



**Visual Arts**  
**Final Assessment Report &  
Implementation Plan**  
**September 2023**

<b>Faculty / Affiliated University College</b>	Arts and Humanities	
<b>Degrees Offered</b>	Master of Arts, Art History and Curatorial Studies (MA) Master of Fine Arts (MFA), Visual Arts Doctor of Philosophy, Arts and Visual Culture (PhD)	
<b>Date of Last Review</b>	2015-2016	
<b>Approved Fields</b>	None	
<b>External Reviewers</b>	Dr. Carolyn Butler-Palmer, Art History & Visual Studies, University of Victoria	Dr. Yam Lau, Department of Visual Art & Art History, York University
<b>Internal Reviewers</b>	Dr. Mark Zbaracki, Associate Dean designate (Graduate) Ivey Business School	Maxwell Hyett, Ph.D. Candidate, Theory & Criticism
<b>Date of Site Visit</b>	April 12 & 13, 2023	
<b>Date Review Report Received</b>	May 18, 2023	
<b>Date Program/Faculty Response Received</b>	Program – August 14, 2023 Faculty – August 22, 2023	
<b>Evaluation</b>	Good Quality	
<b>Approval Dates</b>	SUPR-G: October 16, 2023 ACA: October 25, 2023 Senate (for information): November 10, 2023	
<b>Year of Next Review</b>	2030-2031	
<b>Progress Report</b>	June 2026	

### **Overview of Western's Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process**

In accordance with Western's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the Visual Arts Graduate Program delivered by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

This FAR considers the following documents:

- the program's self-study brief;
- the external reviewers' report;
- the response from the Program; and
- the response from the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

This FAR identifies the strengths of the program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external reviewers – noting those recommendations to be prioritized for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the FAR that have been selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, specifies any action or follow-up that is required, and defines the timeline for completion.

The FAR (including Implementation Plan) is sent for approval through the Senate Graduate Program Review Committee (SUPR-G) and ACA, then for information to Senate and to the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance. Subsequently, it is publicly accessible on Western's IQAP website. The FAR is the only document from the graduate cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Visual Arts Graduate Program, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS), and SUPR-G.

## **Executive Summary**

The Master's program in the Department of Visual Arts has been in existence since 1995, graduating students with both MA (Master's of Art History and Curatorial Studies) and MFA (Master's of Fine Arts) degrees. In 2007, the PhD in Art and Visual Culture accepted its first students. The PhD Program is one of the first of its kind to offer Art History, Studio and Adapted Project Based options. Total enrolment in 2020-21 was 11 students in the MFA, 10 students in the MA and 23 students in the PhD program. Average annual intake has been at 4-6 for the MFA, 5-7 for the MA and 4 for the PhD program.

The self-study process was informed by various departmental meetings, discussions with faculty members and staff, a survey of current graduate students, and a survey of program alumni. Recent annual departmental retreats have been an important part of the program's ongoing process of self-study, enabling the re-evaluation of program structure, aims, processes in light of developments in the field, changes to faculty complement, and other forces impacting graduate education.

The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Visual Arts Graduate Program. They offer six recommendations with considerations for further enhancement.

## **Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program**

- High level of completion and a very successful roster of alumni in various arts and cultural fields and industries.
- Strong collaboration among students has resulted in the 1) launch of their own annual peer-reviewed journal that serves as a venue for scholarly research and creative work; 2) review of classmates' work and collaboration on exhibitions; 3) launch of a peer-to-peer mentorship program.
- Significant funding and research successes of faculty members is a tremendous draw for potential graduate students.
- Hiring of two faculty members broadens the program's focus on including the perspectives of under-represented groups.
  - o Genuine excitement about what these artists are bringing to an already vibrant program.
- The PhD program structure is modeled on professional programs with a view to providing both a rigorous academic training and a head start for graduates entering into the complex job market.
- With two students pursuing dual degrees with partner Universities and one beginning an agreement pathway from their home institution, the department is in the process of developing additional agreements with various partner Universities abroad.
- Access to varied internship opportunities with local and regional partners.
- Innovative and collaborative graduate courses, like *The Museum for Future Fossils*, involving earth scientists, beekeepers, paleontologists, mycologists,

artists, curators, forest guides, sewer engineers, treaty negotiators, and community activists; which, foregrounds experiential learning in both local and international settings with travel planned to Mexico.

- Increase in internal MA students wishing to pursue a PhD, which may serve as evidence of their satisfaction with the program/department.
- Envisioning the new downtown space at 450 Talbot as a site where creative community engaged and experiential learning opportunities take place, and where a wider public can participate in these events.

### **Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program**

- Small size of the faculty complement, affecting supervisory loads and course offerings.
  - o A need to hire Indigenous faculty to continue strengthening ties to the Indigenous arts community and further enrich our program offerings.
- Funding for international MA and MFA students.
  - o Unable to secure acceptances from some very strong international applicants as a result.
- Several students shared in their response to the survey that areas of improvement included: 1) need for a greater variety of courses available to choose from; 2) Increased funding levels and eligibility of funding beyond the 4<sup>th</sup> year for PhD students.

### **Review Process**

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, one internal reviewer and a graduate student reviewer, were provided with Volume I and II of the self-study brief in advance of the scheduled review and then met virtually (due to pandemic restrictions) over two days with the:

- Associate Vice-Provost of the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Associate Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty
- Director, Academic Quality & Enhancement
- Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Associate Dean Research, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Department Chair
- Graduate Program Chair
- Graduate Committee Members
- Acting Director, McIntosh Gallery
- Curator, McIntosh Gallery
- Director of Museum and Curatorial
- Associate University Librarian
- Graduate Program and Department Staff
- Program Faculty Members

- Graduate Students

Following the virtual site visit, the external reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Program and Dean for review and response. Formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, and the Program and Decanal responses form the basis of this Final Assessment Report (FAR) of the Visual Arts Graduate Program. The FAR is collated and submitted to the SGPS and to SUPR-G by the Internal Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

### **Summative Assessment – External Reviewers’ Report**

External reviewers shared that *“graduate programs in Visual Arts are innovative and exceptional. We are highly impressed with the sense of collegiality among faculty members across all fields within the department, as that is only sometimes the case. This spirit of goodwill and collaboration contributes to the success of the MA, MFA, and Ph.D. graduate programs.”*

### **Strengths of the Program**

- Careful attention paid to the University's EDI initiatives with strategic hires and the removal of barriers related to language requirements.
- Clarity of outputs and measurability in the MA and MFA learning outcomes.
- Alumni secure teaching positions at an array of Canadian post-secondary institutions and have published in prestigious journals, exhibited in professional venues and secured careers in art administration.
- The flexibility of the Ph.D. that can be adapted to art history, project-based research such as curating, and creative research.
- MA program in curating is cutting-edge in Canada and in alignment with the recent emphasis on research of application within the field of art history.
- Impressive retention in each of the graduate programs.

### **Prospective Improvements for the Program to Consider**

- The art history and curating faculty are currently stretched to the limit to deliver high-quality MA and Ph.D. programs.
- Clearer distinction is needed between the one-year and two-year MA programs in art history.
- The advancement of reconciliation and place-based work could be more clearly expressed as measurable and observable learning outcomes and program expectations.

- Incorporate EDI and Indigenization outcomes directly into the learning outcomes section or milestones, where relevant.
- Visual Arts Centre is designed with an integrated projection space; however, there is no video projector; this would be an effective way of showcasing the work of the Visual Arts Department to the rest of the campus.
- Additional funding opportunities should be provided for 1) fifth-year Ph.D. students; 2) international students, as this would enable the program to develop a diverse and international profile.
- More balanced distribution of faculty members' supervisory load; which would help all graduate students to experience a similar amount of attention from supervisors (*embedded in external reviewer recommendation #5*).

While none of these areas of improvement were explicitly expanded on as stand-alone recommendations by the external reviewers, many are embedded in the recommendations offered, as outlined in the section below. The points above remain suggestions for consideration by the Program.

### Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

The following are the reviewers' recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers. Recommendations requiring implementation have been marked with an asterisk (\*).

Reviewers' Recommendation	Program/Faculty Response
<p><b>Recommendation #1:</b> Make the directorship of the McIntosh Gallery a joint faculty appointment with the Department of Visual Arts. This would support the continued development of the successful curatorial program and provide administrative harmony to the proposed 450 Talbot Street gallery space.</p>	<p><b>Program:</b> The program fully supports this recommendation, in particular an appointment that would align with Western's EDI, decolonization, and Indigenization initiatives. The pairing of such a position with the McIntosh Gallery Director might not be presently possible due to the fact that the Directorship is classified as a PMA position (Professional &amp; Managerial Association). But the department does see the benefit (logistically and pedagogically) of a new cross-appointed curatorial position in connection to the curatorship of the eventual shared downtown space.</p> <p><b>Faculty:</b> As noted in the program's response, the Director of the McIntosh Gallery is not a faculty position and therefore cannot be jointly held with a faculty appointment. All proposals for new positions will be considered by the Dean's office in the preparation of the budget. All new positions are granted at the discretion of the Provost.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #2:</b> Hire an Indigenous scholar and Black art historian to further the department's EDI, decolonization, and Indigenization initiatives and complement recent hires in the visual arts wing of the program. This would help the art history wing of the Visual Arts Department to develop a focus on the Arts of the Americas, which would impress Western's art history program with a unique identity in Canada.</p>	<p><b>Program:</b> Recent successes with hires on the Studio side have reinvigorated the Department. However, with three retirements in Art History since 2015 that were not replaced, the existing faculty in AH and MCS is stretched to the limit.</p> <p>The program is unsure that a geographical focus is as pertinent to the ongoing research of faculty and the interest of students as much as a topical approach that would enable better foregrounding of current critical issues. The program fully agrees with the reviewers' recommendation of hiring an Indigenous or Black art historian. Given the response to the first recommendation, the program would advocate for the inclusion of a curatorial focus to the description of a new position given the pressing needs in that area.</p> <p><b>Faculty:</b> All proposals for new positions will be considered by the Dean's office in the preparation of the budget. All new positions are granted at the discretion of the Provost.</p>

<p><b>Recommendation #3*:</b> Formulate a standard syllabus for the core MA-MFA first semester course (VIS 9500A) that any faculty member can teach. Such a "department-owned" syllabus, with a set of shared readings and assignments would help meet the needs of all graduate students, no matter their field of study, and reduce the workload of faculty members.</p>	<p><b>Program:</b> The 2022-2023 course outline for VIS 9500 included several guest lectures, some by fellow faculty members; is a "department-owned" syllabus. This provides the best pedagogical approach, one where there is one course instructor to maintain consistency vis-à-vis grading, but that the expertise of several faculty members is incorporated. To further address this recommendation, a curriculum review of this core course needs to be conducted. The program aims to have concrete changes to propose at the upcoming annual faculty retreat scheduled for May 2024.</p> <p>Since the recommendation identifies an issue in VIS 9500 between the learning needs of MA and MFA students, the program feels that it would be appropriate to undertake a curriculum review of the MFA Studio Seminar as well to enhance the integration core courses.</p> <p><b>Faculty:</b> The Dean's office supports review of the content of the core first semester course (VIS 9500A).</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #4:</b> Due to the popularity of the one-year MA in Art History and shifts within the discipline toward course-based degrees, we recommend terminating the two- year MA in Art History.</p>	<p><b>Program:</b> The two-year MA was phased out in 2014. It was mentioned by a faculty member during one of the meetings of the external review but was promptly corrected by another faculty member. Perhaps the misunderstanding stems from that instance. The two-year MA does not appear in the IQAP document.</p> <p><b>Faculty:</b> This was clearly a misunderstanding on the part of the reviewers. As noted in the program's response, the two-year MA has not been offered since 2014.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #5*:</b> Review, and perhaps formalize, the role of the mentor in the first year of the MFA. We recommend, first-year candidates be assigned one or two faculty for an hour of studio visits. This ensures the cohort benefits from the faculty's range of expertise and will help them invite the best-suited faculty for supervision in their second year. Faculty should limit their supervision to ensure this responsibility is evenly spread within the program.</p> <p>Ensure an orientation for new MFA cohorts that</p>	<p><b>Program:</b> Rigorous reviews of students' progression is conducted; one of the tools used to track progress of PhD cohorts is Pathfinder. The yearly written reports drafted by the Candidate, Supervisor, and Graduate Chair have proved quite beneficial. Pathfinder will be implemented for the MFA Program with a report at the end of the fall and winter terms. For the first year of the MFA, the assigned Mentor will ensure students are provided with adequate guidance. The use of the Pathfinder in the MFA will effectively formalize the role of the Mentor.</p> <p>Incoming graduate students participate in a full day of orientation prior to the commencement of classes which includes a tour of the facilities, Health and Safety information, and an introduction to all staff, faculty and relevant campus groups that they will be working with.</p>



<p>conveys important information and builds community at the start of their program.</p>	<p>The program's approach to Graduate Supervision is to give priority to the student's preference based on shared alignment of research interests between student and faculty. The workload balance across the faculty is monitored by the Graduate Chair.</p> <p><b>Faculty:</b> As noted in the program's response, Visual Arts currently provides ample guidance for graduate students, whether in-house or by directing students to SGPS resources. In addition, they will be adopting the Pathfinder system as of September 2023.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #6:</b> The MFA program should approach local museums and galleries to host exhibitions for the cohorts. Public galleries such as Forest City Gallery might respond well to this idea as it strives to remain relevant in the community.</p>	<p><b>Program:</b> Graduate students have access to a number of professional exhibition venues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McIntosh Gallery regularly hosts MFA thesis exhibitions (typically two per year).</li> <li>• the Department's ArtLAB and Cohen Commons fulfills grad exhibition needs at a professional level with paid staff.</li> <li>• SATELLiTE Project Space in downtown London. Since its inception in 2015 graduate students have regularly exhibited and performed there.</li> <li>• SSHRC-funded faculty projects in a number of local, regional, provincial, national, and international venues.</li> </ul> <p>With regards to professionalization, the Graduate Internships in Visual Arts offer students valuable practical experience at a range of arts and cultural institutions. Regular partner institutions include: McIntosh Gallery, Museum London, Embassy Cultural House, Museum of Ontario Archaeology, Forest City Gallery.</p> <p>The Department endeavors to support student and partner-driven initiatives that further expand the range of exhibition opportunities whenever they arise; and, strive to allocate resources on a continual basis to ensure that the existing structures (either in-house or with institutional partners) maintain a quality comparable with any major contemporary art center.</p> <p><b>Faculty:</b> As noted in the program's response, Visual Arts already provides many opportunities for professional exhibition experience.</p>

### Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Graduate Program Chair, in consultation with the SGPS and the Dean of the Faculty is responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan.

Recommendations prioritized for implementation include only those with current or future actions. In this case, recommendations #1 and #2 relate to hiring decisions which are outside the purview of the department (and the scope of this review process), recommendation #4 is based on a misunderstanding by the reviewers, and recommendation #6 is already thoroughly implemented. As such, these recommendations are not included in the implementation table below.

Prioritized Recommendations	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
<b>Recommendation #3:</b> Formulate a standard syllabus for the core MA-MFA first semester course (VIS 9500A).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Plan the curriculum review of the core courses at the Master's level during the 2023-2024 academic year.</li><li>- Conduct curriculum review during the faculty retreat in May 2024.</li></ul>	Graduate Chair Graduate Committee Associate Dean	By June 2024
<b>Recommendation #5:</b> Review, and perhaps formalize, the role of the mentor in the first year of the MFA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Implement Pathfinder to track the progress of the MFA students with a report at the end of the fall and winter terms.</li><li>- Using Pathfinder, assigned Mentors of first year MFA students will ensure that the guidance that the student needs is provided—accomplished directly by the Mentor or by others that the Mentor will suggest.</li></ul>	Graduate Chair Graduate Committee	By December 2023