

Visual Arts

MFA Programme

Programme Summary	
Awarding body	University of Sussex
Teaching institution	West Dean College
Programme title	Master of Fine Art (MFA)
Final award / FHEQ level	Master of Fine Art (MFA) / level 7
Mode of study	Full-time, 2 academic years
Programme Leader	Dr David Stent
External reference points/benchmarks	<p>The UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter A1 Qualification Descriptor for Level7 Subject Benchmarks Statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art and design
Entry Criteria	<p>The following qualifications will be considered for entry on to the MFA programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good Honours Degree or equivalent qualification in Visual Arts or a related discipline • Relevant work experience in an arts-related field which demonstrates the ability to study at postgraduate level • Portfolio: including evidence of current practical work, sketchbooks and evidence of critical writing. An appropriate level of engagement with current debates in contemporary arts and making is required • English language: CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) Level B2 or IELTS 6.5.

Programme Aims

The MFA programme Aims and Learning Outcomes are consistent with the descriptors for a qualification at QAA Level 7, as defined in the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education (Part A, Chapter 1).

The programme aims are to provide:

Practical

- Provide a stimulating and supportive learning environment for students to develop their creative, intellectual and material practices
- Provide facilities and support through which students can further develop their skills and fluency to an advanced level as accomplished practitioners, gaining a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- Enable students to achieve a comprehensive understanding and detailed knowledge of key aspects of their field of study, as well as creative originality in their application
- Encourage and support advanced experimental, creative approaches to studio work, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice (QAA Quality Code Part A, Chapter A1, p12)

Theoretical

- Provide a stimulating environment where advanced research methods and critical practices can be articulated and where a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to personal research and advanced scholarship can flourish
- Increase student's ability to deploy accurately advanced techniques of analysis and inquiry within their chosen discipline
- Enable students to articulate an advanced critical understanding of studio practice and its contexts within contemporary visual art culture, much of which is informed by the forefront of art practice and theory

Professional

- Provide support for personal and professional development, including development and application of transferable skills such as self-management, decision-making, communication, collaboration, problem solving, IT and research skills
- Educate students to possess independence, self-understanding, self-reliance motivated toward future learning, practice or employment

Learning Outcomes

Practical

Ideas and Intentions	Exhibit a body of original work that demonstrates the culmination of self-directed studio practice at an advanced level
Materials and Methods	Apply a effective, fluent and innovative command of forms, techniques and materials to the development of practical work
Innovation and Creativity	Demonstrate an effective, ambitious and innovative approach to selected media through which original, creative ideas and intentions are realised

Theoretical

Contextual Knowledge	Situate their studio practice within a wider theoretical and historical context, as well as effectively assess and contribute to the wide ranging dialogues that constitute the context of contemporary art practice
Conceptual Understanding	Display a command of advanced theoretical and philosophical ideas and an original application of knowledge, together with an understanding of how techniques of research and enquiry are used to generate and interpret works of art
Research and Enquiry	Undertake advanced research and to continue to advance their understanding of how different research methodologies inform and extend their individual practices

Professional

Communication	Effectively communicate advanced ideas and specialised information using a vocabulary appropriate to various practical, theoretical and professional contexts
Professional Standards	Work at an advanced professional level in the development, production, presentation, promotion and documentation of practical and theoretical work
Independence and Self-Management	Show an informed, independent awareness of future opportunities and career development, including use of transferable skills in relation to continuing practice, further study or related employment

Alignment to External Reference Points

The programme documents reflect subject benchmarks associated with the QAA Quality Code, including specific statements within descriptors of individual study units.

The programme also benefits from the ongoing practices and research interests of staff, including the Programme Leader and Associate Tutors. This includes international exhibition profiles, active publishing projects, networking opportunities and evidence of collaboration with other institutions, staff involvement in symposia and related events. The Programme Leader is also a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA).

In addition, there is regular student engagement with professional artists through the Artist-in-Residence programme and the series of Visiting Artists and guest speakers. Students are also given resources to conduct study visits that best suit individual needs.

The Teaching and Learning strategy reflects a College-wide mission statement concerning shared skills development between the Visual Arts provision and other departments (such as Conservation) in common areas such as Writing / Research Skills, documentation and archiving of artworks/artefacts, Information Technology (such as shared online resources).

Programme Structure

MFA – Programme Diagram

MFA Year One

Semester 1 (18 weeks)				Semester 2 (18 weeks)			
Study Block 1	Formative Review /	Study Block 2	Stage Assessment	Study Block 3	Formative Review / Easter	Study Block 4	Exhibition / Final Assessment
Unit VA PGIA Creative Research Strategies (15 credits)				Unit VA PG3A/D Dissertation Synopsis (15 credits)			
Unit VA PGIB Applications of Philosophical Aesthetics (10 credits)				Unit VA PG3B Studio Work II (45 credits)			
Unit VA PGIC Studio Work I (35 credits)							

MFA Year Two

Semester 1 (18 weeks)				Semester 2 (18 weeks)			
Study Block 1	Vacation / Christmas Formative Review	Study Block 2	Stage Assessment	Study Block 3	Formative Review / Easter Vacation	Study Block 4	Exhibition / Final Assessment
Unit VA MFA 5A Dissertation (20 credits)				Unit VA MFA 7A Professional Practice II (15 credits)			
Unit VA MFA 5B Studio Work III (40 credits)				Unit VA MFA 7B Studio Work IV (45 credits)			

Programme Units

- VA-MFA3A/D: Dissertation Synopsis
- VA-MFA5A: Dissertation
- VA-MFA5B : Studio Work III
- VA-MFA7A: Professional Practice II
- VA-MFA7B: Studio Work IV

Distinctive Programme Features

The programme is designed to further advance students' capacities in practical, theoretical and professional domains, supporting the consolidation and realisation of an independent and sustainable artistic practice. The two-year structure provides students with sustained periods of studio-based activity, with dissertation requirements coming early in the first term. This emphasis on practice is nonetheless informed and supported by theoretical and professional Study Units throughout the academic year. The unique setting of the College, including its connections to Surrealism and key figures in art history, provides an immersive environment in which students can develop interdisciplinary and specialist studio work, as well as stressing the importance of research in postgraduate study.

The programme is supported by specialist facilities, including large studio spaces, regular technical and tutorial support. The programme also involves making use of an historic house and extensive grounds to explore site-specific work. As well as skills-based making in a variety of media, students develop critical contextual knowledge and transferable skills that will allow them to go onto further study, continuing practice or related employment. Exposure to prominent Visiting Artists (and Artists-in-Residence), academics and art professionals, as well as other departments and expertise across the college, not only provides students with inspiration for their individual practices but links to further professional opportunities beyond graduation.

Learning and Teaching – methods and strategy

The Learning and Teaching Methods seek to reflect the rationale, aims and learning outcomes of the programme and engage the active participation of a committed group of academic staff and students within practice and text-based academic frameworks. The methods support the practical and scholarly work required at Level 7 of the QAA Quality Code.

Independent study

The MFA programme is centred upon supporting and developing students' individual creative practices. As well as students negotiating, planning and managing their own projects in dialogue with tutors and support staff, the teaching approach allows for a high level of student autonomy and self-direction. Students are expected to be self-motivated and to manage their agreed programme of work. They are also encouraged to engage in group and peer co-operation, collaboration and support. Effective use of available learning resources (including Library and IT services) is expected.

Evaluation and Assessment

A number of different approaches to evaluation and assessment are used to inform learning and teaching methods. Appraisals from tutors and academic staff are provided in formal and informal settings, with critical feedback (written and oral), addressing learning outcomes as appropriate. Peer evaluation of students' progress is also employed, with fellow students giving and receiving constructive criticism in order to develop a self-awareness and self-critical attitude to their work. Self-evaluation is

also useful, with students encouraged to engaging with critical judgements about their own progress, identifying strengths and weakness against their intentions and the learning outcomes.

Lectures and Seminars

A programme of lectures and seminars provide specialist input for postgraduate students, introducing and reinforcing knowledge of theoretical, historical and critical concerns that inform contemporary practice. Lectures are designed to continually refer back to and reflect studio-based work, emphasising the key relationship between theory and practice. A range of important themes and ideas are presented throughout the series, generating a stimulating climate of exploration and debate. Reading is structured so as to introduce a number of theoretical and philosophical perspectives on art practice. Seminar sessions provide an opportunity for subjects to be further developed through discussion and collaboration between peers, tutors and guest speakers (including Visiting Artists, academics, curators, professionals, etc.) Student-led seminars are used to support and interrogate the lecture programme and may be of a descriptive or critically analytical nature, promoting dialogue and debate within the peer group. Written assignments such as essays are also made in response to the lectures.

Demonstrations and practice-based Workshops

Materials workshops are integrated into studio teaching so that traditional and innovative techniques and practical skills are placed at the centre of the discipline. Workshops can also be tailored to suit individual students' needs. Relevant Health and Safety measures and precautions are covered in the induction process. Workshop sessions can also focus on information technologies and software (for example image manipulation) and other forms of extending studio practice.

Individual and Group Tutorials

Tutorials are an important point of continuing contact between staff and students. One-to-one sessions aim to foster a climate in which in-depth discussion of individual's development can take place. Group tutorials, usually involving a student in dialogue with more than one member of staff, aim to establish open discussion of progress as well as the discussion of a specific body of work. Tutorials occur regularly within each block of study, either formally scheduled, or requested by staff / student.

Group Critiques

Group critiques usually take the form of studio-based discussions of student work. Other sessions may be arranged in the context of a workshop or in relation to a specific display or event. All students present during critiques are encouraged to engage in critical reflection and judgement, offering considered and constructive criticism of the work of their peers. Students gain valuable insight into collaborative learning in relation to programme outcomes, assessment procedures and contextual development.

Written and Oral Presentations

Written assignments are undertaken in relation to specific study units. Emphasis is placed on relating theoretical components and assignments to studio practice. Through a combination of presented written work, participation in seminars and tutorials, students are expected to show evidence of

developing critical and conceptual understanding. The programme uses writing assignments in the first term of study in order to diagnose potential problems in writing skills or spoken English. Students may receive learning support to help them with written requirements.

Study Trips

Students are provided with a budget to subsidise trips, either independently or as a formal group, most often selected in direct related to individual practice. These can include visits to galleries, museums, exhibits, workshops, studios or other institutions.

Learning Support

Students can seek support in relation to language training, study and research skills, including the use of the College Library. There are also provision for English language support and learning difficulties (such as dyslexia).

Practical Experience & Work Placement

Students are required to stage a series of three exhibitions as part of their development, including an initial Fundraising Show that introduces them to professional requirements of exhibition management, whilst providing a chance to contribute to the budget for subsequent Summer Shows. Following that, as well as the assessed public exhibition at West Dean, the programme also provides the opportunity for a London exhibition, in a privately-hired space in which the students, in consultation with staff, collaboratively stage a group show.

Assessment – methods and strategy

The assessments for the MFA units provide summative grades, taking into account the learning outcomes measured against assessment criteria. The assessment process provides feedback to students and enables measures to be taken to maintain and improve performance. In common with many creative disciplines the MFA studio units have to be taken together as a holistic enterprise that exhibits internal coherence and growth.

- Work is assessed on a continuous basis independently by at least two supervisors (normally the programme leader and a programme tutor). This assessment is fed to students informally on an on-going basis through discussion and formally at assessment and review
- Essays and thesis are assessed independently and graded according to the assessment definitions
- All assessment is formalised in grades as set out in the assessment definitions
- Assessment is reviewed and moderated by the external examiner