

Gina Strumwasser

Professor of Art



Gina Strumwasser bursts through her office door apologizing. "I'm sorry I'm late," she says, clutching a bag of Mrs. Fields' chocolate chip cookies. "I just couldn't stand it any longer . . . I had to make a cookie-run!" Strumwasser's fresh and friendly manner suddenly causes you to feel as though you are seeing an old friend instead of meeting a Professor of Art History for the first time.

Strumwasser, the youngest professor in the Art Department, has been teaching at CSU, Fresno for about ten years. In addition to her regular classes, she is active with the Fresno Metropolitan Museum's docent program and

conducts tours to museum exhibits in San Francisco, Los Angeles and various parts of Europe. In 1980 she was awarded the National Endowment for the Humanities Grant to study for one year with Professor Creighton Gilbert at Cornell University.

With cups of coffee and cookies distributed, she begins to talk about her love for art history and how studying it has influenced her life. "I became very interested in art when I did my undergraduate work at Berkeley," she explains. "I should have majored in it but I stayed with sociology because I had visions of saving the world. After graduating I realized that I wanted to find a career that would keep me happy

and support my expensive habits. I enrolled in the graduate program for art history at California State University, Los Angeles and then I entered the doctoral program at U.C.L.A."

About the time Strumwasser began the doctoral program, she accepted a teaching position at CSU, Fresno. During the next several years, she commuted back and forth from Fresno to Los Angeles in order to complete her doctorate.

Q: What was it like to teach in Fresno and study for your doctorate in Los Angeles at the same time?

A: It was hectic. For a while I was driving to Los Angeles every week and literally living in two places at one time. It was difficult to maintain my responsibility to my teaching and at the same time sustain my status in the doctoral program at U.C.L.A. One semester I was going back and forth so much that I lived here in my office with Abbey, my crazy German shepherd-chow. I had a little cot and a hot-plate and every morning before classes began, I would go downstairs to use the shower in the sculpture area. One morning I walked out at the same time one of my colleagues walked out of his office. I was in my robe and had curlers in my hair . . . he was in his robe and slippers . . . we looked at each other with surprise and finally he said, "Ladies first!" So I got to take my shower first. Because there are no doctoral programs in this area, living in your office and commuting is kind of a tradition with art historians.

Q: What intrigues you most about studying art history?

A: It is one of the most fascinating ways to learn history. In a sense, you can actually get to know people that lived hundreds of years ago