University

| University of British Columbia (founded 1908) |

Founding Date of Department

| 1958 |

Names of Department

| 1958–2001 Department of Fine Arts |
| 2001–present Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory |

History of Department Composition (i.e., Has art history been taught alone or alongside studio art, humanities, performing arts, etc.?)

The department has offered both art history and studio courses since its inception in 1958 (prior to the founding of the department, courses in these areas had been offered as early as 1947/48 through the School of Architecture). Of note, from 1957 to 1961 studio courses were available for credit only to students in the Faculty and College of Education (thereafter, students in the Faculty of Arts, of which the Department of Fine Arts was a part, could receive credit). Studio and art history are still together in the department today.

Degrees Offered

| 1958: BA with Art History major |
| 1961: MA in Art History |
| 1970: BFA in Visual Art |
| 1975: Diploma in Art History |
| 1980: MFA in Visual Art |
| 1983: PhD in Art History |
| 2001: MA in Critical and Curatorial Studies |

Programmes Offered

See above.

Is visual culture or visual studies taught in your department? If so, when were tenure-stream faculty in these areas hired?

For the first forty-five years, the art history courses offered in the department were designed and delivered according to geographic region and time period, in the traditional mode that characterized the discipline—and the “fine arts” (painting, sculpture, drawing) and architecture were the focus in the Western courses; additionally, traditional crafts and carving in the “non-Western.” In the 1982/83 calendar, the History of Film is offered for the first time (cross-listed with the Theatre Department).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s in tandem with shifts in the discipline toward the “new art history,”
new faculty members in the department began to deliver the established courses with a more expansive approach to mediums (including print media, craft, posters, photography, popular culture, etc.)

The early 2000s were a period of curriculum renewal and a shift toward more thematic courses that continued the incorporation of “visual culture” in existing courses. The development of thematic courses that transcend era and geographic region continues today.

In 2015 a third-year History of Photography survey course was offered for the first time, although photography had long been a topic in seminars and included in other surveys.

No tenure-track faculty members have ever been hired specifically to teach visual culture, although several have researched and published in this area and deliver courses with visual culture as a primary focus.

University Museum or Gallery (including dates founded and relationship to department)

  - Previously known as “The Fine Arts Gallery” and “The Art Centre”
  - Opened December 1948
  - “The Art Gallery has no permanent collection but maintains a continuous display of loan exhibitions. These are rented or borrowed from the National Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art, the Western Canada Art Circuit, the Western (American) Association of Art Museum Directors and other galleries and circuits. Other shows are exhibited, on the invitation of the Art Gallery, by local and other artists, art organizations and institutions. Because it has these numerous sources of material, the Gallery is able to bring to the University a wide variety of exhibitions which are representative of the principal trends in art. Many of the exhibitions are accompanied by explanatory talks, given by the artists concerned, the Curator and other members of the Faculty, and by discussions.”
  - “Since its establishment in 1958, the Department of Fine Arts has taken over responsibility for the Gallery”

  - The UBC Fine Arts Gallery was founded in 1948 and located in the basement of Main Library on the University campus. For much of its early history, the Fine Arts Gallery was the only venue in the Vancouver region to focus exclusively on contemporary art. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Gallery achieved a national profile with exhibitions that explored what is now known as cultural studies, and by presenting innovative work by artists who would establish Vancouver as an international centre. The Gallery was used exclusively as exhibition space until 1994, when it began to house and administrate the University Art Collection ... On June 14, 1995, the Fine Arts Gallery was rededicated the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery and opened its new premises at 1825 Main Mall.

- **Museum of Anthropology (1976–present)**
  - The Museum of Anthropology, with the Departments of Anthropology and Sociology and Fine Arts, offers theoretical and practical training in Museum Studies as a component of undergraduate and graduate degree programs.
  - The department has used the museum as a teaching and research resource (and occasion collaborative exhibition space) since it opened in 1976.
**Sessional Faculty:** We would like to acknowledge the contributions of four additional members who were longtime lecturers in our department, to highlight their significant contributions as teachers, supervisors, and curriculum developers, and to note that key subject areas were taught in the department longer than a map of only tenure-track appointments might suggest. **Joel Brink** (lecturer 1972-79, Renaissance; BA Wesleyan, MA Oberlin), **David Cottington** (lecturer 1972-78; modern art [cubism, Marxist art history]; BA Oxford, MA Courtauld, PhD Courtauld), **Marc Pessin** (lecturer 1974-96; medieval; BA NYU, MA Berkeley), **Doreen Walker** (lecturer 1969-85; Canadian art; BA UBC, MA UBC). In particular, Doreen Walker established the study of Canadian art in our department (and was a significant figure, even nationally, in this specialization). The presence of these longtime lecturers in the department (appointed during the 1970s) also speaks to a period in the department when faculty appointments did not require the terminal PhD degree (and this makes sense, given that we did not offer a PhD in art history until 1983).

**Debate over the Department Name Change in 2001:**
“the Department changed its name from Fine Arts to the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory to better encapsulate the innovative teaching and interdisciplinary research interests of the faculty.” [AHVA website]

“The visual arts … moved into a more academic realm, symbolized by a change of name in 2001 from Fine Arts to the Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory. The intention was to reflect the growing scholarly and research-oriented character of the department.” [Eric Damer and Herbert Rosengarten. *UBC the First 100 Years* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2009), 159, 282.]

**Some additional comments (2017) from faculty members who took part in the discussions are pasted below, for further context:**

“It was important then to redirect the department towards a more intellectual direction, away from traditional connoisseurship. Theory—helping understanding art and ideology—was then the key.”

“‘Fine Arts Department’ was embarrassing as it implied an elitist perspective at a remove from the everyday and the social function of the visual. From 1987 on, there was an emphasis on the everyday, on cultural politics and on the embeddedness of the visual in a social world and a highly charged world.”

“The debate was about the desire to highlight the innovative theory and political and historical research orientation that we felt set our department out as different from others in Canada—on the studio side as well as art history. We wanted to be, and considered we were, something different from arts appreciation and entertainment. Even at the time, many thought the name was somewhat cumbersome, but we felt the stakes were high and we needed to emphasize theory.”

“Theory has underpinned major sea changes in art history. Marxist theory was critical in the 70s, later deconstruction, Barthes and Foucault, post-colonialism, the rise of visual culture, more recently Deleuze, etc. In my field [medieval], anthropological theory can be interesting. All of this has had a significant impact on the production of art history as well as art itself. Many in our department took/take this seriously; there were diverse approaches, but the animation provided by new thinking or even fighting against some theories, was fruitful and energized students as well.”
See further: “More History of UBC” (pdf)

Bibliography


NOTES

1 *The University of British Columbia Calendar, 1947–1948.*
3 The diploma in art history is offered to students with a prior undergraduate degree.
4 “Faculty of Arts and Science,” in *University of British Columbia Calendar, 1986–1987*, 30.
7 *The University of British Columbia Calendar, 1959–1960*, 61
8 *University of British Columbia Calendar, 1957–1958*, 55.
9 http://www.belkin.ubc.ca/about/history
10 “Faculty of Arts and Science,” in *University of British Columbia Calendar, 1998–1999*, 61.