

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY'S FACULTY OF FINE ARTS

The Fine in Fine Arts

by Dorota Kozinska

Concordia University in Montreal is one of the top educational institutions in this country, with 45,954 students enrolled in its courses according to the latest statistics. And its flagship, without a doubt, is the Faculty of Fine Arts.

In its 40-year history, the artists, historians and creative minds within the Faculty's many departments helped produce outstanding graduates and gain a reputation as one of the top fine arts schools in North America. With 3,184 undergraduate and 603 graduate students, 119 full-time and 142 part-time faculty members, as well as 11 research chairs, 59 programmes and nine departments, it's also one of the largest — and one of the most sought after. This year, Rebecca Duclos became the new dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts. Previously dean of Graduate Studies at the renowned School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she also had an appointment as

professor of Visual and Critical Studies, she says she is looking "forward to returning to Concordia, to meeting faculty and students from across the school, and to promoting the exceptional work and research emerging from the Faculty of Fine Arts." She has her job cut out for her.

A Short Story of the Department of Fine Arts

The road from there to here began about 45 years ago. In 1960, Leah Sherman was the first full-time fine arts professor hired by Sir George Williams, where she had been teaching courses in art education, studio and art history.



Concordia's Engineering, Computer Science and Visual Arts Integrated Complex features a mural by Nicolas Baier.
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Soon after, the university established the Department of Fine Arts of the Faculty of Arts, and the department quickly grew in size and prominence. At the time of the merger of Sir George and Loyola College to produce Concordia in 1974, Loyola had been offering a BA with majors in drama and art and art history. The next year, 1975, Concordia's Senate approved the creation of the Faculty of Fine Arts, with the performing arts division to be located at Loyola and the visual arts division at Sir George.

The Faculty's growing popularity and educational diversity soon led to overcrowding, eased somewhat with the acquisition of the Visual Arts (VA) Building on Dorchester (now René-Lévesque) Blvd in 1979. The building, constructed in 1923, had originally been a garage and then home to a car dealership, an unlikely place for fine arts students. Although it went through a costly and lengthy reconstruction, the VA Building always proved to be a challenge for the burgeoning student body and its needs.

In 1981, the Faculty reorganized again, resulting in the formation of nine departments. Those evolved into today's departments: Art Education; Art History; the Mel Hoppenheim

School of Cinema; Contemporary Dance; Creative Arts Therapies; Design and Computation Arts; Music; Studio Arts; and Theatre.

A New Complex

In 2005, most of the Department of Studio Arts, plus Fine Arts' administrative offices, Centre for Digital Arts, Art History Slide Library, Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies in Canadian Art, and Institute of Research/Creation in Media Arts and Technology — known as Hexagram — moved into the newly opened EV Complex.

The premises for Fine Arts' new EV headquarters on the corner of Ste. Catherine and Guy streets have made their mark on downtown Montreal. A magnificent organic glass mural, conceived by artist-photographer Nicolas Baier, attendee '94, and Montreal design team Cabinet Braun-Brañ, adorns its eastern façade. The modern, energy-efficient facility is equipped with sophisticated technological infrastructure, offering endless working and training spaces for students of both faculties in two towers. "Synergy" and "cross-pollination" are among the terms being used to describe the possible new opportunities for research with its neighbours.

The creative minds did not wait long to take advantage of the new opportunity. One of the first occupants was Hexagram, which takes up the top two floors (10 and 11). Drawing on the talents of more than 60 members from fine arts, computer design and communication studies programmes at Concordia, Université du Québec à Montréal and Université de Montréal, it offers a virtual forum for discussions on research in the digital arts field. Working in close collaboration with industry, Hexagram's aim is to make Montreal one of the major centres for research and creation in media arts.

As the Faculty of Fine Arts adjusted to a new image and understanding of its vision in the rapidly changing environment, it had a rare opportunity to become much more than the sum of its many parts. Those parts are embodied by the diverse faculty members, certainly the heart of Fine Arts.

The Faculty's largest department remains Studio Arts, which offers programmes in ceramics, fibres, painting and drawing, photography, print media, sculpture and studio arts — a multidisciplinary array of activities with students moving freely between specialized areas. But within these traditional disciplines lie advancing ties to technology, such as Intermedia Cyber Arts (IMCA) programme, combining performance, installation, music, sound and video, and a course in electronic arts.

The smaller departments offer diverse choices for students and possibly a chance to work with the community. The Creative Arts Therapies, for example, is the only program in Canada to offer a master's in Art Therapy, and it also features a master's in Drama Therapy. The department is extremely proud of the calibre of professionals it produces as well as its outreach into the community, through links to the National Drama Association and institutions such as Les Impatients, which offers artistic opportunities for the mentally disabled, and the Montreal's Children's hospital.

Interdisciplinary Approach

The Faculty of Fine Arts has long encouraged its faculty to expand its boundaries. Marion Wagschal, (S BA 65), has been teaching at the university for the over 30 years while developing and establishing an impressive career as a painter. Over the years, she has seen the Faculty, as she describes, "unfolding and changing together with the changes taking place in contemporary art."

About the Fine Arts' increasingly interdisciplinary approach Wagschal says: "Such cross-fertilization of talent is very good. It offers an opportunity for a lively discourse in art. We are free; it allows us to respond to things and create new things." ●

