Nessa Kerr, master’s student in the art history program, has a special interest in the museum field. Her current research involves the study of sheer veils in paintings by Lucas Cranach the Elder, a Northern Renaissance German painter, prolific in the first part of the sixteenth century.

“I traveled to Germany for three weeks in October 2013 to research paintings by Cranach incorporating sheer veils,” said Kerr. “I viewed over 25 key paintings and visited ten different museums. I also had the advantage of using German museum files and research libraries to find resources not available in the U.S.” The trip was supported by a DU Art! student travel grant and an art history grant provided by the department.

Kerr chose to attend DU because of the museum studies concentration in the art history program.

“The museum studies portion of my program definitely influenced my predilection for work in museum registration and collections,” said Kerr. “I started out thinking I would like to work in museum education, but I quickly realized that my patience and attention to detail, combined with the exhilaration I felt every time I visited the collections storage area in a museum, made me a much better fit for work in museum registration and collections.”

Kerr’s professors have also had a definitive influence on her, she said.

“Dr. Scott Montgomery’s classes got me excited about Northern Renaissance art and encouraged me to turn around the way I normally think to find new, unique ideas for my research.”

“All of the professors in the department have been incredibly supportive and willing to work with me as I push myself as a researcher,” she said. “Seeing their fascinating research and their dedication to their students has inspired me to consider a career as a professor.”

Annabeth Headrick, associate professor in art history, said that Kerr has distinguished herself in the classroom.

“She has a very perceptive analysis of the material and is consistently one of the most thoughtful and consistent contributors to classroom discussion,” Headrick said. “She has taken on for her final research project a truly novel topic which has little to no research done upon it, so she is engaged in the real business of scholarship, trying to address an oft-ignored topic. In addition, her ideas on this topic are sophisticated in their nuance and not only explain the strategies of the artist, but also help us better understand ideas of religion and gender in this period of German history.”

While conducting her research in Germany, Kerr has benefitted from being able to speak the language.
“I never imagined when I started my first German class in fifth grade that it would become so important to my academic career. It’s a passion that has allowed me to really investigate the roots of my current research,” Kerr said. “I also speak some Italian and have been able to use that a little on the project as well.”

As an art historian, Kerr is trained to make connections between disciplines to help her understand the meaning behind the artwork.

“To unravel the meaning of a piece, you have to understand how the artwork and artist fit in with everything else that was happening around them,” said Kerr. “Being able to find connections between art and its broader cultural contexts and determining how valid those connections may or may not be is absolutely essential as an art historian.”

In addition to her studies, Kerr is the assistant to the director of the Vicki Myhren Gallery on campus where she has planned exhibition layouts, rearranged walls, patched and painted the gallery, hung artwork, and photographed gallery events. “I’ve learned about how a university gallery operates, and I’ve communicated with people in many departments across campus as a way to create inclusive programming.”

Following graduation, Kerr hopes to work full time in a museum, with long range plans of pursuing a PhD in art history and becoming a professor.