

# Visual Arts

*Director of Undergraduate Studies: Robert Peters, Midway Studios,  
753-4821*

*Departmental Secretary: Rebecca Meyers, Midway Studios, 753-4821,  
listhost@cova.uchicago.edu*

*Web: [humanities.uchicago.edu/cmtes/midway/](http://humanities.uchicago.edu/cmtes/midway/)*

## Program of Study

The Committee on the Visual Arts (COVA) is concerned with the making of art both as an individual expression and as a vehicle for exploring creativity, perception, and the constructed world. Whether students take COVA courses to meet a general education requirement or as part of a concentration in Visual Arts, the goal is that they will develop communicative, analytical, and expressive skills through the process of artistic production. COVA 10000-level courses are intended for students with no studio background and are appropriate for meeting the general education requirement in the dramatic, musical, and visual arts. More advanced courses presume that students have taken at least one of these, usually COVA 10100. (See individual course listings for specific prerequisites.)

**Range of Course Offerings.** COVA 10100, 10200, and 15000 serve as introductory courses to the elements of visual communication and the critical investigation of art. COVA 10100 and 10200 introduce elementary visual communication through the manipulation of various materials in the studio and also include readings and visits to local museums and galleries. These courses engage principles of visual language stressing the relationship of form and meaning. COVA 15000, which is primarily intended for concentrators, examines the place of artistic practice in contemporary culture. COVA 20000 to 24900 are media specific courses that begin to teach technical skills and provide a conceptual framework for working in these media (e.g., painting, photography, sculpture, video). COVA 25000 to 26900 are nonstudio courses in the theory and criticism of art. COVA 27000 to 28200 are more advanced studio courses.

## Program Requirements

The B.A. program in the Committee on the Visual Arts is intended for students interested in the practice and study of art. The Committee's faculty consists of a core of artists and other humanists interested in making and thinking about art. Those who concentrate in Visual Arts take an individually arranged program of studio, lecture, and seminar courses that may include some courses outside the Humanities Collegiate Division. The program seeks to foster understanding of art from several perspectives: the practice and intention of the creator, the visual conventions employed, and the perception and critical reception of the audience. In addition to work in the studio, these aims might require study of art history and intellectual history, as well as psychology, criticism, and aesthetics. Because of the diversity of student interests and the Committee's interdisciplinary orientation, requirements for the concentration are flexible. All students

must take a core of COVA 10100, 10200, and 15000 as early in their studies as possible. After taking the core courses, but no later than Winter Quarter of their third year, concentrators meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to plan the rest of their program. At least two of the courses beyond the core must be drawn from the second level of predominantly studio-oriented offerings (COVA 20000 to 24900). The remaining five courses may be any intellectually consistent combination of COVA studio courses, COVA critical and theory courses (COVA 25000 to 26900), and any other relevant offerings in the College. Up to two independent study courses that are relevant to the concentration may be counted toward these five electives. (For more information, consult the sample programs of study that follow.) As preparation for the senior project, students must take COVA 29600 in the spring of their third year. This studio seminar examines approaches to independent studio projects. The culminating experience of the COVA concentration is a senior project consisting of a studio project and/or an extended paper that represents a coherent line of inquiry. This work, for which students may receive credit in COVA 29900, is done under the supervision of a primary adviser and must also be approved by the Director of Undergraduate Studies. In the summer between the third and fourth years it is expected that concentrators prepare themselves to present their ideas for the senior project at a group critique at the beginning of the academic year. *(NOTE: The Visual Arts concentration, taken as it is in the context of the College's liberal arts tradition, does not normally prepare a student for admission to an M.F.A. program without additional studio work.)*

### Summary of Requirements

<b>General Education</b>		introductory art history, drama, or music course
<b>Concentration</b>	2	COVA 10100-10200
	1	COVA 15000
	1	COVA 29600 (junior seminar)
	1	COVA 29900 (senior project)
	2	from COVA 20000-24900
	<u>5</u>	electives relevant to the concentration
	12	

**Sample Programs.** The Committee encourages its students either to focus their concentration in the studio or to construct interdisciplinary concentration programs combining studio and nonstudio courses that focus on a particular theme. The examples below are suggestions only:

- (1) A program that explores relationships of image and text in the construction of narratives, combining courses in drawing and graphics with courses in creative writing, literature, and art history.
- (2) A program that explores issues of identity construction through image making, and combines courses in painting, sculpture, drawing, and photography with courses in anthropology, art history, and gender studies.
- (3) A program in the practice of painting exploring aesthetic form as a vehicle for individual expression, including art history and philosophy courses.

(4) A studio-based program in photography that concentrates on black-and-white silver-gelatin processes, and includes a thorough investigation of the history and conceptual framework of the medium.

(5) A program that investigates issues surrounding representations of the body (including an engagement with contemporary and historic practices in visual art and film, as well as feminist, gender, race, and class theory) and concludes in an installation of a series of photographs.

(6) A studio-based program in sculpture that examines how our sensory or kinesthetic knowledge of our bodies differs greatly from how we are seen as objects in space by others (possibly including additional courses in the history of art and in anatomy).

**Grading.** COVA students must receive quality grades for the twelve courses that constitute the concentration. Students must also receive quality grades if they are taking COVA courses to meet the general education requirement in the dramatic, musical, and visual arts. Students concentrating in other departments may take COVA courses for *P/N* grades with the consent of their adviser and instructor.

**Honors.** COVA students who have a 3.0 or higher overall GPA and a 3.5 or higher GPA for all COVA course work may be awarded honors. The work submitted will be reviewed for honors by the COVA faculty.

### Faculty

C. Cohen, T. Cohen, T. Cummins, H. George, T. Gunning, M. Hansen, R. Heller, L. Letinsky, H. Mirra, R. Peters, K. Rorschach, A. Ruttan, J. Snyder, R. Strier, M. Ward

### Courses: Committee on the Visual Arts (COVA)

*Students must attend the first and second classes to confirm enrollment. No exceptions will be made unless the student notifies the instructor before the first class.*

#### *Introductory Courses*

**10100. Visual Language I.** *COVA 10100 and 10200 may be taken individually and in any order. This course meets the general education requirement in the dramatic, musical, and visual arts.* Through studio production and analysis of visual images and objects, this course engages the communicative, analytical, and expressive possibilities of the range of images animating contemporary visual culture. The studio is used to explore the principles, conventions, and inventions of image making. Emphasis is placed on the give-and-take process of making as a means to understand the relationships between the intent of the maker and the content, appearance, and meanings generated by images. Focusing primarily on two-dimensional images, among the issues which may be explored are originality and

reproduction, color, surface organization, spatial illusion, the communicative properties of materials, and the recognition of accident and chance as artistic resources. *Previous experience in media-based studio courses will not normally be accepted as a replacement for this course. Visits to museums, galleries, and other cultural and commercial sites required, as is attendance at designated events. Lab fee \$40. Autumn, Winter, Spring.*

**10200. Visual Language II.** *COVA 10100 and 10200 may be taken individually and in any order. This course meets the general education requirement in the dramatic, musical, and visual arts. Through the examination of three-dimensional forms and a series of studio problems, this course is designed to develop the formal and conceptual skills necessary to think visually—to “see” and to experience the vast array of objects, spaces, and ideas embedded in the contemporary cultural landscape. Emphasis is placed on the give-and-take process of making (which may include the construction and analysis of objects, alteration of spaces, or the placement/arrangement/collection of objects) as a vehicle for students to learn how ideas, thoughts, and emotions take physical form and generate meaning. Previous experience in media-based studio courses will not normally be accepted as a replacement for this course. Visits to museums, galleries, and other cultural and commercial sites required, as is attendance at designated events. Lab fee \$20. H. George, R. Peters. Autumn, Winter, Spring.*

**15000. Art Practice and Theory.** *PQ: Required of all COVA concentrators and should be taken before the senior year. Open to nonconcentrators with consent of instructor. This course does not meet the general education requirement in the dramatic, musical, and visual arts. This course examines the place of artistic practice in contemporary culture and the rhetoric of images. Emphasis is placed on the visual arts, examining discourses such as: the assignment of value to works, the formation of taste, the relationship between individual production and institutional practices, the role of authorship (intentionality) in the construction of meaning, the gate-keeping functions of curatorial and critical practice, the function and maintenance of categorical distinctions constituting “otherness” (high/low, naive, primitive, outside), the relationship between truth and authenticity, the uses of art (e.g., transcendence, decoration, activism, therapy, play). Visits to museums, galleries, and other cultural and commercial sites required, as is attendance at designated events. Winter.*

#### *Intermediate-Level Courses*

**21200. Figure Drawing.** *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or consent of instructor. The live model provides the basic reference for this course. Problems develop comprehension of traditional approaches to the human figure in art and explore the means by which the figure may embody contemporary ideas. Class sessions include studio work, criticism, and visits to local collections. Lab fee \$60. Autumn.*

**21500. Graphics: Etching.** *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or consent of instructor.* The class consists of basic studies of the intaglio process through art-historical references, technical demonstrations, and studio work. The work is critiqued during each stage of the procedure from the inception of the idea of the sketches, proof prints, final prints, and presentation of a portfolio. Various techniques are introduced, such as engraving, aquatint, mezzotint, soft ground, dry point, and lift ground. Artistic questions raised specifically by these techniques are discussed and considered in relation to the final portfolio of prints. *Lab fee \$60. Winter.*

**21900. Color Theory and Practice.** *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or consent of instructor.* An introduction to color for students in all media. Color is looked at using various theoretical, cultural, and historical models as well as intuitive and conceptual approaches to working. Instruction includes the use of a variety of media such as drawing, painting, collage, photography, and digital. Design and fine art models are used to explore this complex area of visual expression. *Lab fee \$30. A. Ruttan. Winter.*

**22000-22100. Beginning Painting.** *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or consent of instructor.* This studio course introduces students to the fundamental elements of painting (its language and methodologies) as they learn how to initiate and develop an individualized investigation into subject matter and meaning. The class emphasizes group critiques and discussion. *Lab fee \$25. Autumn, Winter.*

**22200. Sculpture I.** *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or consent of instructor.* Meant as an introduction to sculpture, this course explores how it is possible through questioning, discussions, and, most importantly, making to progress towards highly individual insights into the fundamental nature of what at first appears to be an obvious and well known form: the egg. Three sculptures are made. The most important is the last, as it attempts to clearly communicate the individual insight of the sculptor into the true nature of the egg. Starting at the same point, we end with radically different sculptures resulting from individual insights and imagination. Thus, it may be understood that sculpture is human thought given aesthetic and material form. *Visits to museums, galleries, and other cultural and commercial sites required, as is attendance at designated events. Lab fee \$30. H. George. Autumn.*

**22400. Modeling the Figure.** *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or consent of instructor.* A live model provides the basic reference point for this course. The work of the quarter is divided into two parts: the full figure and the portrait. Both are formed in clay using a traditional academic studio setting. The fundamental objective of this class is for the student to begin to understand the important difference between looking and knowing, between the eye seeing and the hand making. Although we inhabit a body, we have little visual understanding of its true form. *Visits to museums, galleries, and other cultural and commercial sites required, as is attendance at designated events; one outside project required. Lab fee \$50. H. George. Autumn.*

**22500. Digital Imaging.** (=CMST 28800) *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or consent of instructor.* Using the Macintosh platform, this course serves as an introduction to the use of digital technology as a means of making visual art. Instruction covers the Photoshop graphics program as well as digital imaging

hardware (i.e., scanners, storage, printing). In addition, we address problems of color, design, collage, and drawing. Topics of discussion may include questions regarding the mediated image and its relationship to art as well as examining what constitutes the “real” in contemporary culture. *Lab fee \$60. A. Ruttan. Autumn.*

**23700. Video I: Short Experiments.** (=CMST 28900) *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or consent of instructor.* An introduction to videomaking with digital cameras and non-linear (digital) editing. Students produce a group of short works, which is contextualized by viewing and discussion of historical and contemporary video works. Video versus film, editing strategies, and appropriation are some of the subjects that are part of an ongoing conversation. *Lab fee \$60. H. Mirra. Winter.*

**23801. Video Workshop.** (=CMST 28903) *PQ: COVA 23700 or consent of instructor.* A production course geared towards short experimental works and video within a studio art context. Screenings include recent works by Harrison and Wood, Fischli and Weiss, Martin Kersels, Jane and Louise Wilson, Halflifers, Douglas Gordon, and others. Discussions and readings address non-narrative strategies, rapidly changing technology, and viable approaches to producing video art in a world full of video images. *Lab fee \$60. H. Mirra. Spring.*

**24000. Beginning Photography.** (=CMST 27600/37600) *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or consent of instructor. Camera and light meter required.* Photography affords a relatively simple and accessible means for making pictures. Demonstrations are used to introduce technical procedures and basic skills, and to begin to establish criteria for artistic expression. Possibilities and limitations inherent in the medium are topics of classroom discussion. We investigate the contemporary photograph in relation to its historical and social context. Course work culminates in a portfolio of works exemplary of the student’s understanding of the medium. *Field trips required. Lab fee \$60. L. Letinsky, Autumn; Staff, Winter, Spring.*

**24200. Art and Experience.** *PQ: COVA 10100, 10200, or 15000; or consent of instructor.* This course deals with art forms that deemphasize the importance of the object. These contemporary, nontraditional art forms (e.g., concept, process, performance, body) are examined through readings that provide a theoretical and historical framework for discussion and studio investigation. *R. Peters. Winter.*

#### *Theory and Criticism Courses*

**25300. Introduction to Film Analysis.** (=ARTH 20000, CMST 10100, ENGL 10800, ISHU 20000) This course introduces basic concepts of film analysis, which are discussed through examples from different national cinemas, genres, and directorial oeuvres. Along with questions of film technique and style, we consider the notion of the cinema as an institution that comprises an industrial system of production, social and aesthetic norms and codes, and particular modes of reception. Films discussed include works by Hitchcock, Porter, Griffith, Eisenstein, Lang, Renoir, Sternberg, and Welles. *J. Lastra. Autumn.*

**25400. Theories of Media.** (=ENGL 12900/32800) *W. J. T. Mitchell. Winter.*

**25551. Twentieth-Century Styles.** (=ISHU 25550) *PQ: Consent of instructor.* How does the dramatic artist with a vision or concept reminiscent of particular genre and philosophy of art express that impulse through performance or design? This class is grounded in neo-classicism and romanticism, and relies on dramaturgical research into specific periods. Readings may include Ibsen, Goethe, Racine, and Zola's *Diatribes on Naturalism*. Styles examined may include futurism and constructivism, German expressionism, and the theater of Brecht. *M. Lohman. Autumn.*

**25700. Scene Painting.** (=ISHU 26200) *PQ: Consent of instructor.* This course is an exploration of the basic tools and techniques of classical theatrical scene painting. Scene painting is a unique art that uses techniques and tools not associated with other types of painting. Some projects include faux finishes, foliage, scrim, and backdrops. *M. Lohman. Spring.*

**26300. The History of Photography, 1800 to 1950.** (=ARTH 26400, HIPS 25300) This course studies in detail the invention of the photographic system as a confluence of art practice and technology. The aesthetic history of photography is traced from 1839 through the present. Special emphasis is placed on the critical writing of P. H. Emerson, Erwin Panofsky, Alfred Stieglitz, Lewis Mumford, Susan Sontag, and Michael Fried. *J. Snyder. Winter.*

**26400. Lighting Design for Stage and Film.** (=ISHU 26400) *PQ: ISHU 20010 or consent of instructor.* This is a basic exploration of the theory and practice of lighting design for both theater and motion pictures. Students develop theatrical lighting vocabulary, knowledge of basic electrical theory, color theory, theory of light, design tools, and the actual instruments used to light the stage through lectures and projects. *M. Lohman. Winter.*

**26500. History of International Cinema I: Silent Era.** (=ARTH 28500/38500, CMST 28500/48500, ENGL 29300/47800, MAPH 33600) *This is the first part of a two-quarter course. The two parts may be taken individually, but taking them in sequence is helpful.* The aim of this course is to introduce students to what was singular about the art and craft of silent film. Its general outline is chronological. We also discuss main national schools and international trends of filmmaking. *T. Gunning. Winter.*

**26600. History of International Cinema II: Sound Era to 1960.** (=ARTH 28600/38600, CMST 28600/48600, ENGL 29600/48900, MAPH 33700) *PQ: COVA 26500 strongly recommended.* Film style, from the classical scene breakdown to the introduction of deep focus, stylistic experimentation, and technical innovation (sound, wide screen, location shooting) forms the center of this course, while the development of a film culture is also discussed. Texts include Thompson Bordwell's *Film History, an Introduction* and works by Bazin, Belton, Sitney, and Godard. Screenings include films by Hitchcock, Welles, Rossellini, Bresson, Ozu, Antonioni, and Renoir. *R. Gregg. Spring.*

**26700/30100. Early Video Art, 1968 to 1979.** (=CMST 28700/38700) A survey of the first wave of video art in the United States. We screen and discuss the first ten years of video produced by artists and activists, primarily on the East Coast and in California, including Bruce Nauman, John Baldessari, Martha Rosler, Eleanor Antin, and Top Value Television. Much of the work we look at in this new medium was made as an auxiliary activity by artists already working in sculpture, conceptual art, and performance. We analyze the work as it relates both to this art context and to the sociopolitical climate of the 1970s. *Lab fee \$30. H. Mirra. Winter.*

**26800/36800. Manifestations in Modernism: The Year 1913.** (ARTH 26700/36700) *PQ: Any 10000-level ARTH or COVA course, or consent of instructor.* Around 1913, classical Modernism reached its apogee in the visual arts. The tendencies that had emerged beginning in the late nineteenth century matured, and major innovations (ranging from the invocation of abstraction in painting and sculpture to the further subversion of traditional art concepts in the “ready-made”) reached systematic formulations. Using several exhibitions as a focus, this course explores critically the varieties of Modernist work, reception, and theory. *R. Heller. Spring.*

**27501/37501. Modern/Post-Modern.** (=ARTH 27500/37500) *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or 10000-level ARTH course, or consent of instructor.* Between modernity and post-modernity lay one of the hottest debates in recent intellectual history. Since the 1970s, artists, critics, and others have been variously engaged with the questions and conflicts that obtain here. We focus on a number of key strains and on a question: Why has this dichotomy never been resolved? *D. English. Spring.*

**29000/39000. Real World: Models and Strategies for Contemporary Artists.** *PQ: Open to nonconcentrators with consent of instructor.* This course uses both theoretical and practical approaches to assess various strategies for presenting contemporary art. Through readings, lectures, field trips, projects, and discussions, students gain an overview of historical and contemporary exhibition models. We consider contemporary artists’ uses of sites (e.g., museums and galleries) and a range of alternatives (e.g., artist-curated exhibitions and collaborative work, as well as Web-based, guerilla, site specific, and ephemeral projects). Students broaden their understanding of existing models of presentation and begin considering how these relate to their own practice. *A. Ruttan, S. Smith. Autumn.*

#### *Advanced-Level Studio Courses*

**24300. Color Photography.** *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, and 24000 or 24100; or consent of instructor. A camera and light meter are required.* Course work is directed towards the investigation of color photographic materials, specifically with color negative film to make chromagenic prints. Students focus on a set of issues and ideas that expand upon their experience and knowledge. An investigation of contemporary and historic photographic issues informs the students’ exploration as does extensive darkroom work, gallery visits, and class and individual critiques. *Visits to local exhibitions and darkroom work required. Lab fee \$60. L. Letinsky. Winter*



**27200. Advanced Painting.** *PQ: COVA 22000 and 22100, or consent of instructor.* Presuming fundamental considerations, this studio course emphasizes the purposeful and sustained development of a student's visual investigation through painting, accentuating both invention and clarity of image. *Group critiques and discussion. Lab fee \$25. Spring.*

**27801. Advanced Photography, Black and White.** *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, and 24000 or 24100; or consent of instructor.* A camera and light meter are required. Students focus on a set of issues and ideas that expand upon their experience and knowledge, and that have particular relevance to them. All course work is directed toward the production of a cohesive body of black-and-white photographs. An investigation of contemporary and historic photographic issues informs the students' photographic practice and includes critical readings, as well as group and individual critiques. *Visits to local exhibitions and darkroom work required. Lab fee \$60. L. Letinsky. Winter.*

**28200. Sculpture III.** *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, or consent of instructor.* This studio class is a continuation of COVA 22200, 22300, and 22400 but they are not prerequisites. The first half of this class is devoted to learning about formalist/nonrepresentational sculpture, both its beginning in the Soviet Union and its later rebirth as minimalist art in the 1970s. One large nonrepresentational work is constructed in the first half of the quarter, while the second half is devoted to a more "open problem" that is carved from stone in the outdoors. We ask: Although these two traditions appear to be very different, are they? And then, can aspects of both be used to form a new sculptural understanding? *Visits to museums, galleries, and other cultural and commercial sites required, as is attendance at designated events. Lab fee \$10 plus cost of stone. H. George. Spring.*

#### *Independent Study Courses*

**29600. Junior Seminar.** *PQ: Required of concentrators and should be taken in the Spring Quarter of their third year. Open to nonconcentrators with consent of Director of Undergraduate Studies.* This seminar prepares COVA majors for their senior project. The project is an independent studio project or a combined studio/research paper project that begins in the summer preceding the senior year. Students engage in two main activities: (1) a series of studio projects challenging the imagination and enlarging formal skills; and (2) an introduction to the contemporary art world through selected readings, lectures, careful analysis of art objects/events, and critical writing. Studio projects are conceptually structured, allowing students to respond with individualized materials and approaches. Studio skills are developed while contending with the central task of articulating ideas through a resistant medium. *Visits to museums, galleries, and other cultural and commercial sites required, as is attendance at designated events. R. Peters. Spring.*

**29700. Independent Study in Visual Arts.** *PQ: COVA 10100 or 10200, and consent of instructor.* Students are required to submit the College Reading and Research Course Form. This course is similar to reading courses in other academic areas. We presume that the student has done fundamental course work and is ready to explore a particular area of interest much more closely. *Autumn, Winter, Spring.*

**29900. Senior Project.** *PQ: Required of concentrators. Consent of Director of Undergraduate Studies. Students are required to submit the College Reading and Research Course Form.* This course provides an opportunity for a “summing up.” It is a chance to work in a sustained way on a group of paintings or photographs, for example. This work is then presented as part of a graduation show. As an alternative, one might do a paper that examines issues that may have emerged from the studio and academic experience. *Autumn, Winter, Spring.*