MFA in Visual Studies

A Master of Fine Arts (MFA) is offered through a joint program with The College at Brockport and the Visual Studies Workshop, providing an opportunity unique in graduate studies. All of the courses for the MFA program are held at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY. Visual Studies Workshop (VSW) is an independent, non-profit organization founded in 1969 by Nathan Lyons, photographer, curator and teacher. VSW was incorporated in 1971 and, since 1977, has resided in the buildings at 31 Prince Street and 421 University Avenue, a location in Rochester’s arts district in proximity to other notable institutions such as the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film and the Memorial Art Gallery.

VSW’s interdisciplinary program emphasizes an integrated approach that features studio work in photography, digital imaging, film, video, multi-media, installation, and visual books, as well as critical studies in the history and theory of these media. The program can be comparable to a long-term artist residency offering work experience in a functioning non-profit arts organization, with graduate students playing an active role in the operations of this internationally recognized artists’ space.

The professional artists, publishers, curators, and researchers who staff and visit VSW instruct the graduate students. Graduate students commit to four full-time semesters of study, plus one part-time semester for a final project. Candidates in the MFA program have access to and gain training in the following program areas of the Workshop:

Exhibitions Program

The exhibitions program is comprised of on-site galleries and exhibitions (called Traveling Exhibitions) created for rental by other institutions. All the exhibitions supported by VSW are international as well as culturally and visually diverse, emphasizing a broad interpretation of media-based arts. Through a wide-range of media, VSW has created and circulated exhibitions by both emerging and renowned artists, using often overlooked vernacular photographs, important social documents and innovative imaging techniques. Large-scale exhibitions are hosted in VSW’s Siskind Gallery two to three times a year. VSW also houses a gallery for new work by individual media artists.

VSW Press

Founded by Joan Lyons, VSW Press is one of the only institutional publishers of artists’ books in the US. Many VSW Press titles are created during artists’ residencies at the Workshop. The majority of projects for VSW Press now utilize print-on-demand processes. VSW Press operates an online bookstore, is frequently invited to attend major artists’ book fairs, and has an on-site bookstore and artists’ book gallery supporting readings and book launches for artists.

Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism

For over 30 years this bimonthly journal has been a well-respected and important voice in the fields of photography, film and video, artists’ books, media theory and literacy, and media arts activism. Afterimage runs feature length stories, artist portfolios, conference reports, and exhibition and book reviews in every issue. Afterimage also provides free notices for jobs in the media arts, calls-for-work, exhibitions and screenings.
Research Center
Consisting of about 25,000 volumes and periodicals, the Research Center’s holdings cover a range of subjects from monographs on photographic artists to broader topics of visual studies and media theory. The Research Center houses photographic collections and archives of all periods of the history of photography and visual studies, containing around 900,000 images. VSW’s Research Center has premier holdings of photographs by Lejaren à Hiller, Esther Parada, Syl Labrot and Barbara Blondeau, to name a few. The Research Center holds the largest collection of artists’ books in Western New York, called the Independent Press Archive.

Community Workshops
In addition to the MFA program in Visual Studies, the Workshop holds community workshops ranging from historical and alternative processes to up-to-date digital processes in media arts production, which may be taken for credit through The College at Brockport.

Summer Institute
The Summer Institute, which offers a wide selection of intensive one-week workshops, is designed to stimulate new ways of working and of thinking about work, as well as to provide opportunities to expand technical skills and work with new processes. Students may register for graduate or undergraduate credit through The College at Brockport.

Artist-in-Residence Program
Artists’ residencies are ongoing and bring students in contact with the development of contemporary work by artists of regional and international acclaim.

Internships and Practica
All program areas accept qualified interns on a three- to six-month basis. Interns participate in ongoing production or special projects. In addition to receiving professional field-related experience, interns have access to VSW facilities. Please direct inquiries to info@vsw.org.

Admission Policy
Only full-time students will be admitted to the MFA in Visual Studies program. Applicants must present evidence that they have received a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university (see Graduate Admissions section in this catalog for further details). The program does not require that applicants have a BFA.
To be considered for admission, an applicant must submit a completed application; a statement of interest; a résumé; official transcripts from each institution attended as an undergraduate or graduate student; two letters of reference; a portfolio of his or her most recent and mature work; and a concise statement about the work.
Please visit the Graduate Studies Web site at www.brockport.edu/graduate for specific application deadline information. Applications are available online at www.brockport.edu/graduate (see Graduate Admissions section of this catalog for details). For questions, please call the Office of Graduate Admissions at (585) 395-5465; e-mail gradadmit@brockport.edu; or write the Office of Graduate Admissions, The College at Brockport, 350 New Campus Drive, Brockport, NY, 14420.
To discuss questions about the program, or to visit, contact the MFA Program in Visual Studies, Visual Studies Workshop, 31 Prince Street, Rochester, NY 14607; (585) 442-8676 x112; e-mail address workshops@vsw.org; or Web site at www.vsw.org.

Program Requirements
This is a 60-credit program, requiring five semesters and one summer. The program is designed to introduce students to the field of visual studies in general, as well as to provide specializations in any of three areas of emphasis: 1) photography; 2) digital media, video and film; and 3) imaging systems and book arts. The Summer Institute provides several intense involvements in specialized areas enabling students to work with visiting faculty. During the fourth semester, students take a research seminar in preparation for the internship and final project.
Distribution Requirements (60 credits total)

Core studio courses—Graduate foundation (Semester 1; 9 credits)
- ART 532 Interpretive Strategies (Advanced Photography I)
- ART 513 Digital Media I
- ART 555 Imaging Systems I

Studio courses in visual studies (Semesters 2-4; 18 credits)

Photography
- ART 533 Advanced Photography II
- ART 636 Advanced Studio Problems in Photography

Film, Video and Digital Media
- ART 514 Digital Media II
- ART 515 16mm Film I
- ART 516 16mm Film II
- ART 617 Advanced Studio Problems in Media

Imaging Systems and Visual Books
- ART 556 Imaging Systems II
- ART 657 Advanced Studio Problems in Imaging Systems
- ART 658 The Structure of the Visual Book

Additional Studio Courses
- ART 531 Historical Photographic Processes
- ART 535 Expanded Issues in Exhibition
- ART 568 Working with Visual Information
- ART 735 Arts Organization Practicum

Seminars in Visual Studies (Semesters 1-5; 12 credits)
- ARH 561 History of Photography
- ARH 563 Contemporary Media Survey
- ARH 565 Alternative Views of Art
- ARH 599 Independent Study in Art History
- ARH 664 Media Culture (Art Theory and Philosophy)

Academic Electives (Semesters 2-5; 6 credits)
- Summer Institute (Summer 1 or 2; 6 credits)
  - ART 591

Internship and Final Project (Semesters 4-5; 9 credits)
- ART 797 Graduate Project I Research Seminar
- ART 790 Internship
- ART 798 Graduate Project II Final Project

Core Program
The core program is required of all students entering the program and includes both studio courses and seminars. In the first semester, a series of workshops is structured to introduce students to the full range of available resources and tools, and to encourage an integrated approach to working with diverse materials and presentational means. These workshops meet intensively on a rotating basis; topics include photography (black-and-white, color and various formats), studio and installation techniques, book arts, digital media and video/film. Seminars in the history and theory of photography and related media are also required as part of the core program.

Academic Electives (6 credits)
Students may select 500- and 600-level courses offered at The College at Brockport for which they are eligible. Courses may be from the sciences, humanities (including visual culture), social sciences, non-profit administration or the professions. Electives may include a maximum of three credits of independent study. Studio courses from the Department of Art may not be used to satisfy the academic elective requirement.
Summer Institute Workshops (6 credits)
The Summer Institute is a series of 20-25 intensive one-week workshops conducted by current and visiting faculty. The Summer Institute is designed to stimulate new ways of working and thinking about work, as well as to provide opportunities to expand technical skills and work with new processes. The workshops address a wide variety of concerns in photography, artists’ books, film, video and related media. The six credits of Summer Institute courses may fulfill either studio or seminar distribution requirements.

Internship and Final Project (9 credits)
During the fourth semester, students will develop project proposals and do preparatory work for the internship and final project. The internship is self-generated and designed to benefit students’ work by providing experience in the field. Internships may be done at the Visual Studies Workshop. The final project is a studio project resulting in an exhibition, video, film, artists’ book or equivalent. Two faculty members and one outside educator/professional act as advisors to the project. Students are encouraged to work in at least at two media for their final project.

Visual Studies Courses

ARH 561 History of Photography (A). (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) Surveys the development of photographic processes and the movements and artists that have influenced photography. 3 Cr.

ARH 563 Contemporary Photography and Imaging Survey (A). Surveys the visual and media arts since World War II, with primary emphasis on photography and secondary emphasis on the mass media, the book arts, the time-based arts, installation art, etc. 3 Cr.

ARH 565 Alternative Views of Art (A). Examines and explores art and culture from radically different points of view. Attempts to expand awareness of the multiplicity of world cultures by including subjects, voices and imagery that are often subordinated by traditional institutions of the West such as museums and mainstream commercial media. Uses strategies and disciplines including anthropology, women’s studies, subculture, cyborg theory, political activism and liberation pedagogy to see western art in a different light. Encourages the development of different means of practice in addition to expanded theoretical frameworks for looking at art. 3 Cr.

ARH 599 Independent Study in Art History (A). Prerequisite: Instructor’s permission. Designed individually through consultation between student and instructor to suit the needs and interests of the student, and the special competence of the instructor. Additional requirements may be established by the department. 3-6 Cr.

ARH 664 Media Culture (A). Explores the culture of media through image production and dissemination, sequence and montage and the media environment. Through readings, archival research and direct observations of contemporary life, explores how individuals and groups respond to and manipulate images to make sense of their lives. Examines how images work as a language and how images and words function together. Considers how images construct our environment and social world. Analyzes the practices of mass and alternative media in relation to emerging systems of information. 3 Cr.

ARH 691 Research Topics in Photographic History (A). Students in this seminar form small research teams; each team, under guidance, develops a specific project from the resources and materials available from the visual collections at the Visual Studies Workshop or in Rochester. Students research background history and specific information relative to their chosen topic; then produce an “exhibition” of those materials either in a computer-generated exhibition catalog, or online, or as a physical show in the small gallery spaces at VSW; and keep an individual written journal of their experiences and progress throughout the course of the project. 3 Cr.

ART 513 Digital Media I (A). Course fee. (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) Introduces students to an intersection of photography, video, sound and new media. All production and postproduction is done outside of class time, and students meet as a group for discussions and screenings of work. 3 Cr.

ART 514 Digital Media II (A). Course fee. Prerequisite: ART 513. (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) Allows students to continue to investigate the intersection of photography, video, sound
and new media, and work on individual projects, meeting as a group for discussions and screenings of work. Also provides an introduction to the history of independent media arts. 3 Cr.

**ART 515 16mm Film I (B). Course fee.** (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) Introduces the student to independent 16 mm film production. Focuses on individual expression through scriptwriting, production and postproduction. Sessions include the history of film, camera operation, use of light meters, lighting, composition, directing actors, and the principles and techniques of editing. 3 Cr.

**ART 516 16mm Film II (B). Course fee.** (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) Provides students with advanced aesthetics needed to work with 16 mm film. Covers synch soundtrack, advanced editing techniques, working with a film crew and budgeting. Requires students to produce a film project with soundtrack by the end of the semester. 3 Cr.

**ART 531 Historical Photographic Processes (A).** Introduces and applies several historic photographic processes used in the 19th century. Hands-on experience provides historical background in addition to a deep understanding and appreciation for these processes. Discussions include contemporary issues and artists currently using any one or combination of historical techniques. 3 Cr.

**ART 532 Advanced Photography I: Interpretive Strategies (A). Course fee.** (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) Is based on the broadest possible conception of photography as the present technology of visual language. Treats the camera much as one would a pencil, and asks the many questions raised by the mere act of making a picture: What is meant by speaking in visual, as opposed to verbal, terms? What is the impact of social and psychological circumstances on the visual message? What is the effect of visual media on their audiences? How, eventually, will a record of visual artifacts be interpreted? 3 Cr.

**ART 533 Advanced Photography II (A). Course fee. Prerequisite: ART 532.** Defines a context for developing a personal system of working and decision making that stresses self-criticism and the ability to become aware of directions in the student's own work and the work of others. Strengthens concepts of seeing and sequencing presentation, exhibition format and printing standards. 3 Cr.

**ART 534 Advanced Problems in Photography (A).** (Taught at Brockport Campus and Visual Studies Workshop.) Structured for students to gain independence in their working methods. Requires students to locate an area of interest and create a substantial project that reflects a thoughtful and developed investigation. Requires conceptual and technical readings to supplement their work. 3 Cr.

**ART 535 Expanded Issues in Exhibition (A).** Explores various exhibition formats, including site specific installation and alternative forms of public display such as billboards, signage, mail, networks, and performance. Allows students to develop individual or collaborative projects culminating in a public display. 3 Cr.

**ART 555 Imaging Systems I (A). Course fee.** (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) Provides an introduction to visual books and alternative photographic processes, that, as physical time-based media, stand between photography and electronic imaging. Explores book structures as a means of organizing visual/textual material. 3 Cr.

**ART 556 Imaging Systems II (Bookworks) (A). Course fee. Prerequisite: ART 555.** (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) Examines contemporary use of text/image relationships, as well as historical traditions in visual arts and media as the basis for artists' bookworks. Requires students to plan and produce an editioned book. 3 Cr.

**ART 568 Working with Visual Information (A).** (Taught at the Visual Studies Workshop.) Using the substantial visual resources of the Visual Studies Workshop, provides the fundamentals of working with visual information in a special collections context. Introduces basic database concepts, analysis and current archival/museum best practices (name authorities, exhibition and bibliocitation). Places practical emphasis on the use of FileMaker database software for its ease of use, low cost and power. Surveys other systems including the potential of the Internet for expanded access. Teaches how to use visual information more effectively for research and how to craft effective structures of visual data. 3 Cr.

**ART 599 Independent Study in Visual Studies (A). Prerequisite: Instructor's permission.** Permits students to pursue in greater depth topics studied previously. Designed individually through consultation between student and instructor to suit the needs of the student and the special competence of the instructor. 1-6 Cr.

**ART 617 Advanced Studio Problems in Electronic Media (A). Course fee. Prerequisites: ART 513 and ART 514.** (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) An independent study course. Investigates the intersection of photography, sound, and the computer. Designed by the student in consultation with the instructor based on a project proposal submitted the prior semester. Requires the student to meet bi-weekly with the instructor and present the project at the end of the semester as an exhibition, screening, or lecture. 1-5 Cr.

**ART 636 Advanced Studio Problems in Photography (A). Course fee. Prerequisite: ART 532.**
(Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) An independent study class designed by the student in consultation with the instructor, based on a project proposal submitted the prior semester. 1-5 Cr.

**ART 657 Advanced Studio Problems in Imaging Systems (A).** Course fee. Prerequisite: ART 556. (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) An independent study for students with a good working background in imaging systems, and visual books. Requires a suitable independent study project such as the design, printing, and binding of an editioned bookwork or print portfolio, a series of one-of-a-kind books, or an environmental book. 1-5 Cr.

**ART 658 Structure of the Visual Book (A).** Course fee. (Taught at Visual Studies Workshop.) Requires students to conceive, construct and bind several books to gain a better understanding of the book format as an art form, rather than a reproduction of pre-existing work. Includes lectures on and discussion of prime examples of current books. 3 Cr.

**ART 735 Arts Organization Practicum (A).** As an in-house internship, a practicum that provides the opportunity to gain first-hand experience and working knowledge of one of VSW’s program areas: Afterimage journal, Research Center, and other public programs. Requires students to work under the direction of director and/or program coordinator and make active contributions to advancing the program’s goals. Allows students to gain inside experience of an art organization in learning particular professional skills. 3 Cr.

**ART 790 Internship (A).** Designed to benefit students’ work by providing experience in the field. Involves the commitment of one semester’s time within an active, professional learning situation. Examples include an apprenticeship with an artist, assisting a curator, setting up and teaching evening courses in a remote area, helping design an innovative method of visual text distribution on the Internet. Culminates in a report including documentation and evaluation letters. 3 Cr.

**ART 797 Graduate Project I - Research Seminar (A).** Lays the practical and conceptual groundwork for the final thesis project—a public presentation and contribution to the field of visual studies in the form of a gallery show, media art project, screening or publication. Focuses on issues of professional practice in writing artists’ statements, public speaking about work, display alternatives, understanding the art market, etc. Culminates in the Graduate Review, which is a requirement for Graduate Project II. 3 Cr.

**ART 798 Graduate Project II - Final Project (A).** Prerequisite: ART 797 and Graduate Review. Requires a final thesis project that leads to a public presentation and contribution to the field of visual studies in the form of a gallery show, media art project, screening or publication. Requires that the public project be available to the community for at least one week. Two faculty members and one outside advisor act as advisors to the project. A final presentation and discussion results in vote to recommend the acceptance or resubmission of the thesis project. 1-3 Cr.