

MFA | ILLUSTRATION AS

VISUAL ESSAY



Graduate Programs

“Our aim is to provide students with the skills and analytical approaches necessary to adapt to an ever-evolving professional landscape—all to strengthen the presentation and impact of their personal artistic vision,”

says **Riccardo Vecchio**, the newly appointed chair of MFA Illustration as Visual Essay. Riccardo’s goal is to “give students the confidence that their work can participate at the highest level in current trends—and anticipate and originate future ones.”

Born in Milan and raised in Italy and Germany, Riccardo’s story has come full circle now that he has become chair of the department he studied at when he first came to SVA as a Fulbright Scholar. As a teen, he was a “fierce collector” of magazines featuring SVA’s iconic subway posters, so it perhaps felt like fate to arrive in NYC in 1994 and fully explore his artistic passion. A painter and illustrator, Riccardo’s art has graced the pages of *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, and many more. Movie magic glitters through his work for Criterion Collection and American Movie Central, and he has distilled melodies and good beats into dynamic images for The Verve Music Group and Broadway shows. As a recipient of the NYC Artist Corps Grant, Riccardo harnesses the power of his impressive body of work to craft a project that addresses climate and environmental justice.

In this Q&A, Riccardo offers a sneak preview of his vision for the department:

What do you most hope for students to take away from MFA Illustration as Visual Essay?

It is essential to provide the students not only with the technical skills but also with the analytical and intellectual vocabulary necessary to adapt to the fast-paced digital evolution. In this way, they will be able to strengthen the presentation and impact of their personal artistic vision and face the challenges of the ever-evolving working landscape.

What is one of your goals for MFA Illustration as Visual Essay?

My long-term vision of the program is one of a more racially and economically inclusive and diverse student body. A program with the best 20 students whose merit and talent, not their ability to pay, shine through.

By taking a proactive approach toward these goals now, we will ensure the program encourages robust and multifaceted artistic dialogues, and secure the quality of the College for the future. Put another way, I believe it will hamper the artistic and personal growth of our students if we do not.

In order to equip our students with the pictorial and intellectual skills necessary to enter an increasingly complex and difficult-to-define art and illustration environment, they must have a solid understanding of their artistic vision. This will enable them to face the challenges that AI will throw at them soon. I believe in a diverse, supportive and inclusive community of fellow artists who help hone and define each other’s personal visual language.

Developing a personal vision is a big part of the department. What has helped you develop your personal vision?

The pursuit of a personal vision is a lifelong task. It takes time to recognize that it is a unique voyage of trials and errors. A vision is the sum of our best skills and our weaknesses. Some artists find a defined voice early on, and others take many years to channel their interests. I belong to the latter group. What has helped me is to recognize my patterns of interest, and in so doing, I was able to find my voice and the visual language to express it.

How do you feel art and social engagement/activism can best work together?

Good design, art and illustration do not need social engagement and activism to be more relevant art. Good engagement and activism can be significant without good design, art or illustration. However, when those disciplines meet and collaborate, each aiding the other in perpetuating a message, their impact is more powerful and long-lasting. They become greater than the sum of their parts. Pressing social and environmental issues give weight and urgency to an artist’s work, but they do not guarantee good work. Art and social engagement/activism is most successful when each discipline, disjointed from the collective effort, stays equally powerful.

About the Program

The program operates on a pass/fail grading system with individual annual reviews. At the end of the first year, students must receive an acceptable review from the faculty panel in order to go on to the second year.

Degree candidates must successfully complete 60 credits, including all mandatory courses. A residency of two academic years is required. In the final semester, each student must complete a thesis project, which will be reviewed and approved by the thesis committee and the department chair in order for the student to be eligible for degree conferral. In exceptional instances, transfer credit may be awarded. Decisions concerning transfer of credit are made by the committee on graduate admissions.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

Although the majority of our students come from art backgrounds, not all do. Some of our most successful alumni have majored in areas such as English literature, biology, engineering, architecture, psychology and women's studies. You must have an undergraduate degree to apply.

Nicole Rifkin (MFA 2017) has done illustrations for *The Atlantic*; BuzzFeed; ChefsFeed; Concord Records; Joyful Noise; Longreads; Medium; Mic; *Mother Jones*; *O, The Oprah Magazine*; *Outside Magazine*; Showtime; St. Martin's Press; *USA Today*; *The New York Times*, *Variety*; and many more. reformforest.com.

Illustrating Their Own Success Stories

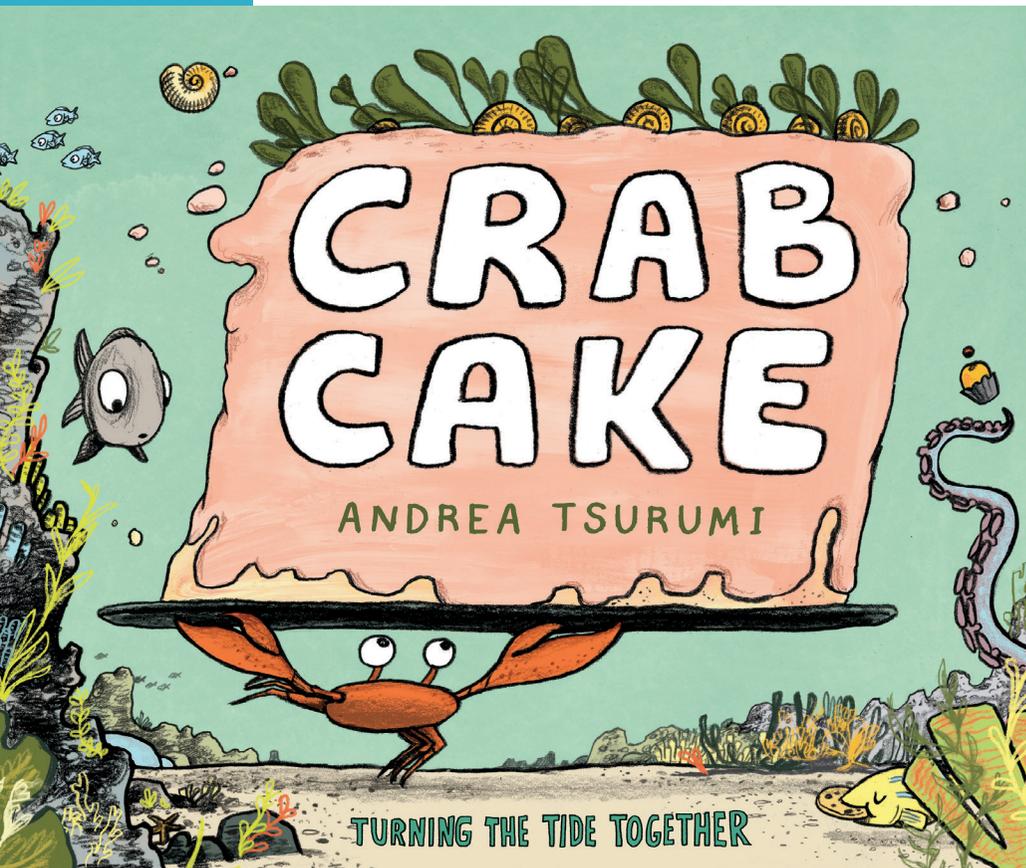
Our Alumni

The mission of the MFA Illustration as Visual Essay program aims to help students develop their own unique vision, and those personal paths lead our graduates to different places. We have featured a few of our successful alumni in this brochure to see where their talent took them after getting their MFA. ▶



ANDREA TSURUMI (MFA 2013)

Andrea is an author, illustrator and cartoonist whose picture books include *Crab Cake* and *Accident!*. She's illustrated *Not Your Nest!*, *Girls Who Code*, *Sharko and Hippo*, *Mr. Watson's Chickens* and the *Kondo & Kezumi* series. Her comics have been published by Hic and Hoc Publications, *The Believer*, *The Nib*, TOON Graphics, Seven Stories Press, the *Brooklyn Rail* and *SpongeBob Comics*. Clients include Goodreads, Breadpig, *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, Bedford/St. Martin's and Bloomsbury Children's Books. She received a Silver Medal and a MoCCA Award of Excellence from the Society of Illustrators, and her books have been listed as Books of the Year by the Junior Library Guild, *Kirkus* and *Publishers Weekly*.



VIKKI ZHANG (MFA 2018)

Vikki uses watercolor and dip pens to tell fairy tales from real life. She currently works in book publishing, advertising, film arts and packaging, and she is developing a kids' cheongsam brand. In 2019, she held solo shows in Shanghai and Beijing. Her work has been included in Society of Illustrators 62; The Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles 59; Museum of Chinese in America; and the 13th National Exhibition of Fine Arts, China 2019. She won the 2019 16th CACC Golden Dragon Award and 2017 CCTV National Book Award. Clients include *The Washington Post*, Voices of Future Generations (UNESCO), Sharjah Library, Lee & Low Books, Centipede Press, McDonald's, Yaso Tangbao, Tencent, Alibaba and *China Post*. Published books include *Goddess* and *Run Fast, Terra-Cotta Warrior!*.





DANIEL ZENDER (MFA 2014)

Daniel is an artist living and working in Brooklyn. His work includes editorial and commercial illustration, graphic design, cartooning, printmaking, painting and sculpture. He is the recipient of Silver and Gold Medals from the Society of Illustrators and was named an Art Directors Club Young Gun. Clients include *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, Nike, Adidas, Facebook and Google, as well as editorial and commercial work from a variety of clients. He teaches at Queens College.

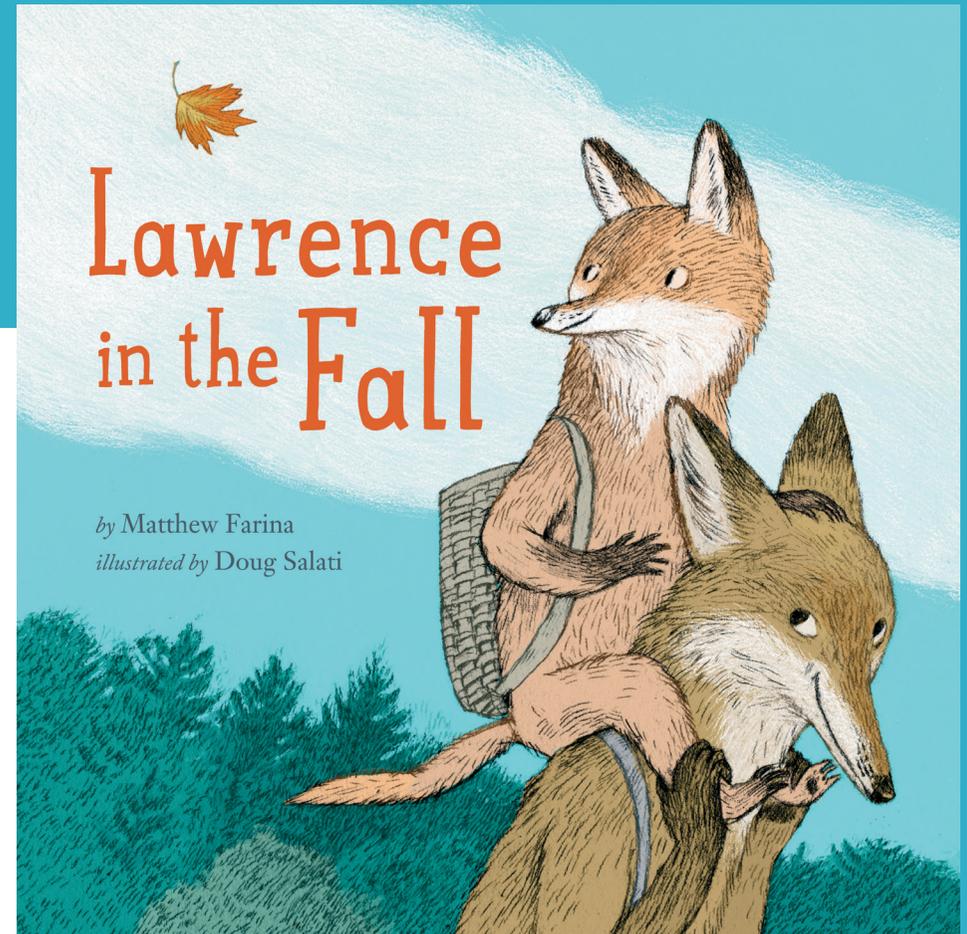
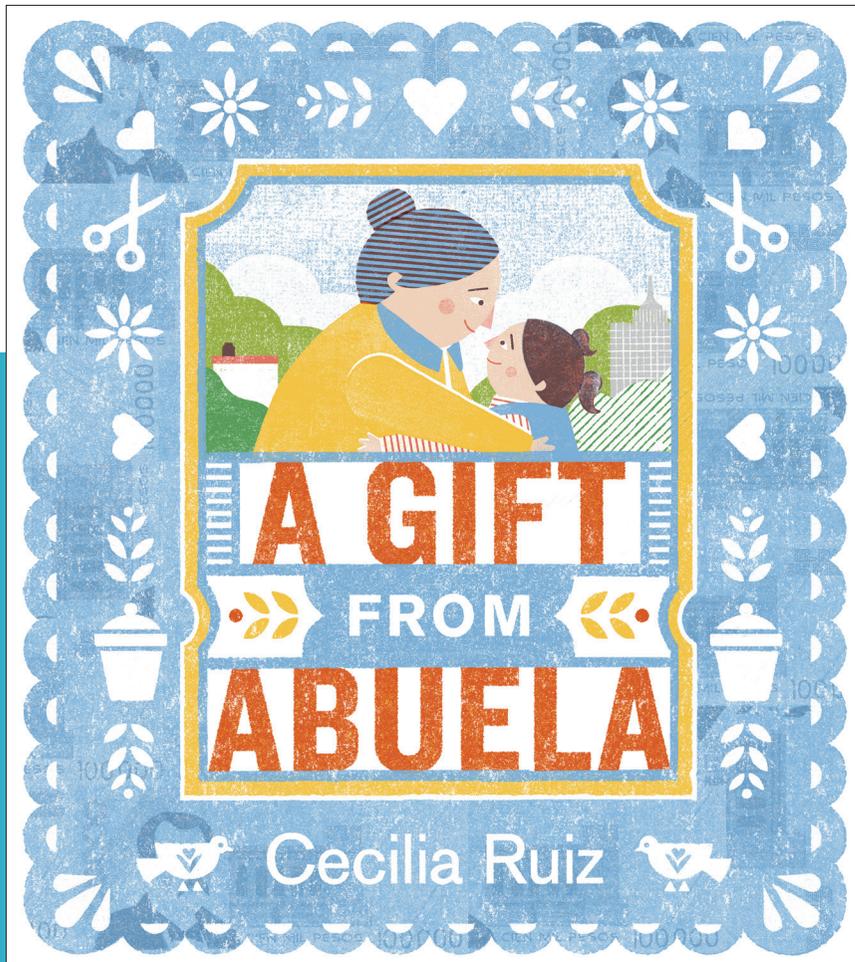


MOJO WANG (MFA 2019)

Mojo is a Chinese illustrator and comic artist whose works have been recognized by the Society of Illustrators, American Illustration and 3x3. After graduating from SVA, he launched his new career as an illustrator and comic artist in New York City with a client list including *The New York Times*; *T*, *The New York Times Style Magazine*; *Elle*; *Elle Men*; and *GQ*.

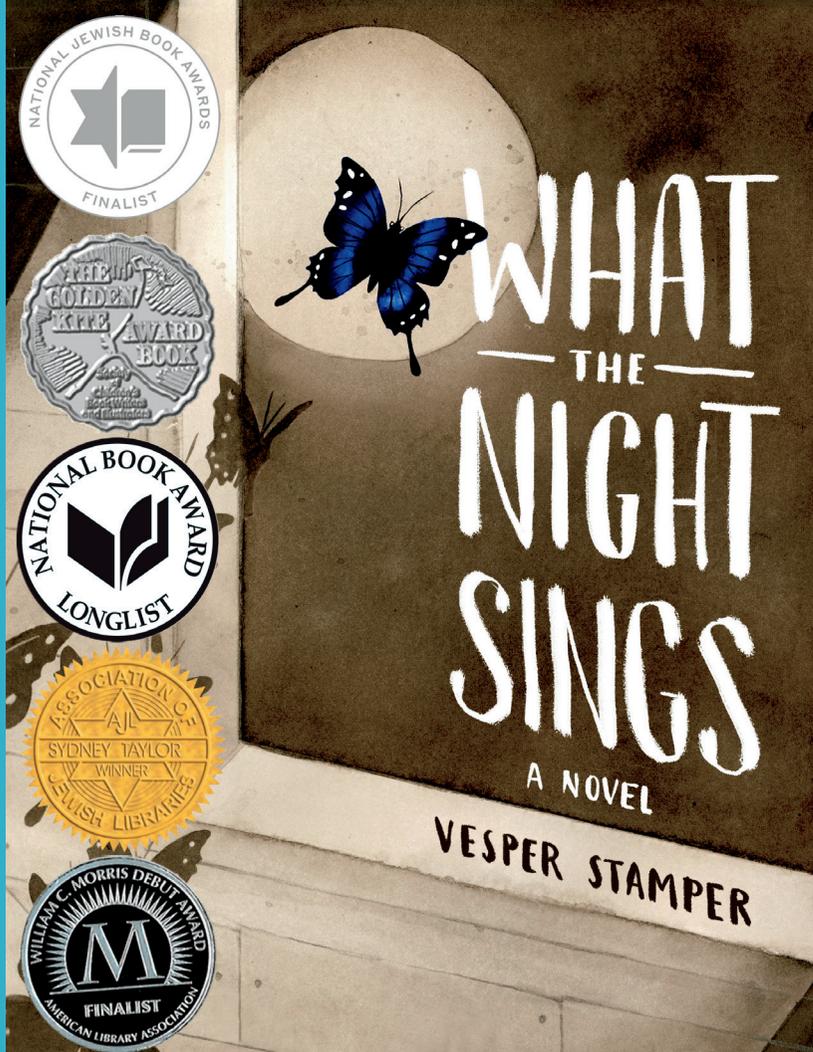
CECILIA RUIZ (MFA 2012)

Cecilia Ruiz is a Mexican author, illustrator and graphic designer living and working in New York City. She obtained a BFA in graphic design from Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City before getting her MFA at SVA. Her work has been recognized by the Society of Illustrators and American Illustration. Some of her clients include *The New York Times*, Google, Penguin Random House, *Fast Company*, Atlas Obscura, Dropbox and the Brooklyn Museum. Cecilia has published two illustrated books with Penguin Random House: *The Book of Memory Gaps* (2015), her debut as an author, which was named one of the best children's books of 2015 by Maria Popova's Brain Pickings, and *The Book of Extraordinary Deaths* (2018). *A Gift from Abuela*, her first picture book published by Candlewick Press, is a Junior Library Guild Gold Standard selection.



DOUG SALATI (MFA 2014)

Doug is a recipient of the 2015 Sendak Fellowship. His first illustrated book was *In a Small Kingdom*, written by Tomie dePaola. His most recent book is *Lawrence in the Fall*, written by Matthew Farina, which was accepted into the Society of Illustrators' 2019 Original Art exhibit for children's books, received 2020 Ezra Jack Keats Award honors for illustrator and writer, and was called a "subtly powerful story of agency and independence" in a *Publishers Weekly* starred review.

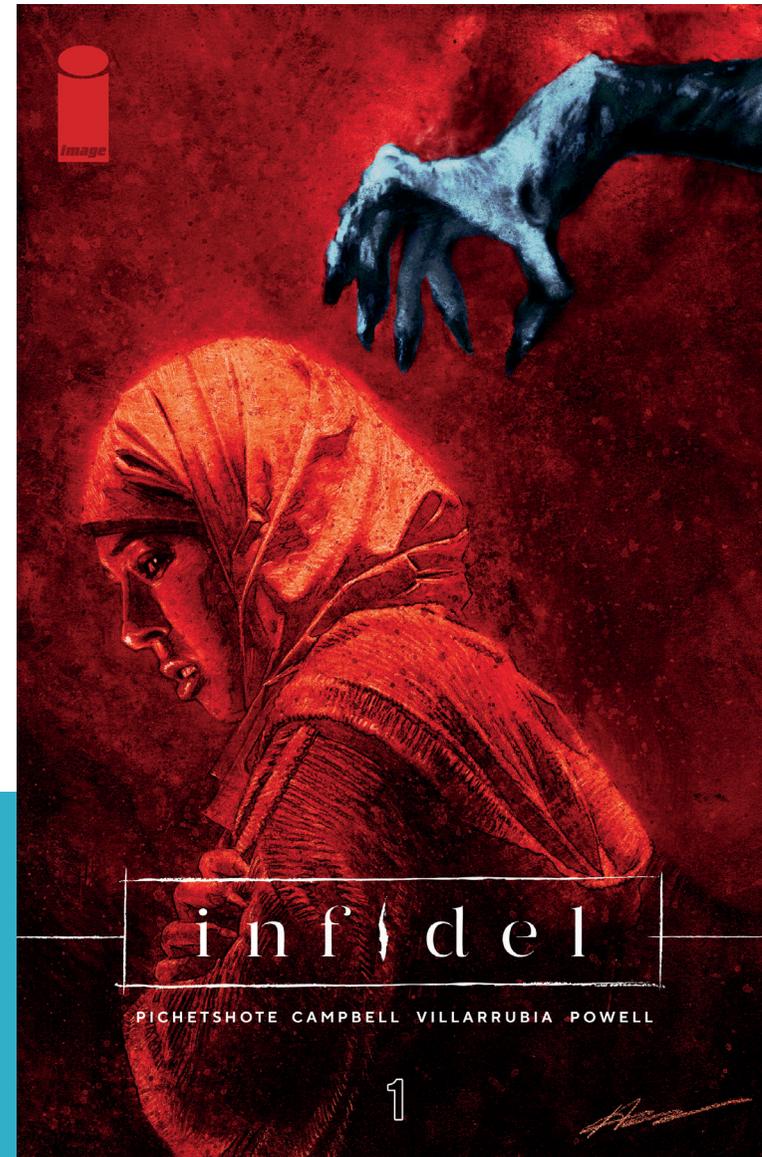


VESPER STAMPER (MFA 2016)

Vesper is an illustrator and author born in Germany and raised in New York City. She has been an illustrator for more than 20 years and now also writes and illustrates novels of historical fiction, including her 2020 novel, *A Cloud of Outrageous Blue*. Her debut illustrated YA novel, *What the Night Sings*, about a teenage girl who survives the Holocaust, was a National Book Award nominee, a National Jewish Book Awards Finalist, a William C. Morris YA Debut Award finalist, Golden Kite Honor Book and Sydney Taylor Book Award winner, and was named a 2019 Best Fiction for Young Adults book by YALSA, a best children's picture book of 2018 by *The Wall Street Journal* and a best book of 2018 by *Kirkus*. Clients include Penguin Random House, Bloomsbury, HarperCollins and SCBWI.

AARON CAMPBELL (MFA 2003)

Aaron is an illustrator whose clients include DC Comics, Image Comics, Dynamite Comics, AfterShock, Top Cow, Sony/TriStar Pictures, Sugar23 and Netflix. His credits include *John Constantine: Hellblazer* (DC Black Label), *Infidel* (Image Comics), *Felix Leiter*, *The Shadow*, *Uncanny*, *The Green Hornet* and *Sherlock Holmes* (Dynamite Comics). Awards include the Tripwire Awards 2020: Best New Series (nominee for *Hellblazer*), NPR: 100 Favorite Horror Stories of All Time, NPR 2018's Great Reads (*Infidel*) and *Paste Magazine*: 100 Best Horror Comics of All Time (*Infidel*).



Curriculum/ Sample Program

The two-year curriculum in Illustration as Visual Essay is designed to capitalize on the technical facility required of students upon entrance to the program. As a result, the program breaks into two distinct parts. The first year concentrates on teaching additional technical skills and introduces students to the necessity of achieving a personal viewpoint as an illustrator.

The second year allows students to put into practice the lessons of the first year, through the course Thesis Project: Visual Essay.

FIRST YEAR/FALL	CREDITS
Book Seminar	3
Computer Illustration Portfolio	3
Creative Writing Workshop I	3
Critique I	1.5
Drawing I	3
Perpetual Appetizers	1.5
Writing Workshop I	0
FIRST YEAR/SPRING	
Creative Writing Workshop II	3
Critique II	3
The Digital Book	3
Drawing II	3
Seminar	3
Writing Workshop II	0
SECOND YEAR/FALL	
History of Storytelling	3
Painting I	3
Studio Workshop I	3
Thesis Project: Visual Essay I	6
Thesis Review I	0
SECOND YEAR/SPRING	
Illustration Business Boot Camp	3
Painting II	3
Studio Workshop II	3
Thesis Project: Visual Essay II	6
Thesis Review II	0
Studio Visits/Where People Work	0

Course Offerings

This is a sample of our recent course listings. For our full curriculum, visit sva.edu/mfaillustration/curriculum.

BOOK SEMINAR

Students will experiment and create a body of work based on the short story. Although the course title is Book Seminar, students are not confined to the book format; however, a series of objects or an installation is encouraged. Students will outline their ideas in a thesis statement prior to the start of the course, which they will present and discuss in the first session. This written statement will serve as a point of departure and later as a point of reference while the work evolves to its final stages. The project will explore technical, aesthetic and conceptual interests while looking into professional directions and specializations.

CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP I & II

These workshops are structured to develop writing skills in poetry, prose and fiction through readings and discussions. The goal is to explore personal expression through writing that reflects artistic concerns. The second semester will focus on poetry, writing for the theater and songwriting.

COMPUTER ILLUSTRATION PORTFOLIO

Digital tools have become main-stream in the design and printing fields, and the Internet has evolved into a medium that enables illustrators to create interactive animations and globally accessible projects. We will investigate several aspects of digital technology, from advanced Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator techniques for print to all facets of web design production, as well as interactive Flash animation.

CRITIQUE I & II

The relationship between fine art and commercial art in dealing with the visual essay will be emphasized in these courses. Students will begin the process of developing visual essays in a limited form. There will be weekly assignments dealing with a variety of subjects related to contemporary concerns. Students will begin to incorporate the material written in the writing workshop with their artwork. The second semester will focus on the production of a one-of-a-kind book that includes text and image.

THE DIGITAL BOOK

Our desire to tell stories always has, and always will, adapt to and define new mediums. The storybook is as old as writing systems themselves; its evolution is bound to that of mankind. The history of film is saturated with animated predictions of stories and characters coming to life and walking off the page. Today, the proliferation of tablets and e-book readers is beginning to redefine what storytelling and characters can be. The digital revolution introduced the storybook to hypertext and interactivity, and with the Internet came social interaction and data-driven narrative. As perceptions regarding digital media shift from desktop to multitouch tablet computers, it's becoming increasingly apparent that reading, storytelling, animation and interactivity are standing on the precipice of their own revolution. In short: there has never been a more exciting time to be in the business of telling stories.

ILLUSTRATION BUSINESS BOOT CAMP

This class is based on eight intensive critique and instruction sessions. The course focuses on three main goals: 1) the solid understanding of the professional illustration environment; 2) the review of existing work and its transformation into a presentable and cohesive body of work; and 3) the development and application of the student's brand and identity tools in different media for communicating, showcasing and promoting that work.

PAINTING I & II

With an emphasis on figurative painting techniques, students will explore both contemporary and classic approaches to painting with oil. The goal is to provide a solid background in oil painting techniques. Painting II focuses on an advanced approach to concepts and styles, including direct, sustained observation of the human form. A more fully developed or visualized painting process is underscored.

PERPETUAL APPETIZERS

This hands-on studio course introduces new tools, techniques and ingredients with the goal of expanding an individual visual vocabulary unique to each student. The intention is to grasp the concept that the search for creativity is not always a linear, forward movement—usually it is a series of experiments, a desire to enter uncharted territory while recognizing an accident can open opportunities more often than the safety of stagnation.

HISTORY OF STORYTELLING: COMICS

This course provides an introduction to graphic media in North America, from the beginning of the newspaper comic strip through the creation of comic books, the growth of graphic novels and current developments in electronic media. Focusing on history and aesthetics, we will compare developments in the United States, Mexico and French Canada, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which comic art is created and consumed. The first half of the semester will concentrate on early comic strips and the evolution of the comic book form through the 1940s. The remainder of the semester will focus on changes that affected comic art in the 1950s and 1960s, the unfolding of a comic book subculture from the 1970s to the 1980s, and contemporary electronic media advancements.

SEMINAR

Through lectures by noted guest illustrators, political satirists, art directors and graphic designers, this seminar will explore the many specialized areas of visual commentators. The course will also include portfolio reviews by professionals working in the field.

“Do it your way. No two people have or need the same experience. Everyone is coming in with different strengths and weaknesses. Know yourself; know what you want from the program.”

—Will Varner (MFA 2011)

STUDIO WORKSHOP I & II

These workshops will develop concepts and finished artwork in relation to the thesis project. Student work will be critiqued regularly by visiting professionals, including illustrators, art directors and gallery directors. We will address the refinement and completion of thesis projects. There will be individual and group critiques.

THESIS REVIEW I & II

Thesis Review is a series of weekly, individual meetings with the department chair for critique and review of the thesis project. These meetings supplement the work in the Thesis Project: Visual Essay courses.

SPECIAL PROJECTS I & II

These courses are coordinated with the chair of the department for students who require specific skill training in the area of drawing or painting.

THESIS PROJECT: VISUAL ESSAY I & II

Students choose a New York City artist as their thesis faculty advisor. They work with the thesis advisor on a one-to-one basis and establish a work schedule to research, write and visualize the thesis project. Topics with special visual essay interest in a variety of areas—such as sports, politics, current and cultural events, education and travel—are emphasized. Students will participate in a group exhibition at the end of the second semester.

WRITING WORKSHOP I & II

These two courses support the creative writing workshop. They will focus on writing fundamentals: grammar, sentence and paragraph logic, idea development, organization and essay structure.

STUDIO VISITS/WHERE PEOPLE WORK

In this unique class, students will observe artists in their workplace on a weekly basis. Settings include advertising agencies, design studios, illustrators' studios and animation studios. At a time of ever-changing needs in the marketplace, the class will explore opportunities in the field of illustration. The studio visits are in essence mini classrooms. Students will research the artists prior to each trip and will be prepared to have a dialogue that is informative.

Notable Alumni

Jonathan Bartlett

HyeSu Lee

Rich Tu

Lauren Castillo

Andrés Vera Martínez

Will Varner

Brian Floca

Lauren Redniss

Sara Varon

Nathan Fox

Stephen Savage

Sam Weber

Nora Krug

Yuko Shimizu

Martin Wittfooth

Brendan Leach

Shadra Strickland

Faculty

Full biographies of our faculty can be found online at: sva.edu/mfaillustration/faculty.

David Sandlin
acting chair, MFA Illustration as Visual Essay; painter; printmaker; cartoonist

Carol Fabricatore
painter, illustrator

Riccardo Vecchio
painter, illustrator

Viktor Koen
illustrator, designer

Alexandra Zsigmond
art director, curator

Gustave Blache III
painter

Anna Raff
illustrator, designer

N.C. Christopher Couch
writer, art historian

James Ransome
illustrator, painter

Christine Donnelly
English as a Second Language specialist, actor, singer

Matthew B. Richmond
principal and senior designer, The Chopping Block, Inc.

Lecturers, Mentors & Advisors

Guy Billout
illustrator

Viktor Koen
illustrator, designer

Stephen Savage
illustrator

Nicholas Blechman
designer, art director

Judith Linhares
painter

Gae Savannah
painter

Tomek Bogacki
children's book illustrator

Ruth Marten
painter

Yuko Shimizu
illustrator

Steve Brodner
illustrator

Marvin Mattelson
painter

Peter Sís
children's book illustrator

Paul Buckley
creative director, Penguin Putnam

Keith Mayerson
painter

Ward Sutton
cartoonist

Pat Cummings
children's book illustrator

David Mazzucchelli
cartoonist

Jillian Tamaki
illustrator

Peter de Sève
illustrator

Peter McCarty
children's book illustrator

Anton van Dalen
painter

Diane Dillon
children's book illustrator

John Nickle
children's book illustrator

Riccardo Vecchio
illustrator

Teresa Fasolino
illustrator

Gary Panter
cartoonist

Voltaire
animator

Donato Giancarlo
illustrator

John Parks
painter

Bruce Waldman
printmaker, illustrator

Judy Glantzman
painter

J. Brian Pinkney
children's book illustrator

Sam Weber
illustrator

Mario Hugo
illustrator

Jerry Pinkney
children's book illustrator

Philemona Williamson
painter

Frances Jetter
printmaker, illustrator

Lauren Redniss
illustrator

Maira Kalman
illustrator

Edel Rodriguez
illustrator

“ I came to SVA with a hazy sense of what I wanted to do. The program has supplied a map to my future career.”

—Joanna Neborsky (MFA 2009)



Jeff Lowry (MFA 2016) is a Tucson, Arizona-based illustrator. His style can be described as a mishmash of the '90s, cartoons, bad movies, comics and far too many video games. His clients include Nike, BuzzFeed and Moleskine. jefflowryillustration.com.

Application Process

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

For a full list of application requirements and detailed instructions, visit:

sva.edu/grad/howtoapply

- Online Application and \$80 Application Fee: sva.edu/apply

DEADLINES

For information on application deadlines, visit: sva.edu/grad/timeline

IMPORTANT LINKS

- FAQ: sva.edu/grad/faq
- International students: sva.edu/grad/intl
- Tuition and fees: sva.edu/tuition
- Visit SVA: sva.edu/grad/visit

Contact Us

We encourage applicants to visit our department. Contact us directly to schedule a departmental tour or sign up to attend an Information Session. For more information and to register, go to: sva.edu/grad/visit.

If you have any questions about the application process, contact Graduate Admissions at 212.592.2107 or email: gradadmissions@sva.edu.

Riccardo Vecchio, chair
Kim Ablondi, director of operations

Tel: 212.592.2210

Email: mfaillustration@sva.edu

Site: sva.edu/mfaillustration

Joana Avillez (MFA 2012) has illustrated for Gucci, Hermès, The Museum of Modern Art, The New Yorker, New York magazine, The New York Times, The Paris Review, and more. joanaavillez.com.



ACCREDITATION

The School of Visual Arts has been authorized by the New York State Board of Regents (www.highered.nysed.gov) to confer the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Advertising; Animation; Comics; Computer Art, Computer Animation and Visual Effects; Design; Film; Fine Arts; Illustration; Interior Design; Photography and Video; Visual and Critical Studies; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts on graduates of programs in Art Education; Curatorial Practice; Design Research, Writing and Criticism; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching on graduates of the program in Art Education; and to confer the degree of Master of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Art Practice; Computer Arts; Design; Design for Social Innovation; Fine Arts; Illustration as Visual Essay; Interaction Design; Photography, Video and Related Media; Products of Design; Social Documentary Film; Visual Narrative; and to confer the degree of Master of Professional Studies on graduates of programs in Art Therapy; Branding; Digital Photography; Directing; Fashion Photography.

The School of Visual Arts is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (msche.org), 1007 North Orange Street, 4th Floor, MB #166, Wilmington, DE 19801, 267-284-5011. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation.

The Interior Design program leading to the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interior Design is accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (accredit-id.org), 206 Grandville Avenue, Suite 305, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503-4014.

The School of Visual Arts' Department of Art Education is a member in good standing of the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP), a national accrediting organization recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

The School of Visual Arts' Department of Art Education is currently pursuing accreditation of its educator preparation programs under the AAQEP standards with an anticipated quality assurance review in fall 2023. Pursuant to Section 52.21 of the

Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, the educator preparation programs offered by the School of Visual Arts are therefore considered to be continuously accredited for purposes of meeting the New York State requirement that all such programs maintain continuous accreditation.

The School of Visual Arts' Master of Arts in Teaching in Art Education program was previously accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

The MPS Art Therapy program is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (www.caahep.org) upon the recommendation of the Accreditation Council for Art Therapy Education. Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs, 25400 US Hwy 19N, Suite 158, Clearwater, FL 33763, 727-210-2350. The program meets all educational requirements for licensure in New York State as a Creative Arts Therapist (LCAT) and Registered Art Therapist (ATR) with the Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB).

CREDITS

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COVER: Keith Negley (MFA 2013)

School of Visual Arts

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