

T H E A N N U A L 2 0 0 2

S V A  School of VISUAL ARTS®



## CURRICULUM AND BEYOND

The School of Visual Arts is an institution where the faculty is composed of working artists and professionals from many diverse fields. As such, whenever even minor changes occur in the art world or in the business and industrial fields those changes will automatically find their way into the classrooms at SVA.

### Cross-Pollination in the Arts

The trend continued for art forms to borrow from one another and to blur the once-clear boundaries that separate them; there was a great deal of activity across the various curricula that demonstrated just how fluid the disciplines are. This cross-pollination is a *fait accompli* that many have come to take for granted. Still, it's striking to see the almost routine ways some SVA departments create curricula that is a tapestry of many strands.

The manner in which the different departments practice this cross-pollination varies, depending on a number of factors, including the state of the art/industry, technology issues and the specific department chair's personality. The BFA Photography Department, for example, has distinguished itself through curriculum innovations and faculty appointments that are driven by a plural discourse that melds together once disparate photographic practices. The faculty roster has been expanded to include art directors, photo editors, critics, museum and gallery personnel, and collectors.

One new course, Art and Commerce, examines the overlapping relationship between work that is art and work that is commerce and how the lines between the two are being smudged. This course is representative of a major shift in the department's philosophy. Until recently, it was segregated by genres: photojournalism, art photography and fashion photography. But no longer. Photography today cannot easily be compartmentalized; the genres overlap every which way. The most commercially successful work is often the most creative and vice versa.

The curriculum of the MFA Illustration as Visual Essay Department is oriented toward helping students develop a strong individual voice. The process by which art students

become authors of their own work naturally leads to experimentation and competence in other art forms, such as — in the case of illustrators — fine arts, graphic design, and Web design.

What's taking place in the BFA Fine Arts Department is a good example of how tradition has been reinvigorated through an infusion of other forms. The department has made such courses as Advanced Video Art, Photography in Fine Art, and Advanced Digital Imagery mainstays of its curriculum. A further indication of how the department is expanding its sights is that it recently established its own video and computer art facilities, in the Sculpture Center.

The Advertising and Graphic Design Department introduced a wide range of new classes this year that, on the whole, demonstrate how the skills required of students in these dynamic areas have greatly expanded. Several classes in particular, including Digital Video, Entertainment: Concept Design, and 360 Degrees of Advertising, reveal the increasing importance of a multidisciplinary approach. The course named Digital Video exemplifies how technology spurs the type of innovation that comes from an interdisciplinary approach. In the class, students make TV commercials, station promotions and other broadcast design pieces. The students in this department, who mostly have a background in traditional (two-dimensional) design, bring another set of skills to the medium of digital video, especially sensitivity to visual communication and capturing the attention of an audience. They approach video differently from the way a filmmaker might; these students are less familiar with the medium and less constrained by its traditional forms.

Entertainment Concept Design and 360 Degrees of Advertising are classes that require students to create branding campaigns and multiple promotional vehicles that encompass a range of mediums, such as print, TV and the Web. These classes simulate the real-world challenges faced by a creative director, whose responsibility is essentially one of solving creative problems through a multimedia/multidisciplinary approach.



### Technology vs. Tradition

A major issue with which many departments at SVA must contend is how to provide students with the fundamental principles and techniques for making art while at the same time ensuring that they become conversant in the technologies that have come to dominate their fields. It is much more difficult to teach students craft and storytelling, and guide them toward developing an individual voice, than it is to teach them technology. And the more technology becomes a factor, the harder it becomes to teach them fundamentals; technology places an emphasis on speed and convenience, while craft and artistic fundamentals have another set of priorities. This is where a *structured* education comes into play.

The main goal of the BFA Computer Art Department is to educate artists first, and to create technologists second. To this end, the department has made the sophomore-year curriculum considerably more rigorous than it had been, to ensure that students understand the challenges inherent in producing quality artwork in a field that also requires a high degree of specialization in computer technology.

In a similar vein, the MFA Computer Art Department does not let technology drive the curriculum, but rather encourages students to use new technology in creative and innovative ways. Curriculum developments and accomplishments in the department over the past year highlight the emphasis being placed on the creative use of technology, including using commercial technologies like the DVD for purely artistic uses. At the same time, the department has proven to be a trove of research into innovative ways of using off-the-shelf software — such as Maya Cloth — to create high-quality computer graphics and animation.

Likewise, the Film, Video and Animation Department represents another set of disciplines in which technology has become a potent force. This department, like both computer art departments, first faces the challenge of instilling the fundamentals of storytelling and image-making in students,

many of whom are entranced by the seductive dazzle of technology. To address this challenge, the department's faculty has recently been directed to be more critical in their instruction and in their analysis of students' work and to attempt to instill in students more of the *why*, which connotes artistic choice, than the *how* of technology.

The principal mandate of SVA is to train young people to become professional artists — artists who will define the creative spheres of the next generation, so the new technologies that are sweeping across the various disciplines are part of how the College is helping to define the future. The MFA Photography and Related Media Department has seen the future, and it's completely digital. It is preparing its students for an industry and art world in which, it maintains, traditional processes will wane. The advantages afforded by digital photography are obvious; chief among them is the fact that the basic equipment for taking pictures and the means of disseminating one's work are cheap and readily available. It's a democratic medium that allows anyone with something to say photographically to gain easy access to the channels for getting images and ideas out to the world.

For the BFA Photography Department, digital photography is just another tool — another implement in the artist's palette. The department's complete renovation of its facilities last year included not only the installation of digital labs, but also brand-new color and black-and-white darkrooms, demonstrating its commitment to traditional photography. The department subscribes to the belief that the best way for beginning students to understand photography is to make their own black-and-white prints. Being involved in this fundamental process reveals the magic of the art form. Seeing light come through a negative is the most direct way to understand exposure — how it relates to representation, how exposure can be interpretive in an almost primal way. To see the image emerge from the chemicals connects the student with a form of artistic alchemy which can often seem to border on the mystical.



## TECHNOLOGY AND FACILITIES

### **Innovative Financing Gives SVA an Edge in Technology**

The College has made technology a top priority, and annually reinvests 10 percent of its gross revenue in information technology and related support (the standard for private industry is about 3 percent). Acquiring the latest technology at such a pace (half of all SVA classroom computers are replaced each year) is feasible thanks to the College's adoption of an innovative financing model that relies on using flexible, short-term leases with a range of vendors for equipment such as computers, copiers and other high-end imaging hardware. Leasing technology instead of buying it provides SVA with a built-in mechanism for constant upgrades; at the end of the lease term — or even in the middle of the term if necessary — the College can move on to the next generation of technology.

### **Online Registration Book**

In a major development, the online versions of the *Undergraduate/Graduate Registration Booklet* and the *Division of Continuing Education Bulletin* — which together list every current class SVA offers — began functioning in real time this past spring. These two essential instruments of the College's operation are now linked to the master database of registration activity, so students have an accurate, up-to-the-hour view of course offerings and registration status. It's a whole new level of service that allows students (and advisors) to research classes by day, time, faculty, department and/or availability. The dynamic online registration book is a key innovation that will pave the way for the College to offer a fully functioning e-commerce component, including online course selection, registration and payment.

### **The Wired Campus**

Last year, SVA upgraded to a new, state-of-the-art network infrastructure complete with

fiber-optic cabling and new Cisco switches. Now, the College plans to continue this move toward the fastest, most reliable technology possible by installing a microwave network that will link all of its buildings. Through this key move, the College will essentially privatize its network, and thus greatly enhance security and eliminate external bottlenecks over which it previously had no control. SVA also plans to upgrade its Internet connection to a full T3 circuit, increasing bandwidth capacity by a factor of 10.

### **Facilities**

A major renovation project that took place over the summer was the complete rebuilding of the offices of continuing education, the registrar, and financial aid. This resulted in a more efficient layout for these offices, which will help expedite and alleviate the administrative tasks of students, faculty and staff.

At SVA, an extensive project like the one described above can take no more than five or six months from concept to move-in. This gives SVA the ability to respond rapidly to a changing environment, especially increasing student enrollment and new staff.

The big facilities story at SVA this year is that it acquired a brand-new 22-story building right next to its 209 East 23rd Street building. The new building was turned into a residence hall, with 72 units that can house up to 360 students; it became available for students in January 2002. This acquisition represents a strong response by the College to the shifting demographics of its student population. A significant change is that more students are coming from farther away — 20 percent of incoming freshmen live 500 or more miles from New York City, an increase of 260 percent from 1995. The new residence hall will add to the appeal the College has for out-of-town students and have a positive effect on student retention. As part of the big picture, acquisition of the new building epitomizes the College's strategic, student-driven approach to facilities upgrades.



## **NEW MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

The role of the School of Visual Arts Board of Directors is to oversee initiatives recommended by the president and the executive vice president of the College. Board members are selected based on a variety of factors, but above all, they must have a strong belief in the importance of art education. The newest members of the board are profiled below.

**Janet Knox** is a banker with the Bank of New York who specializes in wealth management and has worked extensively with Fortune 500 companies. Prior to joining the board Knox worked with the College in her capacity as a financier. She brings to the board a solid background in financial management, deep familiarity with the institution and insights into the art world. She received an MBA, with a specialty in international finance, from Adelphi University. She is a board member for the Irish Repertory Theater and is involved with Concern Worldwide, a relief organization committed to working with the poorest of the poor in developing countries.

**Joseph Patterson** is a real estate and financial services consultant, specializing in institutional real estate investments, tenant improvement financing, and health and life insurance products. He believes the most valuable thing an institution of higher education can do is to connect learning with passion,

and ensure that students do not merely go through the motions of attaining a degree. Patterson grew up in poverty and found his way out of the slums through education. Art became very important to him during his formative years and he developed into a talented illustrator. However, he was compelled to move on to a more practical course of study and ended up getting an MBA at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School. He says that if he had been aware of SVA at that time, he would have tried to further develop his artistic talents. As a board member, he hopes to make SVA more of a force in the minority community.

**Walter Rivera** is an attorney concentrating in civil litigation. He is a partner in the firm of Rivera Hunter Colon & Dobshinsky, LLP. He is committed to using his profession in the service of human rights and progressive social causes. Rivera has brought to the board a strong belief in the power of diversity to enrich the educational experience. His role on the board has been in part as an advocate for a more diverse faculty and for inclusive programs, such as those which provide gifted art students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to attend SVA. Rivera benefited from just such a program, A Better Chance, which allowed him to attend Governor Dummer Academy in Massachusetts, after which he went on to Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania Law School.





Board of Directors with 2002 commencement speaker, Ronan Tynan.  
Seated (l-r): Eileen Hedy Schultz, Silas H. Rhodes, Ronan Tynan.  
Standing (l-r): Walter Rivera, Joseph F. Patterson, Janet A. Knox,  
David Rhodes, Anthony P. Rhodes.  
Board member not pictured: Milton Glaser.  
Photograph: Brian Berman