

SJSU MA/MFA Application Instructions, Program Overview, & FAQ

Thank you for your interest in the MFA Program in the Department of Art & Art History at SJSU. The faculty of the Department of Art & Art History are justifiably proud of the accomplishments of our MFA graduates.

Through its excellent facilities and diverse and well-recognized faculty, the program encourages and enables students to develop their technical studio skills as well as the ability to think creatively and critically about their practice.

Graduate students take critical seminars and studio classes where their peers and the faculty provide critical feedback about their work. Assigned studios are guaranteed for 5 semesters; these studios and shared spaces provide an environment for focused independent experimentation, and build community that facilitates peer to peer discourse. Exhibition opportunities at several student galleries provide an important aspect of professional preparation for graduates in the program.

That the MFA program functions within the context of a liberal arts college is perhaps the strongest indicator of the breadth of competence expected of its students. Graduate students in the MFA programs are given elective options in philosophy, history, literature, theater, music, anthropology, and more. Within the Department itself, the approach to learning is highly interdisciplinary. Faculty routinely share duties across media and disciplines; and the facilities encompass traditional media like ceramics, glass, and darkroom photography to advanced digital methods like VR and CNC fabrication. The faculty is equally broad-based: graduate students are encouraged to develop exposure to as many new approaches as will benefit their progress. All areas share similar admissions processes, curricular structure, advancement, and review processes.

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Upcoming General Information Sessions

The [College of Graduate Studies](#) hosts general information sessions for prospective applicants. Please [visit their website](#) for the most current schedule.

MFA Graduate Programs Overview

The MFA program is a 60 unit degree. Most students complete the degree in 5-6 semesters. The coursework consists of graduate seminars, upper division undergraduate studio electives, TAs, and independent studies. There's a lot of flexibility in terms of the elective courses you take for an MFA in Art.

Studios are available for 5 semesters. You are required to install two exhibitions in your 2nd & 3rd years in one of 8 student galleries, but optional exhibition opportunities exist outside of the requirement as well.

If you are interested in teaching, we have Teaching Assistant opportunities, as well as a class dedicated to preparing MFAs to teach at the college level. There's also opportunities to teach your own class, but that is dependent on undergraduate enrollment so can't be guaranteed.

More information about each degree program can be found on the SJSU Website:

[MFA Digital Media Art](#)

[MFA Photography](#)

[MFA Pictorial Art](#)

[MFA Spatial Art](#)

Deadlines

The deadline for both domestic and international applications can be found [here](#).

Application Process

Apply here: [SJSU Graduate Application Information](#)

All of the information in this document can be found at the 'start here' link above (though some of the information is easier to find than others). I've copied some of the most pertinent links from our website below (which I know can be hard to navigate).

Step by Step Applications Instructions

- [Domestic Steps to Admission](#): Learn about the steps you will take as you go through the domestic application process at SJSU.
- [International Steps to Admission](#): Learn about the steps you will take as you go through the international application process at SJSU.

Application Process

There are two independent sets of admission requirements for a MA or MFA Application to the Department of Art & Art History:

1. **University Requirements:** are managed by the University Office of Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations (GAPE) and required for ALL SJSU graduate applicants.

2. **Department Requirements:** are managed by the Department or School for the Degree Program the student is applying to, in this case that would be the Department of Art & Art History.

Application Routing & Review Process

3. MFA Applicants submit their application through the [Cal State Apply](#) website.
4. Once completed, applications are first reviewed by the University.
5. If the students' applications meet University admission requirements, their applications are then sent to the Department of Art & Art History for review to determine eligibility for the degree program.
6. If their application does not meet the university requirements students will receive notification from the Graduate Office of Admissions.
7. The applications are reviewed by faculty in the area of concentration (Digital Media Art, Photography, Pictorial Art, & Spatial Art).
8. The Department of Art & Art History will send notification of the decision approximately 1 month after the domestic application deadline.

Application Requirements

University Requirements

More information on University requirements can be found here: [SJSU Graduate Application Information](#)

Department Requirements

Prerequisites:

The equivalent to a Bachelor of Fine Art (BFA) degree in the applicant's designated area of graduate emphasis (60 units in studio art) is **recommended**. At least 6 upper division units in art history are **required**. If you don't have 6 upper division units in Art History but have a strong application, the department review committee may conditionally admit you but require that you take the required courses within the first few semesters.

Application Requirements:

Once you begin your application through [Cal State Apply](#), the Department of Art & Art History requirements can be found in the 'Program Materials' section of your application. You will be required to submit:

- 3 letters of recommendation
- Supporting Documents
 - [Graduate Program Admissions Application & Academic Summary Form](#)
 - Statement of Purpose
 - CV/Resume
 - Portfolio

Application Deadlines

Documents & Recommendations for the University and Department requirements must be received by the document due date (which is a little later than the application due date). Check the links below for the Application & Document Deadlines (scroll down for College of Humanities and Arts)

- [Domestic Applicant Deadlines](#)
- [International Applicant Deadlines](#)

The **application** deadline is the deadline to submit the Cal State Apply application. The portfolio, academic record, statement of purpose, CV, & portfolio are all considered components of the application. In other words, all of the 'documents' that YOU provide need to be submitted with the application by the application deadline.

The **document** deadline is the deadline to submit all required documents to Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations. The 'Document' deadline refers to the deadline for documents received by third parties (like transcripts and letters of recommendation).

Academic Calendar

Schedules for Classes, Start Dates, & Course Registration dates are posted by SJSU's [Academic Affairs](#).

Departmental Application Requirements*

The department considers applications holistically and reviews the material in context. We have limited space in the program and the decisions for admission can be difficult. Factors will include (but are not limited to): quality of your portfolio, fitness within our program area (ie: do we feel like we have faculty that can support the candidate?), your statement of purpose, your letters of recommendation, how much space we have in the program as a whole, how many students applied in the given round of applications, and total percentage of students currently enrolled in the area to which you applied.

If you have any questions about Department Requirements (letters of recommendation, Statement of Purpose, CV/Resume, Portfolio) please review the information below and then contact the [Department Graduate Coordinator](#) if you have additional questions.

Recommendations

Please submit the requests for 3 letters of recommendation in Cal State Apply through the 'Recommendations' tab in the 'Program Materials' section of your application. You can submit the requests before you are finished with the rest of the application (see [screenshot](#) below). As soon as you submit the requests, the recommenders will receive an email with a link where they submit their letters as soon as you submit their contact information into Cal State Apply. The letters will need to be received by the 'document due date.'

Documents

You will need to submit the following documents through Cal State Apply's link to Slideroom*

Academic Record

Please fill out the [Graduate Program Admissions Application & Academic Summary Form](#) (pdf) and upload to the Academic Record Document Section

Statement of Purpose

Submit a 600-1200 word (one to two page) essay indicating your reasons to pursue graduate studies in Art at SJSU. The essay should also describe the nature and direction of your work, and its relationship to contemporary art issues. You must indicate in the first sentence of your statement the name of the program to which you are applying and the area you wish to study (e.g. MFA in Art & Art History with a concentration in Spatial Art.)

CV/Resume

For your resume (usually called a Curriculum Vitae, or CV, in academic & artistic contexts), follow the College Art Association Guidelines: [Visual Artist Curriculum Vitae: Recommended Conventions](#).

Portfolio

Requirements vary by degree. Please see the portfolio requirements for each degree below.

Departmental Application Requirements by Area of Concentration

Each Area within the Art Program has its own set of portfolio requirements. Please review the detailed list of requirements listed under each area of concentration below.

- [Digital Media](#)
- [Photography](#)
- [Pictorial Art](#)
- [Spatial Art](#)

Master of Fine Art, Digital Media Art Application Requirements

For any additional information regarding this degree program at SJSU, please visit the department website: https://www.sjsu.edu/art/art_programs/graduate/mfa_digital_media_art/. Additionally, you may contact the Art Graduate Coordinator by email with specific questions.

The Art Department requires the following items to complete their departmental application:

- **A minimum of three (3) letters of recommendation** are required for your application. These letters should address your academic abilities, art interests, and preparation for graduate work. Letters should show exceptional promise in digital media art.
 - Include in your message to the recommender the name of the program you are applying for at San Jose State University. (e.g. "I am applying to the MFA program in the Department of Art & Art History at San Jose State University with a concentration in Digital Media Art")
 - You should request the letters via Cal State Apply before completing/submitting the application, you will not be able to submit your application until all letters have been requested. If you need to cancel your request, you can cancel it by using the "trash" button. To cancel a request click the "trash" button.
 - Please note, once you submit your Cal State Apply application, you will not be able to request additional/alternate recommendations.
- **Completed Academic Summary Form**
- **Statement of Purpose/Artist Statement.** Submit a 600-1200 word (one to two page) essay indicating your reasons to pursue graduate studies in Art at SJSU. The essay should also describe the nature and direction of your work, and its relationship to contemporary art issues. You must indicate in the first sentence of your

statement the name of the program to which you are applying and the area you wish to study (e.g. MFA in Art & Art History with a concentration in Spatial Art.)

- **Résumé or Curriculum Vitae.** Please include education, exhibition history, publications, grants/awards, bibliography, and any relevant professional experience.
- **Provide a URL to your online Portfolio related to Digital Media Art (DMA)** featuring 10-15 completed digital media art projects. You must provide media, size, date, and your specific role in the case of collaborative projects for each project presented in the website portfolio.
 - Your DMA Portfolio must provide examples of art which demonstrate a strong conceptual orientation and aptitude for digital media art in areas including, but not limited to, computer graphics, web development, programming, physical computing, fabrication, prototyping, digital video, sound, interaction design, and computer games. *NOTE: Portfolios containing more than fifteen (15) or less than ten (10) projects can jeopardize the review of your application.
 - Still Images. Images should be sized at least 1024 x 768 @ 72 DPI.
 - Audio & Video. Embed Audio & Video in the project pages of your online portfolio. The committee will review a total of 10 minutes of time based work.

Master of Fine Art, Photography Application Requirements

For any additional information regarding this degree program at SJSU, please visit the department website: https://www.sjsu.edu/art/art_programs/graduate/mfa_photography/. Additionally, you may contact the Art Graduate Coordinator by email with specific questions.

The Art Department requires the following items to complete their departmental application:

- **Three (3) letters of recommendation** are required for your application. These letters should address your academic abilities and preparation for graduate work. Letters should show exceptional promise in Photography.
 - Include in your message to the recommender the name of the program to which you are applying at San Jose State University, (e.g. "I am applying to the MFA program in the Department of Art & Art History at San Jose State University with a concentration in Photography.")
 - You should request the letters via Cal State Apply before completing/submitting the application, you will not be able to submit your application until all letters have been requested. If you need to cancel your request, you can cancel it by using the "trash" button. To cancel a request click the "trash" button.
 - Please note: once you submit your Cal State Apply application, you cannot go back and request more recommendations.
- **Completed [Academic Summary Form](#)**
- **Statement of Purpose/Artist Statement.** Submit a 600-1200 word (one to two page) essay indicating your reasons to pursue graduate studies in Art at SJSU. The essay should also describe the nature and direction of your work and its relationship to contemporary art issues. You must indicate in the first sentence of your statement the name of the program to which you are applying and the area you wish to study (e.g. MFA in Art & Art History with a concentration in Photography.)
- **Résumé or Curriculum Vitae.** Please include education, exhibition history, publications, grants/awards, bibliography, and any relevant professional experience.
- **Portfolio related to Photography** containing fifteen (15) images/files. Portfolios containing more than fifteen (15) images/files can/will jeopardize the review of your application.

- Cover Page: List each of the images/files in the Portfolio Folder by number, extended title and description with the following information: media, size, date, and circumstances under which work was done (class work, independent or job-related).
- Images/files should be grouped in the portfolio folder. Images/File Format: High quality/low compression. [JPEG, .PNG or .GIF files not greater than 1280 pixels wide by 1024 pixels high], OR list URL/website
- For applications with media or methods that are not well represented by still images, QuickTime movies may be uploaded. A maximum of five (5) QuickTime movies of works may be included into the Portfolio Folder in addition to image files.

Master of Fine Art, Pictorial Art Application Requirements

For any additional information regarding this degree program at SJSU, please visit the department website: http://www.sjsu.edu/art/art_programs/graduate/mfa_pictorial_art/ Additionally, you may contact the Art Graduate Coordinator by email with specific questions.

The Art Department requires the following items to complete their departmental application:

Three (3) letters of recommendations are required for your application. These letters should address your academic abilities, art interests and preparation for graduate work. Letters should show exceptional promise in Pictorial Art.

- Include in your message to the recommender the name of the program to which you are applying at San Jose State University, (e.g. "I am applying to the MFA program in the Department of Art & Art History at San Jose State University with a concentration in Pictorial Art")
- You should request the letters via Cal State Apply before completing/submitting the application, you will not be able to submit your application until all letters have been requested. If you need to cancel your request, you can cancel it by using the "trash" button. To cancel a request click the "trash" button.
- Please note, once you submit your Cal State Apply application, you cannot go back and request more recommendations.
- **Completed [Academic Summary Form](#)**
- **Statement of Purpose/Artist Statement.** Submit a 600-1200 word (one to two page) essay indicating your reasons to pursue graduate studies in Art at SJSU. The essay should also describe the nature and direction of your work and its relationship to contemporary art issues. You must indicate in the first sentence of your statement the name of the program to which you are applying and the area you wish to study (e.g. MFA in Art & Art History with a concentration in Pictorial Art.)
- **Résumé or Curriculum Vitae.** Please include education, exhibition history, publications, grants/awards, bibliography, and any relevant professional experience.
- **Portfolio related to Pictorial Art** containing fifteen (15) images/files. Portfolios containing more than fifteen (15) images/files can/will jeopardize the review of your application.
 - Cover Page: List each of the images/files in the Portfolio Folder by number, extended title and description with the following information: media, size, date, and circumstances under which work was done (class work, independent or job-related).
 - Images/files should be grouped in the portfolio folder. Image/File Format: High quality/low compression. [JPEG, .PNG or .GIF files not greater than 1280 pixels wide by 1024 pixels high], OR list URL/website

- For Applications with media or methods that are not well represented by still images, QuickTime movies may be uploaded. A maximum of five (5) QuickTime movies of works may be included into the Portfolio Folder in addition to image files.

Master of Fine Art, Spatial Art Application Requirements

For any additional information regarding this degree program at SJSU, please visit the department website: http://www.sjsu.edu/art/art_programs/graduate/mfa_spatial_art/ Additionally, you may contact the Art Graduate Coordinator by email with specific questions.

- **Three (3) letters of recommendation** are required for your application. These letters should address your academic abilities, art interests and preparation for graduate work. Letters should show exceptional promise in Spatial Art (sculpture).
 - Include in your message to the recommender the name of the program to which you are applying at San Jose State University. (e.g. "I am applying to the MFA program in the Department of Art & Art History at San Jose State University with a concentration in Spatial Art.")
 - You should request the letters via Cal State Apply before completing/submitting the application, you will not be able to submit your application until all letters have been requested. If you need to cancel your request, you can cancel it by using the "trash" button. To cancel a request click the "trash" button.
 - Please note, once you submit your Cal State Apply application, you cannot go back and request more recommendations.
- **[Completed Academic Summary Form](#)**
- **Statement of Purpose/Artist Statement.** Submit a 600-1200 word (one to two page) essay indicating your reasons to pursue graduate studies in Art at SJSU. The essay should also describe the nature and direction of your work and its relationship to contemporary art issues. You must indicate in the first sentence of your statement the name of the program to which you are applying and the area you wish to study (e.g. MFA in Art & Art History with a concentration in Spatial Art.)
- **Résumé or curriculum vitae.** Please include education, exhibition history, publications, grants/awards, bibliography, and any relevant professional experience.
- **Portfolio related to Spatial Art** containing a maximum of fifteen (15) images/files. Portfolios containing more than fifteen (15) images/files can/will jeopardize the review of your application
 - Cover Page: List each of the images/files in the Portfolio Folder by number, extended title and description with the following information: media, size, date, and circumstances under which work was done (class work, independent or job-related).
 - Images/files should be grouped in the portfolio folder. Image/File Format: High quality/low compression. [JPEG, .PNG or .GIF files not greater than 1280 pixels wide by 1024 pixels high], OR list URL/website
 - For applications with media or methods that are not well represented by still images, QuickTime movies may be uploaded. A maximum of five (5) QuickTime movies of works may be included into the Portfolio Folder in addition to image files.

Contact Information

SJSU is a large university, there are several departments that can help you with questions about the degree and application process:

MFA ADMISSIONS



Department Graduate Coordinators

The graduate Coordinator can answer general questions about our MA/MFA program (Application Process, Studios, Facilities, Degree Requirements), and Area-Specific questions within their area. The graduate coordinators are available during regular academic sessions (on break during winter and summer intersessions).

| | |
|--|---|
| MFA (Digital Media Art, Photography, Pictorial, & Spatial Art) | Prof. Andrew Blanton, andrew.blanton@sjsu.edu |
| MA Art History & Visual Culture | Prof. Anthony Raynsford, anthony.raynsford@sjsu.edu |

Program Area Coordinators

For more information about Area-Specific classes, portfolio requirements, and area faculty, please reach out to the Area Coordinators. The coordinators are available during regular academic sessions (on break during winter and summer intersessions).

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Digital Media Art | Rhonda Holberton rhonda.holberton@sjsu.edu |
| Pictorial (painting/ printmaking) | Shaun O'Dell shaun.odell@sjsu.edu |
| Photography | Binh Dahn binh.dahn@sjsu.edu |
| Spatial (Sculpture/Ceramics): | Adam Shiverdecker adam.shiverdecker@sjsu.edu |

University Admission Information

If you have questions about University Requirements (Transcripts, GPA, Transfer Credits, TOEFL, and other Tests) please contact the Office of Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations (GAPE).

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| GAPE Admission Inquiries | admissions@sjsu.edu , Phone: (408) 283-7500 |
|--------------------------|--|

Tuition & Financial Aid Information

If you have questions about Tuition & Fees you may contact the [Bursars Office](#). If you have questions about Financial Aid (federal and state grants as well as loans, scholarships, and work-study programs) please contact the [Financial Aid and Scholarship Office](#).

| | |
|--|--|
| SJSU Bursar's Office | bursar@sjsu.edu , Phone: (408) 924-1601 |
| Financial Aid and Scholarship Office | fao@sjsu.edu , Phone: 408-283-7500 |

FAQs

1) I am an international student, I graduated with a BA from a University in the United States, do I still need to do TOEFL, or can it be waived?

If you have completed your undergraduate degree at SJSU (or any institution within an English Speaking Country) then you are exempt from the TOEFL requirement (for more info see link below). The TOEFL is a University requirement, not a departmental one, so you should follow up with an advisor for University Admissions in our [GAPE office](#) to confirm your Universities Eligibility.

2) Will some of my classes from my previous degree transfer?

We can accept transfer credits from other programs (Including transfer credits from CSU summer arts programs) to count toward electives in the MFA degree program. Course credits for classes taken as an undergraduate can not count toward a graduate degree if they counted toward the undergraduate degree. You may not transfer more than 30% of your units. More info & additional requirements can be found [here](#).

3) Can my recommendation letters be from my former employers, co-workers, or people I've done projects with?

Ideally your Three (3) Letters of Recommendation would come from Art faculty, Artists, Curators, or Institutional Art Administrators you've worked with recently. But if former employers would have insight into your artistic/creative process then those letters could be acceptable. An example of the request form for letters of recommendation can be found at the end of this document.

4) I have a BA, would this degree allow me to apply to the MFA program?

The equivalent to a Bachelor of Fine Art (BFA) degree in the applicant's designated area of graduate emphasis is **recommended**. At least 6 upper-division units in art history are **required**. If you haven't taken 6 units (usually 2 classes) of Art History, you may be asked to take an Art History class your first semester at SJSU if you are accepted.

We consider applications holistically. A strong portfolio demonstrating skill and readiness can be sufficient, even if the applicant does not have a fine art degree.

5) I graduated from SJSU do I need to send my Official transcripts?

SJSU students do not have to submit SJSU transcripts with your application. See step-by-step required documents for admission at [Want to Apply](#).

6) For the portfolio, what is the maximum and minimum number of images we can submit? Do we put images in a zip file, PDF, or separate files?

Submit your portfolio as a single PDF. Please view the requirements here: [Departmental Application Requirements by Area of Concentration](#)

7) For Portfolio, are you looking for skill or more like style/expression or both? My area of expertise? Should all images have the same theme and be cohesive or are you just looking for the breadth of my work?

Portfolios are reviewed by program area. Please view the requirements here: [Departmental Application Requirements by Area of Concentration](#). The [Area Coordinator](#) for the program you are applying to will be able to answer this question with more detail.

8) What is the format for the letters of recommendation?

Your letters should be submitted in PDF file format (see [screenshot below](#)). If you ask your previous professors (recommended), they will likely be very familiar with the format. For recommenders who might be less familiar with formats for academic letters of recommendation, please suggest that they use [this format](#). You should request the letter 4 weeks before the application due date. Here are some pointers for asking for letters of recommendation:

- [How to Ask a Professor for a Letter of Recommendation](#)
- [Daily Serving, Help Desk: Recommendations for References](#)

9) Where do I send my transcripts?

Transcripts are managed by the University Requirements. Official transcripts are required of all SJSU graduate applications and must be sent to Graduate Admissions. The Department of Art & Art History does not need additional transcripts to be sent to us.

Transcripts must be sent to SJSU directly from the institution where you took the courses/received the degree. If your university offers official electronic transcripts, we will also accept this method of delivery. If your university requires an email address to send an official, electronic transcript, the recipient address is: etranscript@sjsu.edu.

Transcripts sent by mail should be sent to:

Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations
San Jose State University
One Washington Square
San Jose, CA 95192-0017

10) How many MFAs are in the program

Generally 40-55

11) Are there individual grad studios, or are they shared spaces according to discipline?

Individual studios that vary in size - some are shared between 2 MFAs. We have studios in 2 buildings on campus and at the foundry which is a mile or so south of campus.

12) How much is interdisciplinary practice encouraged?

As much as you want. MFAs frequently work with faculty outside their 'area' and can take classes in any medium. We offer an interdisciplinary critique seminar for MFAs that most students take at least 2 times.

13) Is there much cohesiveness among students in the first year? Or is everyone pretty independent? In general, how much collaboration occurs?

It really depends on the cohort. During COVID everyone hung back a bit, but generally a pretty close knit group. The size of the program is big enough to allow MFAs to find their people while being small enough that you know everyone and their work fairly intimately. It's a 3 year program with public presentations all three years and exhibitions in your 2nd two years. We have guest lectures and gallery openings every Tuesday which in the pre-Covid times meant a lot of opportunity to get to know students and faculty across the department.

14) Can I apply to a discipline that I'd like to pursue if I don't have a specific background in that field?

It's possible, but we recommend reaching out to the area coordinator in the department you are interested in applying to. The applications are reviewed by area.

15) Does SJSU offer student housing for graduate students?

- SJSU does have some options for graduate student housing:
<https://www.sjsu.edu/housing/housing-options/faculty-staff-graduate-students.php>
- SJSU is located in downtown San Jose, so many off-campus housing options are available. You might want to start the search on Craigslist: <https://sfbay.craigslist.org/sby/>
- There is also a Facebook page called SJSU Student Off-Campus Housing:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SJSUhousing/>
- Another site: <https://www.forrentuniversity.com/San-Jose-State-University>
- Also, this SJSU site: <https://www.sjsu.edu/housing/how-we-can-help/off-campus-housing-resources.php>

16) Does SJSU offer funding for graduate students?

We offer Teaching positions for MFAs, which provides a tuition waiver. Those are managed area by area (DMA, Pictorial, Photo, Spatial), if you would like to find out more please contact the [Program Area Coordinator](#).

Once you are a matriculated student, you can apply for department scholarships: In Spring 2021 the Department of Art & Art History awarded over \$50k in scholarships ranging from \$100 material grants to \$6,000 unrestricted scholarship funds. The university also offers scholarships. If you have questions about Financial Aid (federal and state grants as well as loans, scholarships, and work-study programs) please contact the [Financial Aid and Scholarship Office](#).

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