

MFA in Visual Art

The Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Visual Art educates artists who will define and change the future of their disciplines. It instills students with the agency and resiliency that will be essential to the next generation of artists. The program is home to an inclusive, close-knit community of renegade makers and thinkers, and it offers students a site of rigorous inquiry, humanity, and intellectual generosity.

As part of Washington University, a tier-one research institution, the School's expansive facilities and studios serve as a think tank for intellectual and material experimentation. Each year, through the Freund Fellowship, Island Press, our Public Lecture Series, and other programs, we bring renowned artists, designers, and critics to campus for lectures, studio visits, and reviews.

The Sam Fox School's MFA in Visual Art professionally prepares students for a diversified approach to the field of contemporary art that nurtures sustained, lifelong engagement while recognizing multiple pathways and definitions for a career in the arts and culture. We are proud of our location in St. Louis, which serves as both an extension of the studio and a site of engagement for art and artists.

The curriculum promotes a rigorous and immersive approach to graduate study in art. By combining Graduate Studio, Group Critique, Graduate Seminars, Workshops, Electives, and the Summer Independent Project, the program maximizes the context of the broad and diverse community at Washington University and in St. Louis.

Website: <https://samfoxschool.wustl.edu/academics/college-of-art/mfa-in-visual-art>

Faculty

Our faculty are practicing artists and designers who engage in projects internationally, nationally, and regionally. They exhibit their work in museums, galleries, and other venues. They engage a variety of audiences, receive critical review in periodicals, publish their own writing, and produce documentaries. Others produce site-specific performances and lead community-based programs. Their range of creative practice spans conceptual and media territories that include art and social practice; propaganda and print media; figurative painting; and cinematic, time-based work including sound and digital film-making, book arts, and large-scale sculptural installations. Students often have the opportunity to assist faculty members with studio-based work and research that addresses timely and relevant topics, including race, global politics, the environment, art + science, evolving technologies, social justice, and materials culture and studies.

For further information, please visit the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts website:

- MFA-VA Faculty
- MFA-IVC Faculty

Visiting Lecturers

The school brings nationally and internationally recognized artists, designers, historians and critics to campus to promote new ideas in practice, theory and technology. Invited speakers often participate in graduate studio visits and conduct one-on-one reviews of work.

The Henry L. and Natalie E. Freund Teaching Fellowship is an internationally recognized program that consists of two month-long artist residencies in the Graduate School of Art that culminate with a public lecture and solo exhibition at The Saint Louis Art Museum. During their fellowship, artists teach the graduate students and conduct studio critiques with students.

The Arthur L. and Sheila Prensky Island Press Visiting Artist Program brings distinguished artists to the school for intensive studio residencies at Island Press. Visiting artists work closely with faculty, graduate students and advanced undergraduate students to create innovative prints that garner a critical response from national and international audiences.

Degree Requirements

MFA in Visual Art

The Graduate School of Art subscribes to the standards for the MFA degree as set forth by the College Art Association of America (CAA) and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

The residence requirement for the MFA degree is at least two academic years of full-time study (minimum 15 units each semester). Students have three calendar years from the date of first registration to complete the degree. Individual programs are arranged with the program chair. Graduate students work with faculty advisors according to their areas of interest within the Sam Fox School and the university at large.

In order to earn the MFA in Visual Art (MFA-VA) — the terminal professional degree in studio art — students must complete the following requirements:

Required	Units
Graduate Studio & Critique	32
Graduate Seminars	13
Workshops	3
Summer Independent Project	3
Art/Design/Art History/Academic Electives	9
Total	60

The culminating event of the program requires students to present, defend, and document a thesis exhibition.

Electives may be taken from art or design, art history, and academic courses:

- Art and design electives introduce students to the intellectual and conceptual issues and production methods of a broad array of practices that complement and expand the student's studio practice. First-year MFA students must take College of Art electives at the 500 level; second-year students must take all electives at the 600 level.
- Courses taken outside the College of Art by MFA students must be at the 300-level or above to count as graduate-level credit, and they require prior approval by the student's academic advisor (program chair) in advance of registration.
- Students may not register for courses in the School of Continuing & Professional Studies.

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Graduate Studio

In the Graduate Studio — through a combination of self-directed study, studio critiques, visiting artist reviews, and research students work independently with the guidance of a primary faculty mentor, and they enjoy regular encounters with a broad range of other faculty and visitors. Students are expected to support and drive each other to make work and to take their ideas as far as they can go. A student's time in the MFA-VA program is a singular experience in their artistic journey: we want each of our students to thrive in their chosen path.

Group Critique

Group Critique is the heart of the curriculum. A mix of first- and second-year students meet for rigorous weekly critiques to share new work and engage in lively, constructive discussion. These groups also serve to integrate the entire program as a supportive yet demanding cohesive group invested in their community, both individually and collectively.

Graduate Seminars

Students take a sequence of required seminars — one each semester — on professional practice, research methods, thesis exhibition, and writing. Beginning with the First-Year Colloquium and culminating with Thesis & Exhibition Preparation, the sequence grounds students in their practice within the Sam Fox School community and in St. Louis. It engages students in research methodologies, prepares emerging artists for professional careers, and supports students in the development of their final thesis text and museum exhibition.

Electives + Workshops

MFA-VA students can enroll in electives across the Sam Fox School and the university that build upon their research interests. Each semester, students also participate in required, 1-credit workshops to build essential technical and professional skills. Students can select from workshops in the Sam Fox School (like Fox Fridays), opportunities offered through the university's Skandalaris Center or the Center for Teaching and Learning, or other options in settings around St. Louis.

Summer Independent Project

During the summer following the second semester of the program, MFA-VA students create projects supported by independent research. Projects can be accomplished in a Sam Fox School studio or by engaging in partnerships or residencies with arts organizations. In alternating years, students have the opportunity to participate in our Sommerakademie in Germany. Each student develops a proposal for their project during the spring of their first year. The experience culminates in an exhibition of completed projects at the beginning of the fall semester.

Suggested MFA-VA Course Plan

Course	Fall Units	Spring Units
First Year		
Graduate Studio	4	4
Group Critique	4	4
Graduate Seminar	3	3
Workshops	1	1
Electives	3	3
	15	15
Second Year		
Summer Independent Project*	3	—
Graduate Studio	4	4
Group Critique	4	4
Graduate Seminar	3	4
Workshops	1	—
Electives	3	—
	18	12

* Units from the Summer Independent Project are awarded in the fall semester of the second year.