MFA | COMPUTER ARTS

School of Visual Arts
Graduate Programs

Art and technology

have always been fantastic partners in creativity, and our MFA students consistently create great examples around that intersection. We place a strong emphasis on personal exploration by encouraging students to push their preconceived boundaries and embrace early experimentation as a critical part of the iterative process.

The MFA Computer Arts program emphasizes creativity and a multidisciplinary approach to producing innovative animation, motion graphics and experimental art within a collaborative state-of-the-art production environment. Our goal is to develop artists who will continue to challenge norms, question standards and surprise people long after they leave SVA. Being based in New York City also offers a significantly enhanced cultural experience, including music, theater, food, museums and, of course, world-renowned art galleries.

Our students come from all around the globe, bringing unique cultural perspectives to the creative process. And our combination of small class sizes, working professionals as faculty and guest lecturers provides in-depth exposure to all areas of animation, motion graphics and experimental art.

—Terrence Masson, chair

About the Program

SVA's MFA Computer Arts Department, founded in 1986, was the first MFA program in the U.S. to focus on computer art. It now has a network of more than 1,300 alumni.

- The first-year curriculum strengthens and broadens the student's knowledge and creative approach to digital art in preparation for the thesis year.
- The second year revolves around the thesis process—the completion of a body of creative work, combined with academic research and an artist's statement.
- The first- and second-year academic programs are supplemented by workshops, visiting artists, guest lecturers and internship opportunities.

Graduates of the department are employed by the most prestigious companies and digital studios, including Apple, Nickelodeon, Buck, Hornet, Volvox Labs, Laika, HBO, Google, Aardman Nathan Love, Titmouse and Pixar. Some alumni choose the entrepreneurship of their own businesses. Those who pursue experiential art careers exhibit their work in museums and galleries, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, MoMA/MoMA PS1, Whitney Museum of American Art, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Digital Art Museum, Chelsea Art Museum and Tate Online. By combining creativity with academics, graduates have also published books and scholarly writings, and have chosen teaching careers at prestigious higher education institutions.

Thesis projects from our students have gone on to win awards from major international competitions, including Student Academy Awards, Webby Awards, Prix Ars Electronica, SIGGRAPH, The Young Ones and Lumen Prize. Student works have also appeared in such acclaimed festivals as Cannes, Sundance and Tribeca, as well as the world's premiere animation festivals—Annecy, Ottawa, Animafest Zagreb, Stuttgart Trickfilm, Kaboom, Animac, and more.
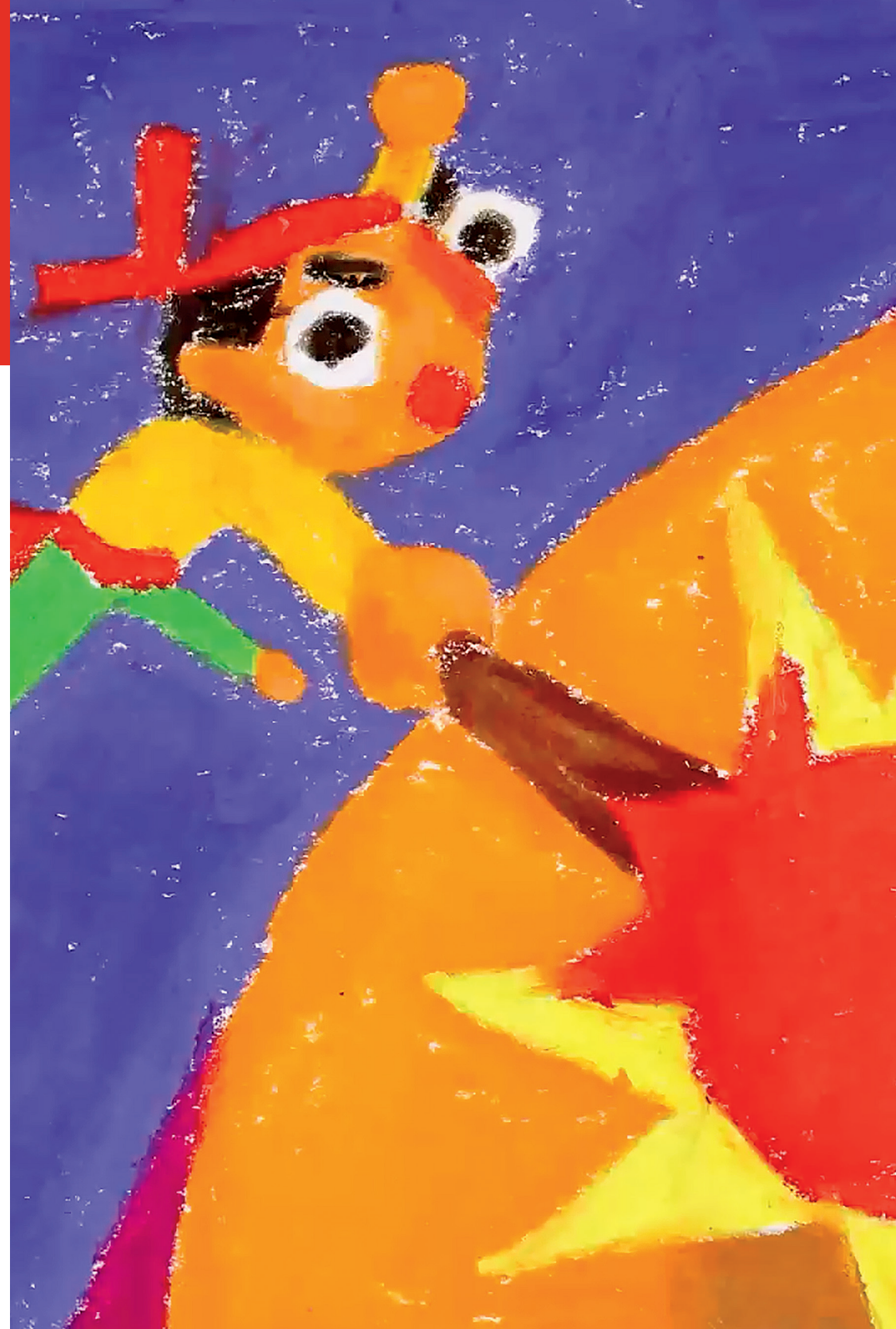
Melody Shih

Motion Graphics Artist's Thesis Jump-starts Her Career

"I've always loved to draw," says Melody Shih, a senior motion designer at Fable. "I like holding pencils and crayons in my hand." While growing up in Taiwan, she was the girl in class who covered the pages of her textbooks with cartoons. Her favorite class was art; it was the place where she found the confidence to pursue her budding passion. Looking back, she says, "I think that was where I realized I wanted to have the ability to communicate through art."

Melody went on to study at Taiwan's Kun Shan University, majoring in visual communication design. After graduating, she began building a career as a graphic designer and illustrator. It was a perfect start to her life as a working artist, but for Melody something was still missing. ▶

"I remembered looking at my work and thinking, 'It's lacking something,'" she recalls. "It would be more engaging if I could make my illustrations move and tell the stories."

She started researching graduate schools and found the MFA Computer Arts Department at SVA, which offers a program in motion graphics. She watched videos created by alumni and was amazed by what she saw. Melody felt certain that the work they were doing was exactly what she wanted to learn.

Moving to New York was both exhilarating and overwhelming. Melody was fascinated by the energy of the city, its crowded streets and deafening soundscape, but some days it overloaded her. Adjusting to a new environment and speaking a different language took time, but it also became a source of inspiration.

For her thesis project, she directed *Cacophony*, a short animation film for which she created a visualization of the sound in New York, transposing the feeling of things heard into colorful images and abstract patterns. Barking dogs, ringing phones, honking horns and chattering teeth fill the screen as a young woman stops at a city crosswalk. Overcome by the harshness of her urban environment, she takes a few deep breaths and is transported to a place of inner calm, where the sound of her own heartbeat brings her a sense of peace.

The film screened in multiple festivals, garnering awards along the way. It was chosen as a Vimeo Staff Pick and was posted on the SVA website, which is where a manager in the animation and graphics department of CNN discovered it. Excited by what he saw, he contacted Melody, offering her a job as a

motion graphics designer for the network.

"If I didn't have this thesis film," she says, "I wouldn't have this job at CNN."

Melody was also lead designer on *Destroyed*, a work of animation that was nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Graphic Design and Art Direction. The project told the story of hundreds of rape kits that were destroyed by police before the statutes of limitations on the crimes expired. The video's release united lawmakers, politicians and victim advocates in a fight for change.

In addition to her role at Fable, Melody's rich career experiences have led her back to SVA, where she is now a faculty member lecturing in the BFA Animation program.

"It's incredible to know that animation and visual storytelling is so powerful," Melody says. "It can create real-world change."
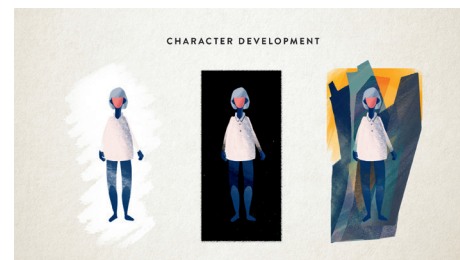
Character development for *Cacophony*, Melody Shih's 2016 student film.

Stills from *Cacophony*.

Curriculum/ Sample Program

3D Animation

The MFA Computer Arts program is multidisciplinary and features areas of concentration in animation, motion graphics and experimental art. Students are required to maintain a minimum grade point average of 3.0 (B) in order to remain in good academic standing.

Motion Graphics and 2D Animation

FIRST YEAR/FALL	CREDITS
3D Modeling and Animation	3
Animation Culture	3
Computer Systems I	3
Digital Art Seminar I	0
Narrative and Visual Storytelling	3
Programming for Animators	3

FIRST YEAR/SPRING	
Advanced 3D Techniques	3
Digital Art Seminar II	0
Digital Storyboarding	3
Technical Direction	3
Sound Workshop	3
Theory, Criticism and History of Time-Based Media	3

SECOND YEAR/FALL	
Character Animation	3
Dynamics and Particle Systems	3
Production Issues: Animation I	3
Thesis I	3
Thesis Research and Writing I	3

SECOND YEAR/SPRING	
Compositing	3
Production Issues: Animation II	3
Seminar in Musical Choices	3
Thesis II	3
Thesis Research and Writing II	3

FIRST YEAR/FALL	CREDITS
Computer Systems I	3
Digital Art Seminar I	0
Motion Graphics I	3
Narrative and Visual Storytelling	3
Theory, Criticism and History of Time-Based Media	3
Web Programming I	3

FIRST YEAR/SPRING	
Digital 2D Animation: Tight Tie Downs	3
Digital Art Seminar II	0
Digital Storyboarding	3
Ecstasy & Apocalypse	3
Motion Graphics II	3
Web Programming II	3

SECOND YEAR/FALL	
Compositing	3
Motion Graphics: Visual Storytelling, Creative Strategy and Design	3
Production Issues: 2D and Motion Graphics I	3
Thesis I	3
Thesis Research and Writing I	3

SECOND YEAR/SPRING	
Production Issues: 2D and Motion Graphics II	3
Seminar in Musical Choices	3
Video Production: From Concept to Completion	3
Thesis II	3
Thesis Research and Writing II	3

Experimental Art

Chiao Chang and Yiran Guo, *SteelHeaven*, 2023.

Course Offerings

This is a sample of our recent course listings. For our full curriculum, visit: sva.edu/mfaca/curriculum.

EMERGING PRACTICES: NONLINEAR STORYTELLING

Using a studio approach, this course will equip MFACA students working in the fine arts with both the technical tools and the conceptual framework to approach new practices and art forms in relation to computational storytelling. Topics include: the implications of installation and immersive media, themes of technology and the body, ongoing discourse in the culture of technology, and the historical context of interactive and new media art. Students will explore alternative narrative forms that are computation-based through a broad sampling of tools and techniques, such as generative and interactive media, gesture and sensor-controlled software, digital fabrication, VR and projection mapping.

DYNAMICS AND PARTICLE SYSTEMS

This course is a comprehensive introduction to procedural effects in SideFX Houdini. Students will begin by exploring the fundamentals of procedural workflows and quickly dive into creating dynamic simulations using rigid bodies, particles, fluids, and more—all with the goal of gaining an understanding of how data moves in the program. Other topics will include importing, processing and exporting geometry to and from other software, instancing, VEX and HScript, SOPs and VOPs contexts, and volumes and VDBs.

CHARACTER ANIMATION

This course provides students with a workshop setting in which to deepen their understanding of body movement and how to convey emotion while solving complex animation problems. Technical instruction will include areas such as forward and inverse kinematics, simple scripting and the power of the graph editor. Acting for animators and facial expressions will be practiced extensively so that students can better understand how to convey fluidity of movement and expression in animated characters. The course will be divided into lectures, demonstrations, tutorials, in-class exercises and critiques.

CREATIVE PROGRAMMING FOR ARTISTS I AND II

These courses are intended for students who have no prior exposure to programming and who want to build their own tools to create digital art. We will take a close look at the techniques used to program simple manipulations of video and sound works and control these with a broad range of external controllers that are commercially available, as well as with simple camera and motion-tracking techniques. The course will consist of lectures and presentations with a short assignment after each session. Software and hardware include: Max/MSP/Jitter and the Processing language tool set; Arduino, iCube, and other I/O devices; Korg Nano, QuNeo and MIDI-based controllers; Kinect, Leap, and other 3D interfaces; and iPhone, iPad and smartphone apps that are able to control the computer.

MOTION GRAPHICS I AND II

Encompassing drawing, two- and three-dimensional animation, video, stop-motion, photography and typographic elements, motion graphics extend beyond the commonly used methods of frame-by-frame animation and live action and create a conglomeration of multiple visual styles. Motion graphics can be used to creatively go beyond the rules of representation, thus augmenting the various ways that media artists can delve into their imaginations and express unique visual and aural works. While the primary software for these courses are Adobe After Effects and Cinema 4D, students are strongly encouraged to explore the creative software available to them as well as experiment with traditional media. Project critiques will be given to develop an informed sense of refined creative expression. Advanced techniques relating to combining 2D and 3D animation, live action and stop-motion will be explored in depth. Coursework will be complemented by guest lecturers and workshops given by industry professionals. Students will complete the course with a reel that showcases both their creativity and knowledge of the software.

TECHNIQUES IN EXPERIMENTAL ANIMATION

Various experimental methods used to create animations will be explored in this course. Students will gain an understanding of many tools, working both in traditional and digital 2D animation. Techniques—such as cut-out animation, stop-motion, compositing and found footage collage—will be covered. Emphasis will be on art direction and design, including composition, rhythm, color, editing and sound. Nonnarrative and experimental storytelling methods and theories will be studied through film screenings and talks with experimental animators and artists.

ART AND TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTIONS

Art and Technological Revolutions explores the impact of different technological revolutions—from the agricultural through the industrial and the birth of photography to the digital and current artificial intelligence innovations—and how they have influenced the production of art. Students will examine the art made before and after each of these revolutions, and discuss the similarities and differences they made possible. This course offers students a thorough understanding of the intersections between art and technology, how they have impacted one another, and how they might shape a symbiotic future.

NARRATIVE AND VISUAL STORYTELLING

This course will study the structural elements underlying animated entertainment, both traditional and experimental narratives. Story structures will be analyzed to discover what content can be conveyed within 30 seconds, a few minutes or longer in art and entertainment. We will focus on the key elements of storytelling, including the development of concepts, such as the central dramatic question, inciting incident, idiosyncratic characters and spaces, conflicts and needs, mounting tension, reversals and resolution. Visual language will be addressed by gaining a familiarity with camera shots, movements, angles and placement. Through short assignments, students will develop original scripts, concept sketches, storyboards and animatics. The basics of previsualization will be covered. An examination of key works in the field is included.

VIRTUAL REALITY STORYTELLING

In this course, students will examine the fundamentals of cinematography and storytelling to bring them into VR/AR environments. We will address such elements as storyboarding, lighting cues, camera framing, sound effects and music. Students will begin with basic real-time production pipeline methods using Unity and will complete the course with a fully realized VR/AR project.

Notable Alumni

Rebecca Adorno
Homeroom, *The Vow*, *Vice* (TV series)

Yong Duk Jhun
The Tiger's Apprentice, *Vivo*, *Kung Fu Panda*

Nancy Kato
Soul, *WALL-E*, *Up*

Erwin Redl
Whitney Museum of American Art, Bitforms Gallery, National Art Museum of China

Carlos Saldanha
Harold and the Purple Crayon, *Ferdinand*, *Ice Age*

John F. Simon Jr.
The Museum of Modern Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Jenni Yang
Clients include: Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Adele and Miley Cyrus

"I realized that combining multiple skills together to form unified, multidisciplinary projects is how I want and need to approach my work. The curriculum at SVA allowed me to explore and tailor my education toward multiple interests by picking a variety of completely unrelated classes."
—Kamil Nawratil (MFA 2013)

Faculty

To learn more about the faculty members and to read their biographies, visit: sva.edu/mfaca/faculty.

Terrence Masson
chair, MFA Computer Arts, School of Visual Arts

Emily Allen
filmmaker, cameraperson

Lotte Marie Allen
academic advisor and curriculum coordinator, MFA Computer Arts, School of Visual Arts; artist; writer

Benton C Bainbridge
media artist; founder, FEED

Juan Beltré
director, designer, animator

John Benton
narrative designer in immersive technology; founder, Love8

Christi Bertelsen
storyboard artist, director, producer

Anney Bonney
visual artist

Rob Campbell
director of operations, MFA Computer Arts, School of Visual Arts; visual artist

Kun-I Chang
creative director, Space Rabbit Studio; visual artist

Javier Cruz
executive producer, music composer, Volvox Labs

Terry Dame
sound artist, composer, musician, instrument inventor

Jon Dieringer
founder, director, editor-in-chief, *Screen Slate*; book editor, A24

Timothy Druckrey
author

Gil Franco
3D modeler

Michael Gold
generative artist, Web3 developer, entrepreneur

Thyrza Nichols Goodeve
critic, writer

Edgar David Grana
composer

Isaac Holze
CG artist

Mark Ingle
senior FX artist, Artjail

Gonzalo Janer
animator, Nickelodeon

Rob Kohr
animation director, Nick Jr. On-Air Promotions

Lisa LaBracio
animation director

Jackie Liao
head of CG, VFX supervisor, Artjail

Jasper Lin
animator, computer artist, programmer

India Lombardi-Bello
assistant to the chair, outreach coordinator, MFA Computer Arts, School of Visual Arts; artist; writer

David B. Mattingly
matte artist, illustrator

Adam Meyers
producer

Nikita Mikros
game designer, developer, chief executive officer, BumbleBear Games

Luis Rodrigo Navarro
3D design and fabrication consultant

Alex Noyes
sound designer, editor, owner, ReSound Post

Steve Rittler
animator, illustrator

Darren Santa Maria
A/V systems administrator, MFA Computer Arts, School of Visual Arts; animator; motion graphics artist

Trilby Schreiber
designer, illustrator, writer, producer

Rich Shupe
programmer, writer

Amresh Sinha
filmmaker

Hans Tammen
creative technologist, sound artist

Jose Vargas
senior systems administrator, MFA Computer Arts, School of Visual Arts

Angelica Vergel
director of operations, BFA Animation, School of Visual Arts

Ben Voldman
illustrator, animator

Ada Whitney
co-founder, creative director, Beehive

Lecturers, Mentors and Thesis Advisors

Nitzan Bartov
interaction designer, CTRL-Labs; game developer; architect

José Carlos Casado
multimedia artist

Jorge R. Gutierrez
director

Emily Hubley
independent animator

Maria Lee
shading art director, Pixar Animation Studios

Sonnyé Lim
independent animator

Kyle McDonald
new media artist

Louis Henry Mitchell
creative director of character design, Sesame Workshop

Dorca Musseb
director, Mighty Oak

Kamil Nawratil
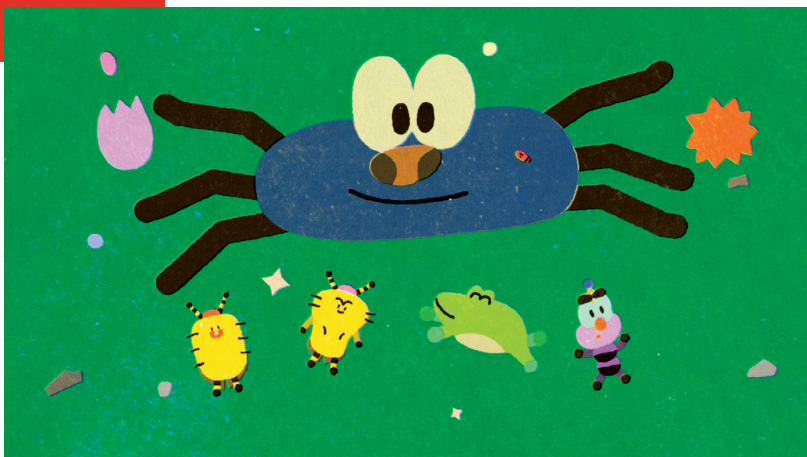founding partner/creative and technical director, Volvox Labs

Mark Osborne
director

Jan Pinkava
director, writer, animator

Bill Plympton
independent animator, cartoonist

Anna Samo
independent filmmaker

Simón Wilches Castro
creative director, Titmouse

FROM ABOVE TO BELOW: Yining Dang, Shan Dora Huang, Chongjia Zhang, *Joy*, 2022; Chiung Xiaoqiong Zhang, *The Awakening of Insects*, 2023; Viewer with Claudia Tay's piece *SemiConductor* at 2022 thesis exhibition.

Application Process

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

For a full list of application requirements and detailed instructions, visit:

sva.edu/grad/howtoapply

- Online Application and $80 Application Fee: sva.edu/apply

DEADLINES

For information on application deadlines, visit: sva.edu/grad/timeline

IMPORTANT LINKS

- FAQ: sva.edu/grad/faq
- International students: sva.edu/grad/intl
- Tuition and fees: sva.edu/tuition
- Visit SVA: sva.edu/grad/visit

Contact Us

We encourage applicants to visit our department. Contact us directly to schedule a department tour or sign up to attend an Information Session. For more information and to register, go to: sva.edu/grad/visit.

If you have any questions about the application process, contact Graduate Admissions at 212.592.2107 or email: gradadmissions@sva.edu.

Terrence Masson, chair
Rob Campbell, director of operations
India Lombardi-Bello, assistant to the chair
and outreach coordinator
Lotte Marie Allen, academic advisor
and curriculum coordinator
Jack Meisterich, administrative assistant
Milos Paripovic, senior systems director
Rochele Gloor, assistant director for innovation technologies
Jose Vargas, senior systems administrator
Darren Santa Maria, AV systems administrator

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ACCREDITATION

The School of Visual Arts has been authorized by the New York State Board of Regents (www.highered.nysed.gov) to confer the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in 3D Animation and Visual Effects; Advertising; Animation; Comics; Design; Film; Fine Arts; Illustration; Interior Design; Photography and Video; Visual and Critical Studies; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts on graduates of programs in Art Education; Curatorial Practice; Design Research, Writing and Criticism; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching on graduates of the program in Art Education; and to confer the degree of Master of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Art Practice; Computer Arts; Design; Design for Social Innovation; Fine Arts; Illustration as Visual Essay; Interaction Design; Photography, Video and Related Media; Products of Design; Social Documentary Film; Visual Narrative; and to confer the degree of Master of Professional Studies on graduates of programs in Art Therapy; Branding; Digital Photography; Fashion Photography; Film Directing.

The School of Visual Arts is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (msche.org), 1007 North Orange Street, 4th Floor, MB #166, Wilmington, DE 19801, 267-284-5011. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation.

COVER: Seugah Yoo, *One Night Out*, 2022.

The Interior Design program leading to the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interior Design is accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (accredit-id.org), 206 Grandville Avenue, Suite 305, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503-4014.

SVA is a member in good standing of the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP), a national accrediting organization recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. The MAT program in Art Education has been awarded full accreditation by AAQEP through December 31, 2030. Accreditation acknowledges that a program prepares effective educators who continue to grow as professionals and has demonstrated the commitment and capacity to maintain quality.

The MPS Art Therapy program is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (www.caahep.org) upon the recommendation of the Accreditation Council for Art Therapy Education. Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs, 25400 US Hwy 19N, Suite 158, Clearwater, FL 33763, 727-210-2350. The program meets all educational requirements for licensure in New York State as a Creative Arts Therapist (LCAT) and Registered Art Therapist (ATR) with the Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB).

" **SVA turns out the best students because they have the most prepared skill set. That's why I recruit from there today.**"

—Myung Lee (MFA 2004)

School of Visual Arts

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sva.edu/grad