RE: RSHA proposal to locate Art History within the School of Art

Yes, I am strongly in favor of the RSHA proposal to locate the Art History Department within the School of Art.

Students involved in practice-led research must study Art History and Art Theory. The study and application of AH/AT is integral to and inseparable from the conception, design, and making of serious artwork. Most serious art practitioners understand Art History and Theory as living disciplines that actively influence as well as respond to contemporary art making. Art practice students are deeply engaged in Art History and Theory, not only as part of their usual required and elective course load, but as a weighted portion of their required learning outcomes and assessments for every course in their major. Many School of Art students become involved with curating prior to graduating, and become valued employees in gallery/museum roles due to their finely attuned powers of observation assimilated with an academic knowledge of theory and history, which allows for cognitive recognition of techniques, styles, and capacity to understand the full context of contemporary artwork.

Having Art History and Theory co-located within the School of Art is essential to the development of meaningful and rigorous art making.

The distinction between Art History and Art Theory is real, but is certainly not so disparate as to be separately located in two different Schools. There is overlap in the coursework and research involved, and much of the same ground is covered, with slightly different perspectives, in the introductory courses. They are closely related, much in the same way, if not more so, than Anthropology and Archeology are related.

Being located within the School of Art certainly would have benefits for researchers and students of Art History who see themselves as part of a living discipline with contemporary relevance. Being proximate to art practice invites and allows for deeper engagement with art itself as it evolves. The student of Art History stands to gain a much more accurate sense of materials and processes in terms of both past and current techniques.

Artworks are not just lenses through which culture, history, and the gestalt are depicted; they are the evidence of the very dynamic, tangible dance between observation and reaction that happens between a maker and his/her medium, an experience of materiality. Academic understanding of this engagement would be well served by actual experience of art making. This has the added benefit of sharpening the visual perception of the student through active observation.

School of Art department heads have expressed interest in developing studio courses targeted towards techniques most relevant to Art History. Having the Art History department within the School of Art would allow for coordinated timetables to facilitate this type of course offering, which has, up to now, been difficult to accommodate.
The processes and boundaries of art are rapidly expanding and shifting. Having primary source data, a valued resource for historians in general, seems irreplaceable. All of the extensive research that goes into trying to fully understand the mind of the maker, their materials, their constraints and opportunities, the ideas and the pressures of their time; that is all right here at the fingertips of tomorrow’s Art Historian looking back upon today. Locating Art History within the School of Art presents an opportunity for Art History to be more relevant and in-touch with contemporary art as it moves forwards, and to reflect upon and enrich Art History not only in the context of history but in analogous relationships to current art making as reflection of the contemporary world.

The School of Art already integrates Art History and Theory into every studio course, and would be that much stronger for the additional specialized breadth and depth the Art History department houses. In my view, Art History would gain much through co-locating into the School of Art and embracing the opportunity to engage with the actual practice of that which they strive to understand so deeply: Art.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission.