Each student takes courses in drawing, design, and color theory, and selects from electives in printmaking, painting, sculpture, photography, four-dimensional studio, and interdisciplinary arts.

Through pairing traditional arts training with contemporary art-making practices, the Visual Arts Department’s curriculum equally values process and product. Faculty teach technical skills that build critical integrity to cultivate young artists who are independent and ambitious thinkers and makers.

During a student’s first year in the Visual Arts Department, they develop technical facility with various mediums and art forms. In advanced years, students develop a portfolio and create a body of work. Photoshop and digital mediums are integrated across the Visual Arts curriculum. Students regularly showcase their work through juried and school exhibitions, in addition to professional engagements.

The Academy believes it is not what an exceptional art portfolio looks like that makes it unique, it is what that exceptional portfolio thinks like that makes each student’s work distinct.

Within the Visual Arts Department framework of studio practice, critique, and exhibition, students develop skills to articulate their ideas and process, and become self-directed in pursuing their own subject matter and concept areas in their artwork.

“I’ll never forget the excitement of installation week and the long hours Marsha would spend in the studio—plaster dust footprints left behind. The Visual Arts Department represents a unique bond among its students and instructors.”

-Michele, Visual Arts Parent

Maxine Zhou (left), Marsha Abramson (center), and Olivia Mulholland (right), Senior Exhibitions 2017, 2018, and 2019

The Chicago Academy for the Arts

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What can students expect from the Visual Arts Department?

Students in the Visual Arts Department participate in five exhibitions throughout the school year. Additionally, the Department frequently visits galleries and museums around Chicago, and students are expected to incorporate these influences in their own work and exhibit curation.

Visual Arts students undergo different evaluation processes depending on their year. Freshmen and sophomores individually consult with Visual Arts faculty at the end of each semester to discuss their strengths and room for growth. Through constructive criticism and self-evaluation, students gain invaluable perspective on their work as artists.

The Visual Arts Department evaluates students most intensively at the end of their junior year. Students present 15 works, including five in a series, and an artist statement to Visual Arts faculty and one academic instructor. Juniors prepare for this presentation—constructed to teach students how to articulate their point of view and process, and to prepare them for college—throughout the year, including by attending statement seminars.

Seniors apply for scholarships through the National Foundation for the Advancement in the Arts (NFAA) and spend the majority of the year preparing their thesis to be presented at their Senior Exhibition.

Recent College Acceptances

Bard College
Central St. Martins (London)
Colorado College
The Cooper Union
Kansas City Art Institute
Maryland Institute College of Arts
Milwaukee Institute for Art and Design
Minneapolis College of Art and Design
Parsons New School of Design (New York & Paris)
Pratt Institute
Rhode Island School of Design
School of the Art Institute (Chicago)

Maxine Zhou, Senior Exhibition 2019