

Grad Program: Studio Arts (M.F.A.)

Basic Information

A graduate program in the studio arts beckons many artists because it allows them to dedicate a few years to their chosen medium and gives them an entrée into a teaching position at a college, university, or art school. In most cases, the graduate school route leads to a Master of Fine Arts degree, or M.F.A.

While a few M.F.A. programs will allow you to choose several concentrations, most will require you to focus on just one—such as painting, or ceramics. In the program, you'll take advanced seminars in history and theory, and maybe pedagogy, but the core of the program will hinge on your hands-on studio work. M.F.A. students will be expected to participate in campus art shows, often as exhibitors, curators, or guides. The goal, of course, is to foster artists; but it seems that many programs also feel an obligation to give students a bit of the practical experience that they'll probably need to get a job that pays the bills.

It's worth taking the time to find a program that has grants and assistantships more readily available. Paying for an M.F.A. out of pocket is costly and not particularly practical, so programs offering assistantships have a double benefit: you gain marketable teaching experience and earn money toward your tuition. There are more graduates than job opportunities for graduates—especially at the college level, where the competition can be fierce—so every bit of experience will count.

Finding an M.F.A. program that suits both your academic and economic needs may be tough. Research what sort of artwork a program's faculty tend to like and do a comparison with the work in your own portfolio. Figure out what sort of accessibility to the professors you're likely to find, and see what sort of studio space the program guarantees its students. Basically, determine what's most valuable to you in a program, and then leave no stone unturned until you find the programs that match your needs.

Degree Information

Most students wishing to pursue Studio Arts on the graduate level pursue an MFA. Under the canopy of fine arts, the M.F.A. options seem endless. There are programs in painting, sculpture, ceramics, drawing, printmaking, photography, video, metalwork, jewelry-making, stained glass, woodworking, weaving, bookmaking, and more.

The M.F.A. is a terminal degree, meaning that once you earn the degree you've completed the full course of possible study in that field. If you want to teach at the university level or higher, this is what you'll need. Most M.F.A. programs take two to three years to complete. The M.F.A. degree often culminates in an exhibition of the student's work, accompanied by a written thesis and, most likely, an oral critique. There are many variations in M.F.A. programs out there, but this is one aspect of the degree that you're not likely to escape.

Questions to Ask Yourself When Choosing a Degree Program

- Who are the faculty members and what have they accomplished recently?
- What sort of access do you have to faculty members—especially any big names?
- What about the students? Where are they from? What are they doing?
- What have the graduates done since leaving the program?
- What sort of assistantships, grants, and other financial aid opportunities are available?

10 of the Most Influential MFA Programs in the World

By Artspace Editors April 24, 2014

While they may not be the cheapest avenues into the art world, these are, without a doubt, the top-ranked MFA programs for art students looking to add a gold star to the top of their CVs—and to build a ladder into the gallery sphere. Of course, there's no "silver bullet" for instant post-graduate success. But there are

certain programs that tend to spark the interest of curators, critics, and collectors alike.

- **YALE UNIVERSITY**

LOCATION: New Haven, Connecticut

SPECIALTIES: Sculpture, painting and printmaking, graphic design

TUITION: \$33,500

TIME TO DEGREE: ≤ 3 years

NOTABLE FACULTY: Rochelle Feinstein (director of painting/printmaking dept.), Gregory Crewdson (director of photography dept.), Martin Kersels (director of sculpture dept.), Trevor Paglen, Shirin Neshat, Huma Bhabha, Carroll Dunham, Barbara London

FAMOUS ALUMNI: Robert Mangold, Eva Hesse, Wangechi Mutu, Matthew Barney, Chuck Close, Brice Marden

BIGGEST SELLING POINT: The potential for connection-building is high here—there are rumors of second-year students in the program being signed with galleries and invited to participate in international exhibitions before they've even graduated. It's reputed to have the best graphic-design and photography departments. Also, check out the Yale School of Art's snazzy, GIF-heavy website, and the fact that its visual arts facilities are housed in a series of recently-built, cutting-edge eco-friendly buildings to get a sense of the progressively-minded nature of the program.

- **COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

LOCATION: New York City

SPECIALTIES: The program is interdisciplinary, but applicants apply to either painting, printmaking, sculpture, photography, or "new genres"

TUITION: \$51,676

TIME TO DEGREE: 2 years

NOTABLE FACULTY: Gregory Amenoff, Sanford Biggers, Nicola Lopez, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Kara Walker

FAMOUS ALUMNI: Jon Kessler, Korakrit Arunanondchai, Georgia Sagri, Guy Ben-Ner, Lisi Raskin

BIGGEST SELLING POINT: As with many of the Ivies, in Columbia's case, self-perpetuating exclusivity plays a major part here: only two percent of applicants to Columbia's MFA in the visual arts are accepted. As of fall 2013, the highly selective program also offers a degree in Sound Art—so if that medium's your thing, this is the place for you. Also, if you're looking to enter the art profession, it doesn't hurt to spend your formative years of training in the artistic capital of the world.

- **GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE**

LOCATION: New Cross, London

SPECIALTIES: The school offers a tutorial system, allowing students to choose their focus, but its known for teaching conceptually weighted work

TUITION: £3,330 (\$5,600) for Brits; £8,650 (\$14,500) for international students

TIME TO DEGREE: 2 years

NOTABLE FACULTY: Suhail Malik, Mark Leckey, Lindsay Seers

FAMOUS ALUMNI: Malcolm McLaren, Lucian Freud, Yinka Shonibare, Bridget Riley, Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Liam Gillick

BIGGEST SELLING POINT: Goldsmiths offers a unique blend of studio practice, theoretical, and art-historical training that has made it the U.K.'s most notable and best-known graduate program. It's this vigorous atmosphere that birthed the artists associated with the Young British Artists in the 1990s, among many other notable alumns.

- **THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO**

LOCATION: Chicago, Illinois

SPECIALTIES: Fiber and material studies, film/video/new media/animation, art and technology, sound, and performance

TUITION: \$44,010

TIME TO DEGREE: 2 years

NOTABLE FACULTY: Michelle Grabner, Gregg Bordowitz, Joseph Grigely,

Josiah McElheny, Glenn Ligon

FAMOUS ALUMNI: Tania Bruguera, Sanford Biggers, Claes Oldenburg, Jeff Koons, Leon Golub, Apichatpong Weerasethakul

BIGGEST SELLING POINT: For the true interdisciplinarian, SAIC has a unique program—its MA in Visual and Critical Studies—which, more than other interdisciplinary programs at comparable schools, embraces the crossover nature of contemporary artistic discourse. Based on the intersection of visual phenomena, critical studies, and creative production, the program combines aspects of a studio-based program and theoretical study, and can include art history, criticism, the general liberal arts, and studio practice.

- **THE SCHOOL OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON**

LOCATION: Boston, Massachusetts

SPECIALTY: Interdisciplinary

TUITION: \$39,020

TIME TO DEGREE: 2 years

NOTABLE FACULTY: Jim Dow, Chantal Zakari, Susan Jane Belton, Mark Cooper

FAMOUS ALUMNI: Jim Dine, Joan Jonas, David Lynch, Larry Poons, Nan Goldin, Ellsworth Kelly

BIGGEST SELLING POINT: The major draw for aspiring artists to choose the SMFA, which was itself founded by a group of artists in 1876, is the opportunity to exhibit work at the MFA Boston, one of the city's most important cultural institutions. The school is also partnered with nearby **Tufts University**, where SMFA students can sit in on classes and take advantage of Tufts's hardy academic resources.

- **RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN**

LOCATION: Providence, Rhode Island

SPECIALTIES: Literally everything from furniture design to landscape architecture to painting, with the most popular majors being illustration, industrial design, architecture, and graphic design

TUITION: \$42,622

TIME TO DEGREE: 1–3 years; most students finish in 2

NOTABLE FACULTY: Dike Blair, Naomi Fry, Dean Snyder, Patricia Treib, Henry Ferreira

FAMOUS ALUMNI: Roni Horn, Andrea Zittel, Janine Antoni, Jenny Holzer, Kara Walker

BIGGEST SELLING POINT: While many MFA programs offer a post-studio mix of critical theory and interdisciplinary experimentation, RISD's curriculum is firmly planted in the mastery of technical craft, with a curriculum that emphasizes traditional skill sets over conceptualism—in other words, this program is for those who like to get their hands dirty. RISD also benefits from a close relationship with its equally prestigious neighbor **Brown University**.

- **CALARTS**

LOCATION: Valencia, California

SPECIALTIES: Art, graphic design, photography and media, and art and technology.

ANNUAL TUITION: \$41,700

TIME TO DEGREE: 2 years

NOTABLE FACULTY: Sam Durant, Charles Gaines

FAMOUS ALUMNI: Ashley Bickerton, Mark Bradford, Mike Kelley, Jack Goldstein, Elad Lassry

BIGGEST SELLING POINT: CalArts was founded in 1960 by none other than **Walt Disney** himself. The media mogul merged Los Angeles's **Conservatory of Music** with its **Chouinard Art Institute**, with the assistance of the conservatory's chair, **Lulu May Von Hagen**, to form the new school. (The school was envisioned as a "CalTech for the arts"—hence the name.) As a result, CalArts still retains strong ties to Hollywood and California's media industries. Under the direction of the late artist Michael Asher, the school also became famous for its durational "crits," nothing-is-off-the-table discussions of students' work that could go for 14-hour marathon stretches.

- **BARD COLLEGE**

LOCATION: Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

SPECIALTIES: Film/video, music/sound, painting, photography, sculpture, and writing

TUITION: \$55,000

TIME TO DEGREE: a total of 2 years, with three summer sessions and two independent-study sessions

NOTABLE FACULTY: Amy Sillman, Ulrike Muller, Sadie Benning, Huma Babha, Thomas Eggerer, Zoe Leonard, Nick Mauss, R.H. Quaytman

FAMOUS ALUMNI: Amy Sillman, Paul Chan, Carolee Schneeman, David Horvitz, Herb Ritts, Rachel Harrison, R.H. Quaytman, Trisha Baga, Zak Kitnik, Lucy Raven

BIGGEST SELLING POINT: Bard spearheaded the low-residency MFA program, with students gathering for sessions that are clustered in eight-week summer 'residencies' and divide up long periods of independent work lasting from two to three years. This means the focus is on creating art, rather than credits, grades, or classes. The program's unique rhythm means that it has been able to secure a number of influential artists as visiting professors, as well—many of whom are alumni of the program themselves. The widespread influence of Bard's program on the contemporary art scene has led some to speak of the "Bard mafia."

- **THE SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS**

LOCATION: New York, New York

SPECIALTIES: Computer art; visual narrative; photography, video, and related media; fine arts (painting, sculpture, printmaking)

TUITION: \$36,130

TIME TO DEGREE: 2 years

NOTABLE FACULTY: Mark Tribe, Marilyn Minter, Laurel Nakadate, Polly Apfelbaum, Hannah Wilke

NOTABLE ALUMNI: Inka Essenhigh, Barnaby Furnas, Keith Haring, Andrea Fraser, Sarah Sze, Sol LeWitt

BIGGEST SELLING POINT: SVA is more than the snazzy ad campaign you may have seen plastered around New York's subway system. The school's program in 'visual narratives' combines writing and visual art, for those interested in illustration, graphic novels, and other forms of 'visual storytelling.' Lately, however, there has been substantial turnover among the school's faculty.

- **UCLA**

LOCATION: Los Angeles, California

SPECIALTIES: Ceramics, interdisciplinary studio, new genres, painting and drawing, photography, sculpture

TUITION: \$ 11,220 for California residents; \$23,465 for everyone else

TIME TO DEGREE: 2–3 years

NOTABLE FACULTY: James Welling, Greg Lynn, Catherine Opie, Barbara Kruger

FAMOUS ALUMNI: Sharon Hayes, Matthew Brandt, Xavier Cha, Shana Lutker

BIGGEST SELLING POINTS: As a public university, UCLA is much cheaper than some of the Ivy league options out there while offering a totally comparable experience in terms of the quality of its programs. It also is renowned for its highly competitive "New Genres" program, which immerses students in installation, video, film, audio, performance, and digital work, plus "hybrid and emerging art forms."

Back to School Guide: The 10 MFA Programs That Give You the Most Bang For Your Buck

By ARTINFO Posted: 10/23/2012 5:12 am

Enrolling in a Fine Art MFA program is a tough decision for any would-be artist, and it comes with multiple considerations. ARTINFO has examined the most popular guides out there, like U.S. News's graduate school rankings, along with a plethora of online advice columns to try and tackle this subject in the most practical way possible. Everyone is familiar with the cachet of programs like Columbia and Yale, but we've singled out the following programs as our own personal favorites. Our criteria more or less boil down to weighing their respective price tags against the prospects of financial aid, teaching assistantships, and other support, as well as the benefits of their prestigious faculty, impressive facilities, valuable visiting artist programs, and cutting-edge curricula. In many cases, we've picked schools that seem truly to offer enrollees a great deal (i.e. they are reasonable considering what you get), though a few are simply examples of world-class programs that are worth considering (i.e. they are still expensive -- but it might be worth it). We also mention a few caveats about each, where we found them.

Art Center College of Design

Faculty: Walead Beshty, Stan Douglas, Mark Allen, Mungo Thomson

Alumni: Zack Snyder, Doug Aitken, Ron Osborn

Price Tag: \$18,772

About: This private school is nestled in bucolic Pasadena, California, outside of the hustle and bustle of Los Angeles, but close enough that the city's many galleries and museums are just a short drive away on the freeway. Though the school's tuition compared with its competitors won't break the bank on its own, the program participates in the Federal Pell Grant, FSEOG, and Cal Grant programs. The school has gained the reputation as the West Coast's version of

RISD, with more of a professional program than a post-studio one, sending many of its graduates off to work in Hollywood's film industry, or putting their graphic skills to use in design and media.

[Fine Print]: Outside of the studio art MFA, programs are more structured and geared towards professional fields.

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California Institute of the Arts

Price Tag: \$39,014

Faculty: Michael Asher, Jo Ann Callis, Sam Durant, Harry Gamboa Jr., Charles Gaines, Michael Ned Holte, Thomas Lawson, Allan Sekula

Visiting Artists: Miranda July, Uta Barth, Steve Rodin, Glenn Ligon

About: Their current faculty list is nearly as long as the impressive alumni they boast. Cal Arts sets itself apart with its accumulated star power, which helps to balance out their not-so-meager price tag. The one-on-one attention given to the MFA candidates is nearly unparalleled, and the loose requirements for graduation give students a freedom in their curriculum they will likely find nowhere else. Since the art school is just a section of Disney's grand Santa Clarita valley arts compound, students have access to classes and collaborations throughout the school. For those who want to study with renowned artists, and pretty much do whatever they want at the same time, this is totally worth the price. The program is unique in that students will have multiple opportunities to have solo exhibitions, giving them more exhibition experience by the time they graduate than other programs.

[Fine Print]: Students are required to take several critical studies courses, which can include anything from the social sciences to literature - while Cal Arts is an institution specializing in the arts, it is well supported by its robust critical studies departments. Overall, while there are some scholarship and grant opportunities, this is still a private school and has one of the biggest price tags on our list.

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Hunter College, Department of Art

Price Tag:\$15,615.70, \$8,465.70 (New York Resident)

Faculty: Paul Ramirez Jonas, Nari Ward, Constance De Jong,

About: One of the best programs with a substantially affordable price tag in the New York metropolitan area (it's a perfect example for why the CUNY system is a great deal) the Hunter MFA stands as a really a big fish in bigger pond. It has amassed an impressive faculty list and a many of its young alumni have jumped right into shows in Chelsea, like the painter Jules de Balincourt. Candidates are admitted into the program through an area of concentration, from painting to photography, and must present their thesis in that area. For in-state residents, this is a bargain price for one of the most prestigious programs in the bunch.

[Fine Print]: There isn't much of a campus life and studio space and facilities are spread out throughout the city, with graduate studio space on west 41st Street and 10th Avenue. There is big competition in New York's art world, so while you may be in the center of it all, prepare for the cut-throat environment.

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MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT)

Price Tag: \$20,885

Guest Speakers: Yvonne Rainer, Alfredo Jaar, Mark Tribe, Tom Eccles (external reviewer)

Faculty: Antoni Muntadas, Joan Jonas,

About: There is big emphasis placed on the critical studies program portion of the program, and its connections with the advanced technology community of greater MIT. Of the other schools on our list, MIT's MFA has a unique experimental and systematic approach to visual art that is very research heavy, stressing an interdisciplinary approach. The MFA is part of the department of architecture, within the school of architecture and planning, and is the latest evolution of the Center of Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS). With big names like Otto Pine and Krzysztof Wodiczko in the institution's history, as former directors of CAVS, it's

no wonder faculty members like Nam June Paik, Joan Jonas, and Antoni Muntadas have been drawn to the program to teach.

[Fine Print]: The program is highly competitive, with only six spots available each year, making it the smallest peer group as well as the most science-and-research oriented program.

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Rutgers University, Mason Gross School of the Arts

Price Tag: \$11,808, \$7,692 (New Jersey Resident)

Faculty: LaToya Ruby Frazier

Visiting Artists: Huma Bhaba, William Kentridge, Christian Marclay, Richard Serra, Christopher Wool

About: Candidates are required to produce a written thesis as well as participate in the MFA thesis exhibition in order to graduate - a small price to pay considering that, comparatively, tuition is basically free. Teaching assistantships that can supplement tuition costs are available based on undergraduate course offerings, artistic merit, accomplishments in a specialty, and previous teaching experience. With the MFA thesis exhibitions held in New York, the program's campus provides a great environment to concentrate on work (with no shortage of available studio space) in a smaller (but still very much urban) setting, while maintaining the ability to stay abreast of New York's art scene.

[Fine Print]: Rutgers is a state university, so there is a substantial difference in tuition prices for New Jersey residents. Also, while the school may be close to the art hub of New York City, it is not much of one itself - with more frat houses in town than art galleries.

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Tyler School of Art, Temple University

Price Tag: \$31,470, \$22,710 (Pennsylvania Resident)

Alumni: Lisa Yuskavage, Liz Markus

Visiting Artists: R.H. Quaytman, Wangechi Mutu, Hal Foster, Dara Birnbaum, Doreen Remen, Hilary Harkness, Patty Chang, Siebren Versteeg, Rashaad

Newsome, Amanda Ross-Ho, Kerry James Marshall

About: The graduate teaching and technical assistantships cover full tuition and provide an annual stipend for students, and are renewable each year, so while tuition is not cheap on its own, it can be for some. The painting and drawing programs share a great deal in common with the sculpture programs, and together are ranked among the top 10 in the country according to US News. Philly is no New York, but art students have plenty to see and participate in while studying there, from the Philadelphia Museum of Art to the newly renovated Barnes Collection.

[Fine Print]: Temple University is a huge school, and students will actively have to seek out art opportunities in the city.

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University of California Berkeley, Department of Art Practice

Price Tag: \$15,220.75, \$7,589.75 (California Resident)

About: Berkeley's MFA program is smaller and less recognized than some of its peers, but it's nothing to scoff at. Berkeley is one of the few on our list that provides both a conceptual and technical program, with professional training. Students at the graduate level are required to take classes in other subjects from the larger university curriculum, which places large stock in its students' ability to thrive in visual art and academic environments. The MFA thesis exhibition is held at the Berkeley Art Museum, and each class has approximately 14 students.

[Fine Print]: Berkeley has an excellent program, but unlike some of the other schools on our list, the larger university isn't known for its hidden gem of an art program.

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University of California San Diego, Visual Arts Department

Price Tag: \$29,617.50, \$14,515.50 (California Resident) (2012-13 fees/tuition)

Faculty: Anya Gallacio, Steve Fagin

About: San Diego's program leans heavily towards art theory and new media studies and does not have craft-oriented programs, nor facilities. An added benefit for those with interest in technology is UCSD's Center for Research in Computing and the Arts (CRCA), an interdisciplinary center on the university's impressive campus. Each class is relatively small, with 40 to 50 students to 29 faculty, making the one-on-one time you would receive here pretty high.

Teaching assistantships make up for a large portion of graduate funding aid, covering at least three quarters of tuition.

[Fine Print]: San Diego is not the art hub that Los Angeles is and has a much smaller, DIY gallery scene.

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University of Southern California, Roski School of Fine Arts

Price Tag: \$27,519 or Free

Faculty: Sharon Lockhart, A.L. Steiner, Jud Fine

About: Considering the price of a private school education these days, the oldest art school in Southern California happens to provide a prestigious program that is well funded. Its MFA program has generous funding awards for both incoming and continuing students. The teaching assistantship award covers tuition for a full year, along with a monthly stipend, and medical and dental benefits. First year awards are granted automatically during the admissions process without a separate application, and second year awards are based on merit, given at the end of the first year.

[Fine Print]: The facilities have been rumored to be fairly small compared to So Cal neighbors like Cal Arts. The school is also a huge sports school, so while you may have community within your program, it won't be the artiest crowd overall - go Trojans!

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**Virginia Commonwealth University, School of the Arts, Department of
Sculpture + Extended Media**

Price Tag: \$23,300, \$9,885 (Virginia Resident)

Visiting Artists: Paul DeMarinis

About: Ranked first in the country in the area of sculpture, VCU's facilities are a wonderland for artists working in hardcore mediums like metals, stone, and industrial materials. Some of the biggest draws for the program are the foundry and metal fabrication shop. While you may be pretty far from major art world happenings, there is near limitless space and facilities for artists to make the kinds of large scale projects they likely wouldn't be able to realize at an urban university.

[Fine Print]: The program has a variety of scholarship opportunities, but only if you apply in the fall semester.