

# MFA in Visual Art

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

## 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 according to their areas of interest within the Sam Fox School and the university at large.

Students in the class of 2027 and beyond must fulfill the following degree requirements. For class of 2026 academic requirements, consult the 2024-25 Bulletin.

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	36
Graduate Seminars	13
Workshops	2
Art/Design/Art History/Academic Electives	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

### Suggested MFA-VA Course Plan

Code	Title	Units
<b>Year 1: Fall</b>		
ART 5010	Graduate Studio	5
ART 5015	Group Critique	4
ART 5050	First-Year Colloquium	3
ART 5080	Workshops	1
Elective		3
<b>Year 1: Spring</b>		
ART 5020	Graduate Studio	5
ART 5025	Group Critique	4
ART 5060	Professional Practice in Art	3
ART 5090	Workshops	1
Elective		3
<b>Year 2: Fall</b>		
ART 6010	Graduate Studio	5
ART 6015	Group Critique	4

ART 6050	Research for Practice	3
Elective		3
<b>Year 2: Spring</b>		
ART 6020	Graduate Studio	5
ART 6025	Group Critique	4
ART 6060	Thesis and Exhibition Preparation	4
<b>Total Units</b>		<b>60</b>

The culminating event of the program requires students to present 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. MFA students must take College of Art electives at the 5000 level.
- Courses taken outside the College of Art by MFA students must be at the 3000 level or above to count as graduate-level credit and 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.

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

### 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 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 possible. 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. During the first two semesters, 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.

## End of Semester Reviews

Students must participate in a review at the end of each semester. Reviews are not critiques. Failure to participate in a review will result in a student's dismissal from the program.

## Pre-Candidacy Review

The Pre-Candidacy Review is an advancement review and serves to determine a student's readiness to proceed to the second semester. Students are reviewed at the end of the first semester by a faculty group that includes their faculty mentor, who serves as chair of the committee, and two other faculty members selected by the student. Additional reviewers such as the Freund Teaching Fellow may also participate. Reviews take place on campus and are approximately one hour long.

Students are evaluated on core competencies and are rated satisfactory or non-satisfactory based on the following criteria:

- Commitment to studio practice and investment in self-directed creative research
- Evidence of experimentation, risk taking, and advancement of skills/knowledge
- Demonstration of a level of craft and professionalism appropriate for graduate study
- Ability to articulate concrete goals for ongoing studio work and research

The following requirements are due to the review committee one week prior to review:

- Documentation of artwork from the semester with checklist
- Artist statement addressing current work no more than one page in length
- Completed and curated creative work installed in a professional manner and setting
- Five-minute verbal introduction of work (not read or repeated from artist statement)

The review consists of a viewing of the work with an introduction by the student and a question-and-answer period with the faculty committee. The student exits while the faculty committee makes a determination of satisfactory or unsatisfactory with a majority vote. Once a decision has been made, the student returns for a discussion with the committee. In addition to the oral review, students will receive written assessment from the review committee regarding their work and overall progress.

Students who are rated non-satisfactory in the Pre-Candidacy Review will be placed on academic probation and must work with their faculty mentor to develop a plan for improvement over the next semester. Students must then satisfactorily pass the Candidacy Review at the end of the first year or they will be dismissed from the program.

## Candidacy Review

The Candidacy Review is an advancement review and serves to determine a student's readiness to proceed to the thesis year. Students are reviewed by a faculty group comprised of the student's faculty mentor, who serves as chair of the committee, and two other faculty members selected by the student. Reviews take place at an off-campus location where the First-Year MFA Exhibition is on view and are approximately one hour long.

Students are rated satisfactory or non-satisfactory based on the following criteria:

- Continued commitment to studio practice and investment in self-directed creative research
- Evidence of a developing artistic position manifested in studio work, presentation, and writing
- Ability to articulate strategies deployed in the work and how they relate to the candidate's artistic intentions
- Ability to identify aesthetic, theoretical, conceptual, and/or historical contexts currently informing their studio practice
- Ability to articulate concrete goals for ongoing studio work and research
- Depth of inquiry that demonstrates ability to pursue thesis work

The following requirements are due to the review committee one week prior to review:

- Documentation of artwork from the semester with checklist
- Artist statement addressing current work no more than one page long
- Completed and curated creative work installed in a professional manner and setting
- Five-minute verbal introduction of work (not read or repeated from artist statement)

The review consists of a viewing of the work with an introduction by the student and a question-and-answer period with the faculty committee. The student exits while the faculty committee make a determination of satisfactory or non-satisfactory with a majority vote. Once a decision has been made, the student returns for a discussion with the committee. In addition to the oral review, students will receive written assessment from the review committee regarding their work and overall progress.

Students who pass satisfactorily are eligible for MFA degree candidacy. The students and their review committee as well as the graduate chair then complete and sign the Degree Candidacy Form.

If a student is rated non-satisfactory in the Candidacy Review, the graduate chair will appoint an ad-hoc subcommittee within 48 hours to work with the student's committee to determine if the student will remount the review or be dismissed from the program. Students already on academic probation will be automatically dismissed if the outcome of the review is non-satisfactory.

## Pre-Thesis Review

The Pre-Thesis Review is an advancement review and serves to determine a student's readiness to proceed to the final semester. Students are reviewed at the end of their third semester by the thesis committee they formed at the beginning of the third semester. A thesis committee includes the faculty mentor, who typically serves as chair, and two or three additional committee members. All members of the committee must be present. Reviews take place on campus and are approximately one hour long.

Students are rated satisfactory or non-satisfactory based on the following criteria:

- Continued commitment to studio practice and investment in self-directed creative research
- Ability to Identify aesthetic, theoretical, conceptual, and/or historical contexts informing studio practice, thesis work, and research
- Demonstrated ability to engage in practice-led and academic inquiry
- Preparedness for proposed thesis work and writing

The following requirements are due to the review committee one week prior to review:

- Documentation of artwork from the semester with checklist
- Thesis Plan which includes a presentation of the student's proposed thesis artwork, an outline of the written statement, and an annotated bibliography
- Completed and curated creative work installed in a professional manner and setting
- Five-minute verbal introduction to work (not read or repeated from artist statement)

The review consists of a viewing of the work with an introduction by the student and a question-and-answer period with the faculty committee. The student exits while the faculty committee make a determination of satisfactory or non-satisfactory with a majority vote and approve or reject the student's Thesis Plan. Once a decision has been made, the student returns for a discussion with the committee. In addition to the oral review, students will receive written assessment from the review committee regarding their work and overall progress.

Students must have their Thesis Plan approved at the review. If the Thesis Plan is not approved, they must resubmit the plan by the first week of the next semester for approval by their thesis committee.

Students who are rated non-satisfactory must remount and pass a second Pre-Thesis Review in the first week of the next semester. If they do not satisfactorily pass second review and have an approved Thesis Plan, they will be dismissed from the program.

## Final MFA Thesis Review

The Final MFA Thesis Review is the last and most significant comprehensive assessment of a student's work in the program. The Final MFA Thesis Review takes place at the Mildred Lane Kemper Museum where the MFA Thesis exhibition is installed. The Final MFA Thesis Review is conducted by the candidate's thesis committee: the faculty mentor, the thesis advisor, and the secondary committee members. The Chair of the MFA-VA program serves as officio on all committees, except those on which the Chair serves as a thesis committee member.

The thesis artwork, artist's talk, and text are presented as a culmination of the candidate's progress through the program. The thesis text serves as a map for assessing and reviewing the artwork installed for the exhibition. The Final MFA Thesis Review determines whether or not the candidate is awarded the Master of Fine Arts degree. Final MFA Thesis Reviews are approximately one hour long.

For the final review, a pass/no pass vote of the committee members is conducted based on the following criteria:

- Developed, focused, and significant body of work
- Demonstration of depth of inquiry and professional competence
- Evidence of forward momentum in ideas and execution of work
- Ability to identify aesthetic, theoretical, conceptual, and/or historical contexts across visual and written thesis work and as demonstrated in verbal presentation (MFA Artist Talk)
- Potential in the work for expansion and evolution of the field/discipline

The following requirements are due to the review committee one week prior to review:

- Thesis text (bound and copied for all committee members)
- Thesis abstract
- Artist statement

The review consists of a viewing of the work with an introduction by the student and a question-and-answer period with the faculty committee. The student exits while the faculty committee make a determination of pass or no pass with a majority vote and approve or reject the student's thesis statement. Once a decision has been made, the student returns for a discussion with the committee.

If the student passes the review, the thesis committee and the chair of the MFA-VA program sign the Approval to Graduate form, which is submitted to the Office of the Registrar. A passing vote indicates that a majority of members of the thesis committee find that the candidate has met or exceeded the requirements of the MFA thesis through the thesis text, artist talk, and artwork.

In the event of a no pass vote, which indicates that the majority of the thesis committee judges the quality of the candidate's thesis to be below the standards expected of master's level performance, the degree program of the candidate is terminated.

In addition to the pass/no pass vote, the thesis committee also votes to approve the candidate's thesis text. In the event that the thesis text is not approved, candidates will have up to one week to address concerns and then resubmit the text to the chair of their thesis committee.