

VISUAL ARTS

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The goal of the Visual Arts Department is to create a supportive and challenging arts environment for students, allowing them to experience firsthand the discipline, knowledge, and seriousness that can lead them to a career in the visual arts. Artist-teachers and visiting artists serve as mentors to the student artist, introducing them to art history, contemporary art, and the principles of artistic form.

In two- and three-dimensional studio classes, NOCCA visual arts students are encouraged to concentrate on technical proficiency, creative problem-solving, and self-discovery. This focused exploration increases confidence and allows students to stay open to new possibilities and to become increasingly self-directed. Students are encouraged to investigate and create art that responds to issues they feel strongly about and in the process develop their own artistic vision and voice.

Weekly student-led critiques give students the skills and vocabulary to intelligently discuss their work. Within the thoughtful inquiry of a group discussion with trusted mentors and peers, students learn to refine both the technical and conceptual basis of their work, to make considered choices, and to articulate their ideas. This is how they develop their aptitude for art analysis and hone their ability to more accurately assess their work and the work of others. With the knowledge they gain at NOCCA, students leave with a portfolio that reflects work that is technically sound and that expresses their personal point-of-view.

Guidelines for Continued Enrollment

Attendance, punctuality, and self-discipline are critical to a student's success in the Visual Arts program. Students take classes in a variety of areas in the visual arts and are expected to give each class the same level of seriousness and commitment. Students in Levels I-III are invited to advance to the next level if they complete the year with a B average or better. Intro students, regardless of their final grade, are required to re-audition to move the next level of the program.

College Prep and Career Counseling

The Visual Arts faculty is committed to guiding students through the college application process. Our years of expertise and knowledge of arts conservatories, colleges, and universities are available to students through guidance in choosing schools, selection of portfolio pieces, and letters of recommendation. Each year students in Levels II-IV participate in a Visual Arts college week in which students are introduced to writing an artist's statement or college essay and are given one-on-one feedback; they also learn about professional photography of their work and how to present images in a digital portfolio. The department hosts numerous art college recruiters who give presentations on their programs and provide one-on-one portfolio reviews for our students.

Course Descriptions

The Visual Arts curriculum is a studio-based program in which students work in professionally equipped spaces. Students take classes in 2D and 3D Foundations for the entire year and rotate through Ceramics, Digital Arts, Photography, and Printmaking for a portion of the year. The Visual Arts program is made up of the following levels: Intro (two days a week); Level I, Level II, Level III, and Level IV (all five days a week).

Auditioning students may be accepted into Intro, Level I, or Level II, depending on their previous experience as demonstrated in their portfolio and their performance at the audition.

Home Assignments: All students (except Intro students) receive weekly home assignments. Missing home assignments will jeopardize the student's success at NOCCA. Home assignments are an essential part of the program, allowing students to apply the concepts learned in class to artwork created in their home environment. As students advance through the program, home assignments become the basis for their art portfolio that reflects their individual voice and is an essential part of any art college application. Students are encouraged to investigate and create art that responds to issues they feel strongly about—to “say something.” We accept that some issues that are important and meaningful to our students may be controversial, and that some work, especially early in a student's NOCCA career, may lack refinement. It is art's role to question and provoke, as well as to inspire. Learning to do this thoughtfully and effectively takes practice, and home assignments, dovetailed with class critique, provide the environment for students to develop a significant body of work.

Critique: In student-led critiques of weekly home assignments students give and receive feedback on their work. College recruiters actively seek applicants who demonstrate a developing artistic vision and voice, who think about what they want to say and how they say it, and can speak about their process as well as demonstrate it. Critique provides students with a safe, nurturing environment to discuss their work among their peers.

2D Foundations: Students begin with a strong foundation in translating the 3-D (“real”) world onto the 2-D page. Intro and Level I programs hone observational skills to look carefully and discern relationships between components of what is seen (ratios, angles, positive/negative space relationships). Students learn compositional strategies and how to effectively use and care for artmaking materials, a variety of dry media (drawing), and in Level I wet media (painting). Level II scaffolds upon these technical skills by building student proficiency in conceptual artwork that expresses a student's individual voice. Level III students complete the AP Studio Art Portfolio requirements. Level III offers students personal choice in responding to a broad set of prompts. The focus is on solidifying a strong Studio Art Portfolio for submission to universities and art institutes.

3D Foundations: Students receive basic through advanced sculpture instruction emphasizing elements of art and principles of 3D design, using varied materials and processes to further their conceptual development. Artist-teachers guide them in the use of additive, subtractive, kinetic, and performative processes, and in reflecting on and refining their work via critique. Intro and Level I instruction focuses on 2D to 3D translation through creating linear, geometric, planar, and volumetric forms from drawings, using wire, cardboard, and wood. Level I students learn the basics of frontal lateral elevation drawing, mechanical drawing, and cardboard, wood, and metal fabrication. Level II students practice metal casting, mold-making, assemblage, and woodworking via increasingly conceptual prompts. Level III students build on these skills, rounding out their personal body of work, using a variety of materials in a progressively self-directed manner. The sculpture program builds skills in a wide range of materials and processes, while promoting dynamic and creative concept development and advancement for each student.

Ceramics: Students are introduced to an array of techniques and approaches to working in clay. Intro students use simple hand-building techniques of coil and slab to investigate 3D structures, moving beyond representational thinking into an exploratory “what else?” stage of discovery. Level I students work on the potter's wheel, preparing clay, centering, throwing cylinders and simple forms, and trimming them. Bisque-fired work is decorated, glazed, and fired again. Emphasis is on craftsmanship and sensitivity to materials. Level II students work on design-oriented projects, planning and coordinating elements to produce a final piece or series. They can combine hand-building and wheel-throwing and are encouraged to think through how to finish surfaces for the work's final presentation. Emphasis is on timing, planning, and conceptual development. Level III students develop work based on concepts and themes in their evolving portfolio. Emphasis is on planning the presentation of ceramic work, as well as construction and surface treatment.

Digital Arts: Students learn computing skills and advanced instruction in Photoshop. Level I students use photography as the catalyst for projects while building basic digital skills around a student-driven subject. Skills include setting up a photographic shoot and bringing the work into Photoshop for editing and using the masking technique to blend images. Students' painting and drawing skills are combined with Photoshop techniques to create multi-layered portraits. Level II students build on their repertoire of photographic and Photoshop skills to create advanced imagery using "adjustments" and masking techniques. Students combine color theory with 2D drawing skills to create digital paintings. Level III students develop an extended project blending traditional painting and drawing with Photoshop to realize a theme. Reproductions of historical artworks introduced before each project serve as a guide as students develop their imagery.

Photography: Students are introduced to various types of cameras and camera operations, film processing, and/or digital files and printing. Intro teaches the basics of capturing light by creating handmade pinhole cameras and printing from a paper negative. Students learn about exposure, composition, and darkroom chemistry through paper negatives and positive prints. Level I students work with digital single lens reflex cameras and learn manual camera techniques including stop action, motion, depth of field, and selective. They leave with a basic knowledge of digital SLR operations, metering, and basic Adobe Photoshop editing and printing. In Levels II-IV students refine their camera use with digital SLR and/or medium format film cameras and take equipment home to work on personal projects. Off-campus excursions allow students to respond to the concept of "place" in their work. Level IV students who choose a concentration in photography work with large-format cameras and fiber-based papers to build on conceptual ideas that comprise their portfolios.

Printmaking: Students are introduced to various printmaking techniques: relief (linocut) in Intro, intaglio (copperplate etching) in Level I, color reduction printing (woodcut) in Level II, and large-scale screen printing in Level III. These processes acquaint students with print media, moving from simple to more complex techniques. Over the course of four years, students learn to apply print techniques to conceptually complex pieces using aspects inherent in the print process. Level III students work with multiple print processes, choosing the techniques based on their concept and vision for their final project.

Level IV Thesis: Students work with a faculty mentor to create a "Contract" reflecting the work to be completed during this year of guided independent study. Individual critiques guide their progress while students work to fulfill their Contracts and create thematically cohesive portfolios for submission to universities and art institutes. Level IV students can opt to use other studios in the visual arts department if they want to concentrate on a specific media or approach. Level IV students can also opt to complete the AP Studio Art exam.

Extracurricular Course Offerings

Noncredit classes in a variety of visual arts are offered throughout the year. Noncredit classes are taught by regular NOCCA faculty and are offered to students in grades 8-12. Students attending noncredit classes do not need to audition, but enrollment and a small fee for supplies are required.

Certificates

The Visual Arts Department awards certificates in the following three categories:

Certificate of Artistry is the highest certificate bestowed on students in Levels II-III-IV who demonstrate a mastery of the visual arts through a portfolio comprised of work that is cohesive, conceptually sophisticated, and reflective of the student's personal voice.

Certificate of Achievement acknowledges the hard work, participation in classes, and mastery of technical skills by students in II-IV.

Certificate of Recognition acknowledges a student's successful completion of at least level one of the program.

In all cases the judgment by the core faculty regarding the awarding of certificates is final.