interpreting modern painting.

The project brings together feminist and queer approaches to reposition the practices of women painters within queer art history. It adopts an intersectional framework that foregrounds the significance of class for queer lives, as well as for conditions of artistic production, thematic concerns and the circulation of artworks. Grounded in rigorous art-historical analysis, the project focuses on painting – a medium with a long tradition of gendered hierarchies that has therefore been critically reassessed by feminist scholars – to demonstrate how queer women artists negotiated, subverted or reappropriated its conventions.

The project employs the term 'women' not as a fixed, biologically determined category, but in a way that is mindful of a spectrum of gender experiences, some of which may not have been publicly articulated in the first half of the twentieth century. The umbrella term 'queer women' refers to people who transgressed dominant heteronormative frameworks and lived – or contemplated – non-normative sexualities and gender identities at that time.

Case studies, conducted by the project leader and two doctoral researchers, will be accompanied by a range of scholarly activities designed to reflect on questions of terminology and to advance methodological approaches. These include an ongoing reading group, two international workshops, and an open-access co-edited volume.

The project leader focuses on Irène Zurkinden and Leonor Fini, while one doctoral researcher (already appointed) examines the work of Émilie Charmy. We invite applications for a second doctoral position to investigate one or several further queer women painters working in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Possible case studies for this dissertation project include, but are not limited to: Jeanne Mammen, Gertrude Sandmann, Lotte Laserstein, Anita Clara Rée, Gluck, Gwen John, Patricia Preece and Dorothy Hepworth, Tove Jansson and Tuulikki Pietilä, Gerda Wegener and Lili Elbe, and Jeanna Bauck and Bertha Wegmann.

The dissertation project will be supervised by Prof. Dr. Charlotte Matter, Laurenz Assistant Professor of Contemporary Art (first supervisor) and a second professor at the University of Basel (member of Group I, to be defined).

Job description

- Individual research within the framework of the research project, resulting in a PhD
- Collaboration and participation in the project activities, including regular team meetings, a reading group, workshops, lectures, and a co-edited volume

Profile

- Above-average master's degree in art history or a related field
- Familiarity with discourses in queer and/or feminist art history
- Interest in modern painting, art historical methods, queer/lesbian/trans theory and questions of class, along with a willingness to engage with these discourses through the project's reading group and other activities
- Proficiency in English (as the main language of the project activities); the dissertation can be written in German, English or French
- Excellent writing, strong editorial and analytical skills
- Collaborative mindset

We offer

- 100% doctoral salary (following the standards of the University of Basel) for a duration of 3.5 years
- Academic mentoring and collaboration within a team sharing an interest in queer feminist art history
- Funding for research trips and conference attendance
- An inspiring workplace in the heart of Basel, with excellent libraries and a vibrant museum scene
- Possibility to participate in the doctoral program of eikones, Center of the Theory and History of the image, <https://eikones.philhist.unibas.ch/en/graduate-school/phd-program/>

Environment

The University of Basel is committed to diversity. It values the different experiences and perspectives of its members and promotes their diverse strengths, regardless of age, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, cultural background, language, social or professional status, lifestyle or political conviction.

Application

Please submit your application in English, German or French as a single pdf by 20 May 2026, 23:59 pm CET, using the online portal provided by the University of Basel: https://careers.unibas.ch/job/St_-Alban-PhD-position%2C-SNSF-project-Modern-Painting-and-the-Lesbian-Gaze-Depa/1357693957/

The application should include:

- 1) Cover letter (1 page)
- 2) CV
- 3) Copies of degree certificates
- 4) Contact details for two references

5) Project description, including a working title, a summary with clearly defined research questions, an overview of the state of the art, and the theoretical and/or methodological approaches you intend to use (max. 5 pages) and relevant literature (max. 2 pages)

6) Writing sample (e.g. a chapter from the master's thesis, at most 20 pages)

Information

Questions regarding the position can be directed to Prof. Dr. Charlotte Matter, charlotte.matter@unibas.ch. Please note that we only accept applications submitted through our online application portal. Applications via email or postal services will not be considered.

Timeline

Shortlisted candidates will be notified by 31 May 2026. The online interviews will be held on 10 June 2026. The position starts on 1 July 2026 or by mutual agreement and runs until 31 January 2030 at the latest.

Reference:

JOB: PhD Position, Modern Painting and the Lesbian Gaze, University of Basel. In: ArtHist.net, Apr 11, 2026 (accessed May 8, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52196>>.