

Bridging Worlds: Skill Development and Conceptual Thinking in Art Institutions

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## **Abstract**

### **Bridging Worlds: Skill Development and Conceptual Thinking in Art Institutions**

**Ashu Aman Gera**

This thesis investigates the relationship between skill development and conceptual thinking by analysing their role in two modern-day art institutions: one in India and the other in The United States. This study relies on qualitative research methodologies, which include reflections of the author's artistic experiences in these institutions, artwork analysis, and in-depth interviews with professors from these institutions. The goal of this research is to critically evaluate and compare two prestigious art programmes to determine their strengths and weaknesses and to create the best possible environment by combining these elements into an art curriculum that incorporates the best of different educational paradigms.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The study's main objective is to explore what characteristics define an ideal Fine Art curriculum and whether conceptual thinking or skill development should be prioritised. In addition, it investigates the curricular differences between two schools, one located in India and the other in the United States, with a particular emphasis on striking a healthy balance between skill development and conceptual thinking.

The purpose of this study is also to understand the ideologies and belief systems that have had a significant role in shaping my formal education in Fine Arts. It would assist me in figuring out what these schools intend to accomplish by training future artists. Through this research, I will critically examine my past and how it informs my opinion regarding what a comprehensive Fine Arts curriculum should be. My observations and experiences will serve as a source of reflection for this research. In order to investigate the artistic education I received in India and the United States, I have conducted my research using qualitative methodology. Furthermore, I analysed these two training programmes available and compared their advantages and disadvantages to create the most effective art curriculum possible.

By contrasting my experiences at these art schools, I was able to obtain insight into effective training programmes and how they could be improved. I decided to employ empirical research to learn more about how different training programmes stack up against one another and identify best practices that should be incorporated into a brand-new art curriculum. My ultimate goal is to design the ideal Fine Art curriculum that addresses my question about skill development and conceptual thinking while also optimising the benefits of the different educational programmes currently offered.

Before proceeding further, let me define what I mean by skill development and conceptual thinking. They are two essential aspects of a studio arts practice. Skill development in this research refers to technical mastery, including elements like composition and colour theory. Traditionally, artists were expected to hone these skills through countless hours of repetition and observation so that their works could be cohesive and visually appealing. Conceptual thinking in this research refers to the act of meaning-making and generating ideas, which again is an essential component of the field of Fine Arts.

Conversely, conceptual thinking emphasises the ideas and concepts more than the actual making of the artwork. Artists prioritising conceptual thinking often challenge traditional artistic norms by exploring ideas. This approach prioritises the development of a strong concept or message embedded within the artwork, challenging the viewers to engage with deeper layers of interpretation and meaning.

Conceptual thinking forces artists to go against the grain, question accepted wisdom, and utilise their creations as a forum for critical discussion. By tapping into the power of ideas, artists can create thought-provoking pieces that stimulate intellectual and emotional responses. These terms are seldom seen in isolation, even though they are both unique and crucial components of the Fine Arts. Art institutions determine the extent to which these two components are related. Now that we have a working definition for these terms, we can further analyse the roles these two distinct aspects of Fine Arts education played in my education.

## **Positionality - My Artistic and Educational Background**

My earliest recollection of my artistic endeavours is my success in various art competitions held while I was in elementary school. You could explain it as having creative talent or simply having a very determined mother who wanted to see her child excel in areas where she could not. Although my mother earned a diploma in Costume Design, she could not work in the field due to the era and the society in which she lived. The oil pastel drawings I created in the second and third grades are still ingrained in my memory and the walls of my bedroom in India. I still have all the awards, which I have no recollection of accepting. I remember trying to open up a trophy all afternoon as some genius decided to shape it as a painting palette. I was that young and naive. I still remember the disappointment of opening up another prize and finding a book inside. I wanted toys. Until the 10th grade, I considered art to be nothing more than a passion or a hobby.

My introduction to the formal learning of the art world was rebellious. As a member of a traditional upper-middle-class Indian family, my parents expected me to study maths and science in 11th grade and become an engineer like all male members of my family for three generations. I gave in, and those were my two most difficult years. My only vivid memory of those times is of skipping maths classes and sneaking into the art studio, which was located in our high school's basement. I remember doing basic still life using different mediums. Being an I.C.S.E. (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education) affiliated school, which was leaps and bounds ahead of various Indian state boards, my school provided excellent art classes. I was caught several times and promptly sent to the headmistress. Her husband was the Dean of Activities and our primary art teacher. Despite sympathising with my "fish trying to climb a tree" situation with maths and science, she was forced to summon my mother to the school several times.

Having seen my suffering and predicament for those two long years, my mother finally decided to join my rebellion and allowed me to pursue this field further. Fine Arts seem like a waste of time in a nation where men frequently support their large extended families as the sole breadwinners. Indian education is still primarily dominated by S.T.E.M. courses. It is highly unconventional for boys of "good" households to join the art field in India. To pursue it took courage, and most of it came from my mother.

Maharaja Sayajirao University (M.S.U.) was one of the few universities that took Fine Arts seriously. One of India's most prestigious Fine Arts institutions is the Maharaja Sayajirao University (M.S.U.) in Vadodara, Gujarat, India whose Faculty of Fine Arts was established in 1950. It offers undergraduate and graduate programs in various Fine Arts disciplines, including painting, sculpture, and ceramics.

Undergraduate studies at Maharaja Sayajirao University was a starting point for my new life. The formative years were strictly technical. They were catered to skill building, creating a sturdy foundation for my artistic language. After earning a Bachelor's degree in Visual Arts from M.S.U., I moved to North America to pursue a Master's degree in Fine Arts. The California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) is a private university in Valencia, California, in the United States. CalArts strongly focuses on interdisciplinary cooperation and experimentation, one of its most noteworthy features. Philipp Kaiser et al. (2020), in their book about the show "*Where Art Might Happen: The Early Years of CalArts*", mention that the early years of CalArts as an institution played a significant role in developing contemporary art, breaking down traditional boundaries and emphasising experimentation and collaboration. This was a stark contrast from my time at M.S.U, which had strong inclinations towards skill building and strict differentiating departments with several fault lines

in place, seldom creating any chance for interdepartmental artistic creations. Looking back at the differences between these two institutions is what laid the foundation for this research.

I was given the opportunity to serve as a teaching assistant for the first-year undergraduate painting class at CalArts, giving me a direct one-to-one comparison of my undergraduate programme and the undergraduate programme at CalArts. I consciously compared my educational history and that of any young person beginning their journey in a higher education art programme. At CalArts, students were given free rein to experiment and develop their ideas. These students were participating in the undergraduate programme about which I had initially fantasised when I first entered the art world. However, I was most perplexed by the institution's absence of focus on skill development and by the amount of autonomy granted to aspiring artists for conceptual thinking. It did not matter what language the students spoke, but what was being said was of interest to everyone.

### **The Critical Question - Why This Matters**

My mental construction of what constitutes the building of a creative language and the utility of building this language are both being called into question in today's world. My observations as a T.A. at CalArts included some students facing difficulties coping with the absence of a class structure. But how were their challenges distinct from the restrictions I experienced in my undergraduate studies? Now that I have touched upon why this topic is of great interest to me and gone over some of my past interactions with these art institutions, I would like to use this research to go into more depth about some of the disparities that exist between these institutions.

Every art program has its curriculum, which is both explicit and also hidden. In a sense, that is more fundamental; all that my experience can do is hint at a conflict between various belief systems and ideologies of these institutions. If I could better understand the people who run and teach at these institutions, it would help me comprehend precisely what these art schools hope to produce with their many course offerings. What exactly do they mean when they say "artist"? Do they believe that artistic creativity may be passed on to others? If this is the case, how can I utilise these characteristics for my teaching practice and employ these factors to further create an ideal Fine Art curriculum? What roles do skill development and conceptual thinking play in a comprehensive Fine Art curriculum? What is an ideal Fine Art curriculum? Is such a curriculum even feasible? These were the questions that drove this research.

### **Methodology - Navigating the Research**

This study employs diverse research methods to evaluate the two Fine Art programmes. An in-depth analysis of these two art programmes is central to my research. The second chapter consists of seminal works by notable authors in the field of art education. While providing historical context to my research, these works also discuss the evolution of art and the changing role of an artist. These works have helped me examine the transition of art and art education from a traditional skill-based approach to embracing conceptual thinking in recent times. The chapter also examines the impact of the shift in art movements in the later half of the 20th century, with new movements like conceptual art taking centre stage, and explores its effects on the balance between skill and concept in contemporary art education.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide a detailed comparison of the Fine Arts programmes at M.S.U. and CalArts, including insights from interviews with professors from both institutions and a

reflective analysis of the artworks created during my studies. These chapters examine the contrast between technical skill and conceptual exploration, emphasising each institution's distinct approaches.

Building on the educational philosophies of Maharaja Sayajirao University and the California Institute of the Arts, Chapter 5 consists of a 13-week curriculum which I have designed using elements from my experiences at M.S.U in India and CalArts in the U.S. This chapter, which also acts as a conclusion, explores how skill development and conceptual exploration can work together to give artists an holistic experience which would provide them the tools they need to express themselves artistically and participate meaningfully in larger cultural and social contexts. Chapter 5 goes into more detail about the proposed curriculum. It covers many different areas of art education, from mastering techniques to critical thinking and deepening concepts. This curriculum is designed to prepare students for the constantly changing needs of the art world.

### **Data**

The primary data for this research comes from the interviews I conducted with faculty members at M.S.U and CalArts. My collection of paintings and drawings, created during my time at these schools, further supports this data, offering a reflective perspective on my educational experiences. As a researcher and an artist, I will also include my reflections on the artistic training process. This approach allows for a flexible examination, enabling me to identify and consider any biases or preconceptions that may influence my interpretation of the findings.

### **The Anticipated Outcome**

Using these qualitative methods enabled me to capture the complexities and nuances of the art curricula and the ideologies that lie beneath them, which provided me with important insights regarding the development of an Ideal Fine Arts curriculum. Finally, this research is critical to the field as a whole because it may aid the community of art educators in understanding the demands of a modern Fine Arts curriculum.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the intricate connection between skills and conceptual thinking in art education that has grown over time. Traditional academic training in the arts includes the study of drawing, painting, printmaking, photography, and sculpture (Holtje, 2019). This approach provided artists with the tools to accurately observe and capture their environment, based on the notion that technical proficiency was fundamental to creative expression. But the paradigms in art education began to shift as the art world grew to embrace ideas and social context. The idea that technical mastery should come before ideas in artistic expression was challenged with the emergence of conceptual art in the second half of the 20th century. This meant that changes had to be made to art education as well. Technical proficiency was superseded by critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and the ability to convey difficult ideas through art.

This chapter examines how educational art institutions have adapted to this change by incorporating conceptual thinking into historically skill-based curricula. It will look at how this integration affects students' intellectual and creative growth and how it gets them ready for the demands of the contemporary art world. This discussion will highlight the changing nature of art education and its influence on creating contemporary art paradigms through a review of the literature, including influential works like Stacey McKenna Salazar's "Laying a Foundation for Artmaking in the 21st Century," John Roberts' "The Intangibilities of Form" and Arthur C. Danto's "After the End of Art"

### **Historical Context of Art Education**

In the past, the main goal of art education was to build technical skills, with a focus on mastering techniques like painting, sculpture, and drawing. This method was based on the apprenticeship model and tried to teach students the skills they would need for accurate drawing and fine craftsmanship (Morrison, 2006). Though a significant change occurred as the art world grew and accepted different styles and points of view. Conceptual art, which came about in the late 20th century, questioned this skill-centred view. It hypothesised that intention, and context should be more important than skill in artistic expression. This change was a turning point in the history of art education. It led to a reevaluation of the curriculum and ways of teaching so that technical skills and conceptual thinking were given equal weight.

### **Conceptual vs. Skill-Based Art**

A fundamental shift in the way people perceive and value the process of creating art is highlighted by the emergence of conceptual art and its impact on art education. Conceptual art emerged in the 1960s and challenged traditional notions of what constitutes art by placing more emphasis on the idea or concept behind the piece than the finished piece (Conceptual Art Movement Overview, n.d.). This movement argued that the ideas driving the work and the artist's intent should take precedence, which broadened the definition of what could be considered art.



There are significant ramifications for art education from this paradigm shift. The foundation of art curricula has historically been the acquisition of technical proficiency and versatility in media. Nevertheless, the emergence of conceptual art required a reassessment of these curricula with a focus on critical thinking, conceptual development, and idea execution and articulation. In addition to encouraging the development of technical proficiency, art education started to support the formation of a conceptual framework that allowed students to explore and express their ideas.

### **Exploring Skill and Concept in Contemporary Art Education through John Roberts' Perspective**

In order to improve my understanding of the differences between skill-based and conceptual art, I found "*The Intangibilities of Form*" by John Roberts as a valuable resource. Roberts (2007) defines "skills" as the traditional artistic competencies of technique and craftsmanship. On the other hand, he presents the idea of "deskilling," which denotes a shift towards more cerebral and conceptual artistic pursuits. Moreover, Roberts (2007) defines "conceptual art" as putting the artwork's underlying idea or concept ahead of conventional aesthetic and material considerations. He further provides an analysis by mentioning Duchamp, a prominent conceptual artist by mentioning that "Duchamp's work opened itself up to general social technique without seeking to aestheticize this process. This is his great historical achievement" (Roberts, 2007, p. 81)

Roberts (2007) emphasises the much discussed difference between skill and conceptual thinking in the evolution of modern art as one of its central themes. Roberts looks into the evolution of art during the post-readymade era, which was distinguished by a shift away from traditional craftsmanship and towards intellectual engagement in the artistic process. Roberts also discusses how global capitalism has shifted the definition of skill in the arts. He contends that more profound socioeconomic changes are inextricably linked to "deskilling" in modern art. The best way to illustrate Roberts' shift—from the tangible to the conceptual, from a skill-focused curriculum at MSU to an interdisciplinary approach at CalArts—is to look at where the two institutions are situated.

Roberts' discussion reflects a broader socioeconomic transformation in which the rise of global capitalism has altered the value of traditional artistic skills. This shift suggests a divergence between developed first-world countries, which are frequently pioneers of conceptual, post-industrial art trends, and developing countries, where traditional skills may still hold sway due to differences in economic development and cultural priorities. This contrast highlights the complex relationship between global economic forces and art education approaches (Roberts, 2007).

Roberts' study of the readymade as a creative tool made me realise how much my understanding of art has progressed since I started my education. The readymade as Roberts' (2007) argues questions what people think about art by rethinking the role of the artist and showing everyday objects as creative works. Roberts' ideas about art remind me of my time at CalArts where exploring ideas and concepts was more important than using traditional art skills. Instead of making things that look aesthetically pleasing, the focus was on thinking critically and asking questions. His work shows how important it is to get students to think about big ideas. The modern art world puts a lot of value on creativity and intellectual depth. To prepare students for these demands, different approaches are needed.

Roberts' study of artistic deskilling raises essential questions about the future of art education. How can art schools reconcile the need for technical proficiency with the need to

foster conceptual thinking? How can educators prepare their students for a rapidly evolving art scene where traditional ideas about what constitutes art are frequently questioned? These are also the central questions of my thesis, which I intend to develop as I create a curriculum that incorporates both talent and conceptual art, reflecting the complex and dynamic nature of modern art practice.

### **Perspectives from Danto's Study of Post-Historical Art and the Development of Conceptual Narratives**

American philosopher and art critic Arthur C. Danto is well-known for his groundbreaking work *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. Danto has made significant contributions to the philosophy of art. In this landmark work, Danto argues that the path of art history has ended, not that art has stopped being, but rather that it has transcended the historical account that once characterised its evolutionary trajectory (Danto, 1996). This claim, which was in line with the beliefs of the conceptual art movement, signalled the beginning of a new chapter in art theory by highlighting the significance of conceptual narratives over artistic craftsmanship.

Danto distinguishes the end of an art narrative from the end of art itself: "What had come to an end was that narrative but not the subject of the narrative. I hasten to clarify" (Danto, 1996, p. 4). The historical background of the 1970s, a time that saw the emergence of conceptual art, where the idea or concept underlying the artwork took precedence over its aesthetic or material aspects, profoundly impacted Danto's investigation into the nature of art (Danto, 1996). This paradigm shift questioned conventional ideas of artmaking and the artist's function, highlighting the dematerialization of the art object. He contended that the lines separating art from non-art in this post-historical period might be erased by contextualising any object inside a theoretical framework.

Consistent with the conceptual art movement, Danto's philosophy presents an artistic vision in which the story or idea underlying the piece is given centrality. "Only when it became clear that anything could be a work of art could one think philosophically about art" (Danto, 1996, p. 14). According to this movement, an artwork's value is not found in its visual appeal or technical proficiency but rather in the artist's intention and the philosophical framework surrounding the piece (Danto, 1996). This approach drastically changed the standards by which art is judged, moving the emphasis from formal beauty and technical mastery to the concepts and stories the work conveys.

Danto's theories have ramifications that go beyond the field of art criticism and into a more general discussion about the nature of art and its role in society. Danto's work encourages a reevaluation of the artist's function from a producer of visual objects to that of an intellectual or philosopher, whose primary medium is ideas rather than materials, by elevating the conceptual over the aesthetic (Danto, 1996). In keeping with the eclectic character of contemporary art, this reinterpretation of art broadens the term to encompass a wide range of techniques, from conventional painting and sculpture to performance, installation, and digital media.

Furthermore, Danto's post-historical view of art emphasises the democratisation of the art world, where a wider variety of inclusive and diverse artistic expressions are made possible by decentralising the power to determine what constitutes art. "Nothing is more right than anything else. There is no single direction. There are indeed no directions" (Danto, 1996, p. 126). This tolerance creates a more diverse cultural environment where art explores various viewpoints, experiences, and identities.

Danto's *After the End of Art* delves into the intellectual foundations supporting art's significance and worth. According to him, the real essence of art is found in its capacity to capture and convey complex concepts, stretch and test our understanding, and interact with the philosophical issues that shape the human condition (Danto, 1996). This conceptual framework for appreciating art highlights the contemplative and cognitive aspects of creating and appreciating art, as well as the ability of art to further intellectual and cultural dialogue.

This book offers a fascinating perspective on the state of modern art, one that is marked by a move away from aesthetic ideals and towards conceptual narratives. This revolutionary perspective on art expands what constitutes art and who qualifies as an artist, challenging conventional ideas of artistic value. Danto's work continues to be a vital resource for academics, artists, and critics alike because it provides a sophisticated framework for comprehending the intricate relationship between technical proficiency and conceptual thought in contemporary art.

### **Institutional Contexts and the Conceptual Shift in Art: Exploring George Dickie's Theory**

The *Institutional Theory of Art*, which was first put forward by George Dickie in his 1974 study, is a key way to understand how art has changed over time in response to cultural and institutional forces. It is the structures and activities of institutions that give them power. For instance, the institution of racing gives people the power to declare a winner, which is usually given to a certain group of people—the timers. At certain times, umpires, parents, police officers, judges, teachers, and lawmakers all have institutional power (Dickie, 1974, p. 80). He says that the definition and recognition of art are set by the institutions and social settings that make things art, not by the things themselves or how well they were made. This point of view stresses the importance of the idea or concept behind the piece rather than strictly adhering to established technical and aesthetic standards. It shows a big shift towards conceptualism in modern art (Dickie, 1974).

The limits of what constitutes art, which became especially noticeable with the emergence of conceptual art groups in the 1960s and 1970s, inspired him to develop his theory. These movements suggested that the artist's intention and the message the piece conveys are more critical than the traditional emphasis on the material and aesthetic aspects of art (Dickie, 1974). He contends that the "art world," which is made up of critics, galleries, artists, and museums, is essential to this process because it grants items the designation "art" in specific situations (Dickie, 1974).

This institutional perspective on art comprehension moves the emphasis from the artwork itself to the systems and procedures that certify and categorise art. It draws attention to how art institutions actively contribute to the production of artistic value and meaning by endorsing and interpreting works in addition to displaying and conserving art (Dickie, 1974). This viewpoint is consistent with the conceptualist theory, which holds that an object's position as art can be determined by its presentation and setting just as much as by the thing itself.

Reevaluating the artist's place in the creative process is another thing that Dickie's Institutional Theory encourages. The artist's goal and the conceptual framework they offer become essential components in the artmaking process in a society where institutional endorsement can turn an ordinary object into an artwork (Dickie, 1974). Many modern artists, who frequently investigate the dynamics of art's presentation and reception in diverse situations, find resonance in this theory and apply it to their practice.

Furthermore, Dickie's artwork stimulates a more general conversation regarding the democratisation and inclusion of art. The theory suggests that a wide range of practices and expressions can be recognized as art, expanding the scope of what is considered valuable and worthy of attention in the art world. It does this by asserting that art's status is conferred by institutional acknowledgement rather than intrinsic qualities (Dickie, 1974).

George Dickie's *Institutional Theory of Art* provides an engaging perspective on the state of modern art. In line with the trend towards conceptualism, which gives the idea and context of art precedence over conventional aesthetic and material concerns, it highlights the vital role that cultural institutions play in defining and approving art. As a result, Dickie's theory contributes to the conversation about the nature of art and how it interacts with society by illuminating the processes by which contemporary art becomes recognized and significant (Dickie, 1974).

### **Bridging Foundations: Stacey Salazar's Vision for 21st-Century Art Education**

Salazar's (2013) text, "Laying a Foundation for Artmaking in the 21st Century", explores teaching and learning during the foundational year of art college. Her work sheds light on the delicate balance art schools need to keep in place to produce well-rounded artists who can successfully navigate the complex terrain of the contemporary art world. Salazar gathers information from various participants, including teachers, students, art colleges, and foundation programme participants, using a comprehensive approach that includes surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and stimulated-recall interviews. This methodological approach guarantees a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the foundational year, providing a wealth of information about the pedagogical approaches that help developing artists the most.

One of Salazar's most important conclusions is the vital role foundation programmes play in creating an atmosphere where technical proficiency and conceptual thinking are integrated to strengthen students' critical and creative thinking abilities rather than being mutually exclusive. This is inconsistent with my personal experience of art education curricula in the US and India, where pedagogical approaches slightly lean towards one direction.

Salazar's findings highlight the distinctions in the foundational education approaches taken by art institutions compared to other works in the field. The debate over how best to prepare students for the opportunities and challenges of contemporary artmaking is reflected in the emphasis placed by some schools on technical proficiency and others on conceptual depth. Salazar's work has numerous implications for art education. According to her research, art colleges need to continuously adapt their curricula and teaching methods to promote an educational environment that values the development of both skills and ideas. This is especially true in international art education, where institutional and cultural disparities can make the pedagogical environment even more challenging.

Upon close examination of Salazar's research, it is clear that an artist's foundational year is a critical time in their education, shaping both their method of creating art and their theoretical conception of the art world and influences their journey throughout.

### **Implications for Future Art Curricula**

The reviewed literature, firsthand observations made while exploring the nuances of conceptual and skill-based art, and critical perspectives offered by books like Danto's *After*

*the End of Art* and John Roberts' *The Intangibilities of Form* all had a significant impact on my development of a coherent art curriculum. These resources highlighted the dynamic nature of art and art education and the need for a curriculum that places equal emphasis on conceptual depth and technical proficiency.

It is clear for me how this will impact art curricula in the future: education needs to adapt to reflect the dynamic interplay of concept and skill that characterises modern art. This means teaching students using conventional methods and media while also pushing them to think critically, engage with difficult ideas, and develop a strong conceptual base for their work. Students would receive a well-rounded education and learn how to navigate the complexities of the modern art world as a result.

It is feasible to imagine programmes that are becoming more adaptable and sensitive to the quick changes occurring in both the art world and society when speculating about art education's future. The hope for more inclusive and collaborative learning environments that dismantle the conventional barriers between various academic disciplines and art forms is one of the goals for my art education curriculum. In order to give students access to a broader range of experiences and viewpoints, art schools and other institutions may form partnerships or use project-based learning, in which students collaborate on projects that call for the synthesis of skills and concepts.

Many also realise that social and cultural awareness is essential to art education. Future curricula might give more attention to social justice concerns, international art practices, and art's role in activism and community engagement. This shows that art is now seen more widely as a tool for change, connection, and communication rather than merely as an individual endeavour.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the changing terrain of art education by looking at how skill-based and conceptual art interact via the prism of seminal works. The writings emphasised how important it is to have a well-rounded curriculum that balances conceptual depth with technical proficiency to reflect contemporary art's dynamic and multidimensional nature.

The historical backdrop provided in the chapter's opening section highlighted the art education system's long-standing focus on skill development and its progressive transition to include conceptual thinking. John Roberts' "The Intangibilities of Form" and Danto's *After the End of Art* offered a critical viewpoint on conceptual art's nature, further clarifying this change.

The chapter also explored how these changes might affect future art curricula and argued favouring flexible, multidisciplinary programmes that can keep up with the fast-paced changes in the art world. In addition to providing students with a broad skill set, the future of art education is expected to cultivate a profound engagement with ideas, pushing students to become artists, thinkers, and innovators.

When one considers the significance of a well-rounded approach to art education, it becomes evident that producing adaptable and reflective artists calls for more than merely technical instruction. It necessitates an education curriculum that places equal emphasis on conceptual exploration, critical thinking, and skills. Students who receive such an education are better equipped to negotiate the intricacies of the art world and larger society, enabling them to use their work as a vehicle for expression, dialogue, and social change. This well-rounded strategy also recognizes the variety of artistic career paths, from traditional

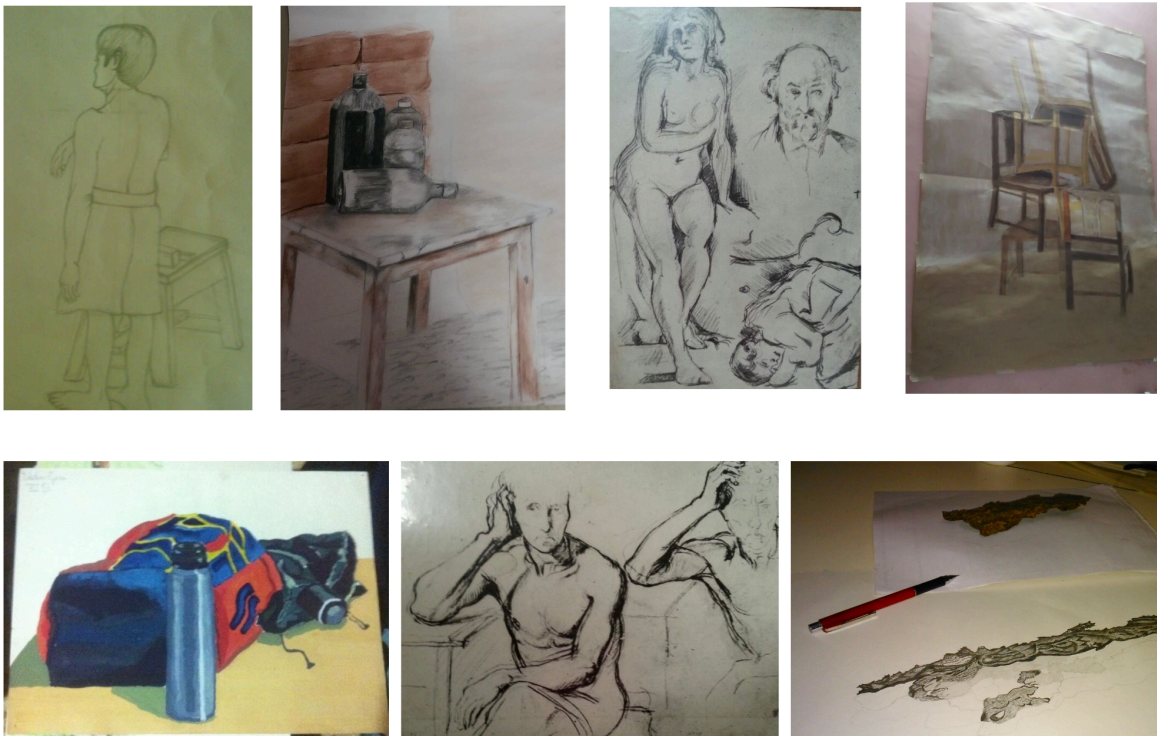
media to digital art, multimedia, and other fields. It honours the variety of artistic expression and every artist's distinctive contributions to society.

## Chapter 3

Maharaja Sayajirao University

### Admission Story

Admission to the M.S.U The Faculty of Fine Arts is challenging. The fact that they only accept 30 undergraduate students per year for all their departments, despite receiving hundreds, if not a thousand applications, does not make it any easier. However, the admissions procedure, on the other hand, is straightforward. There is a two-day entrance examination, and only shortlisted students are invited for an interview on the third day, where you showcase your portfolio to the jury. You get admitted to this prestigious university by passing the entrance exam and the interview.



**Figure 1** : Admission Paintings

Given that I had only recently decided to pursue Fine Arts as a career, to say I was unprepared for the entrance exam would be an understatement. The content of the admission exam was revealed to me only a week before the test date. Considering that the city of Baroda, now known as Vadodara, is 100 km from my hometown, my mother decided to accompany me for the examinations. We woke up at 4:00 in the morning and took an early morning bus from the Gujarat State Road Transportation Corporation (G.S.R.T.C.). Perhaps it was my fear of Engineering or the fact that I had no backup colleges, but I have

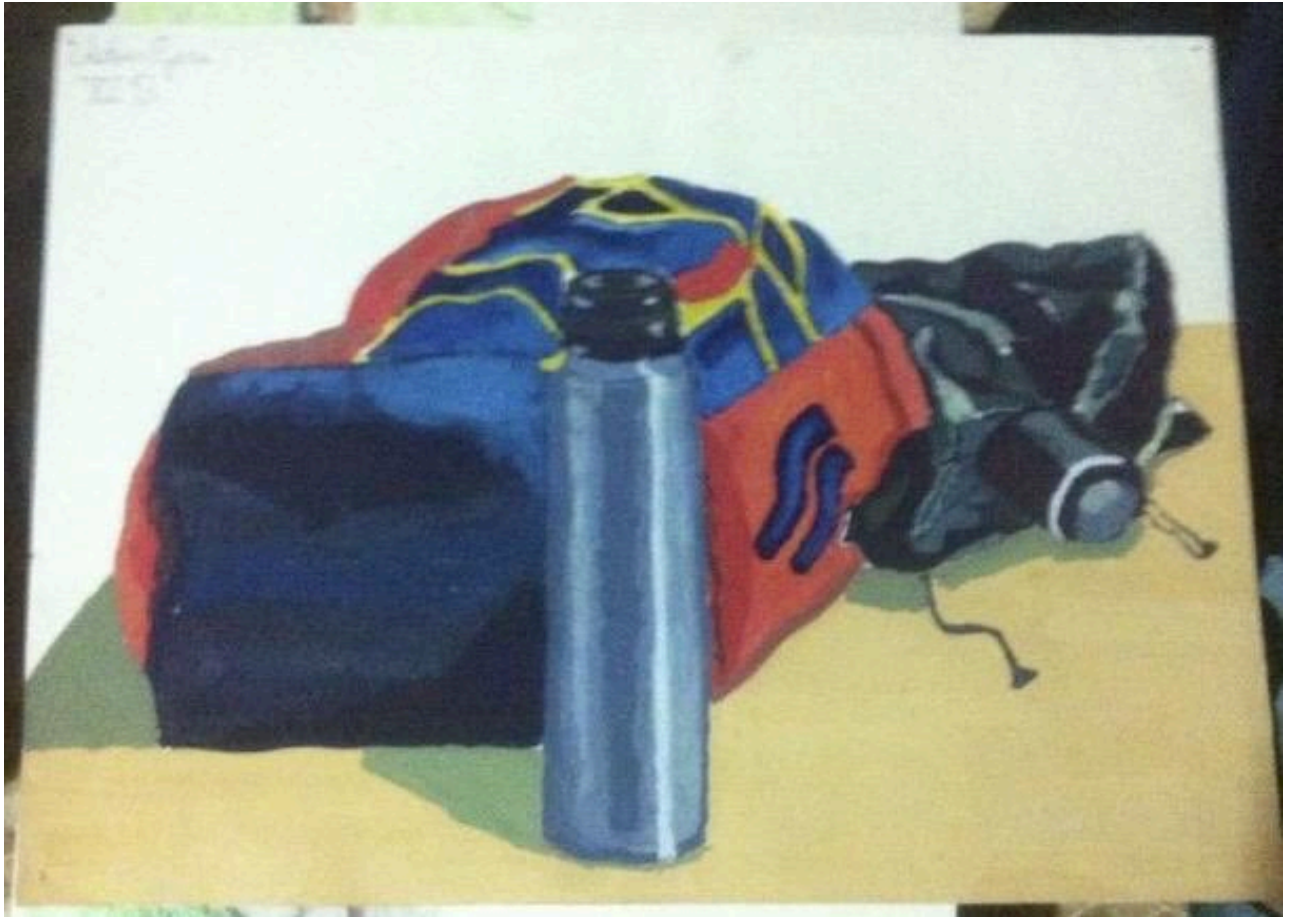
never given my all like I did for those exams. I was driven and undeterred, fueled by nervous energy that shielded me from the outside world, vanquishing my doubts and fears.

On the examination day, they asked for our first and second choice for the department. I only wanted to paint. Making sculptures or Printmaking seemed as alien to me as being a rocket scientist. I filled in painting as my sole choice. The exam consisted of five sections: Drawing, Painting (Still Life), Painting 2(Composition), Applied Art, and Sculpture. It's been over a decade since that examination, and while I don't remember the specific details of each test, I knew I had performed exceptionally well in the sections crucial for my chosen department - Painting. At the end of the second day, they posted a list on the notification board outside the individual departments. My name was on the Painting list, marking my successful clearance of the first hurdle. However, the interview scheduled for the following day loomed ahead. We extended our hotel stay for another night, and my father and younger brother decided to drive down to Vadodara for the interview.

The competition was stiff. Many students there had been preparing for this entrance exam for several years. My discomfort was palpable when I saw my fellow candidates arrive for the interview with, to my eyes, what seemed like truckloads of drawings and paintings. In stark contrast, I only had a sketchbook and a few drawings and paintings made using Poster Paints. The interview process was gruelling, with about 150 students shortlisted. My interview was scheduled for midday, but by the time my turn came, it was around 4:30. I was anxious and exhausted, having nervously paced across the campus numerous times.

My recollection of the actual interview is hazy. If you had asked me about it just five minutes afterwards, I wouldn't have been able to tell you much except that it was a disaster. I felt I had botched my only chance. The panel consisted of Department Heads and the Dean, sitting behind a massive wooden desk. They confirmed my name and asked to see my work, which, I could tell, did not impress them. However, they did examine my entrance exam paintings and my portfolio (Figure 1). The interview lasted a mere 5-7 minutes. I emerged feeling gloomy and almost sure of my rejection. The results were to be announced around midnight. Resigned to my assumed fate, I insisted on returning home instead of waiting for the official verdict. My phone rang around midnight, and to my utter shock, my parents informed me jubilantly that my name was on the acceptance list.





**Figure 2** : Painting from my highschool portfolio.

### **Skill Development in the Early Years**

My time at M.S.U marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life. Moving to a new city at the age of 19 had its apparent benefits. I was living the life I had always dreamed of. The painting program at M.S.U focused primarily on studio practice, with minimal emphasis on theory. The open 24-hour campus was a haven for creativity, especially for senior undergraduate and master's students who often worked late into the night.

The first year was devoted to acquiring fundamental skills like composition, light and shadow, and colour theory. I received a thorough introduction to sketching and various painting techniques. It was a repetitive task offering little room for creativity. The second academic year brought only a slight change with the introduction of figurative studies, replacing still life. Introspecting now, I realise the immense value of those formative years. They provided a solid foundation and a reference point for my future creative endeavours.

My early years at M.S.U were filled with drawing exercises that led to the creation of the artworks included in this section. Most were drawn on newsprint paper, a thin, affordable sketching material. The cheapness of the paper eased the guilt of discarding imperfect

compositions. My technical skills developed, but art, for me, had yet to acquire a subjective quality. At M.S.U, semesters typically began with still life or object studies, requiring precise centring and proportionality in compositions.



**Figure 3** : Still Life (1st Year M.S.U)

One of the earliest sketches I have is from my bachelors (Figure 3). These items, utilised for Still Life paintings for several years, were scattered throughout our university. Nobody at the college had any idea where they came from. They were kept in the first-year cupboard while awaiting new students' arrival every year. Compositions such as these were utilised primarily to enhance form. Repetition, even though it is deemed elementary, has been shown to impress our brains with a specific degree of skill set time and again. Even though my

present painting practice has very little to do with Still life, I cannot help but question if I would have the same degree of self-assurance to sketch with paint and work in layers if I had not made such a significant investment in developing my skill set at the very onset of my artistic education.

I vividly remember my initial frustration with the repetitiveness of charcoal compositions and often skipped classes, foolishly believing I could catch everything necessary. However, developing expertise in any field requires consistent effort and time. Even if you are passionate about a career, there will always be less appealing aspects. For me, drawing was one such aspect. I never enjoyed creating repetitive drawings. In my first year, keeping a sketchbook was mandatory, and our instructor would review them biweekly. I struggled to understand the purpose of these exercises at the time. Drawing was frustrating. Even now, I prefer starting a painting with a loose composition in paint rather than a detailed sketch. However, I would be lying if I claimed that my early drawing practices did not influence my later compositional abilities.



**Figure 4 :** Figurative Study ( M.S.U, 2nd Year Undergraduate)

In the airy studio, light filters through high windows, casting an ethereal glow that wraps around the solitary figure posing in the centre. It was a perfect composition study for the human form, draped in fabrics that whispered tales of tradition. As young artists, we were trying to translate the language of shape and shadow onto paper. This ritual of live human drawing study was a cornerstone of my education at M.S.U, a challenge of skill, a meditation on perception.

The study of the human figure was multifaceted and pushed us to grow. We were asked to explore a variety of drawing and painting materials and papers, as well as do different exercises that were meant to improve our ability to observe. There were timed sketches

where each stroke was a race against the clock. Every sketch was a practice run to get better at seeing, understanding, and drawing people.

Through these exercises at M.S.U, I enhanced my artistic skills and changed my outlook on life and art. It was a truly transforming experience. Even though I could only truly understand all of this in retrospect, I learned the value of discipline and endurance from my lack of them. Rather than being holed up in my house alone, painting, I would have preferred to spend more time at my institution and working on campus. Not only did I learn how to paint during my time at M.S.U., but I also gained an appreciation for the complex dance between creativity and skill and how to view the world through the eyes of an artist.





**Figure 5 :** Critique at M.S.U

### **First Encounters with Critique**

The art critique in the sombre halls of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda haunted me. Maybe it was just my social anxiety, but the large room, devoid of any form of cosiness or comfort, gave the impression of being more of a frigid prison where one's creative works were exposed to the prying eyes of professors. There were visible signs of the creative bloodletting that was a rite of passage on the concrete floor, which bore the scars of innumerable critiques. What was once a symbol of my aspirations and optimism—my artwork—now appeared like an offering to the twin deities of doubt and criticism, spread out on the floor for examination.

My classmate's quiet tones did little to mask our underlying fear. The walls reflected our inner anxiety, emphasising the silence that hung heavily on us. The sound of a page flipping or a chair creaking under the weight of a nervous student served as a vivid reminder of the gloomy atmosphere in which we were immersed. Our mentors, gatekeepers of artistic value, passed judgements from the front of the room. One of our professors, his hair a witness to years spent in the trenches of artistic battle, wielded his book as a shield, his gaze rarely leaving its pages to meet ours. His colleague, similarly commanding in his quiet—a foreshadowing of criticism so severe that it may break the fragile edifice of our creative identities.

When the critique began, it was a slow, meticulous vivisection of dreams, each question and comment a scalpel that stripped away layers of intent, leaving our inspirations exposed and quivering. The first presenter, a young woman with a voice that trembled like a leaf in a storm, found her work—a complex narrative of urban decay—picked apart until the canvas seemed to fray at the edges.

My speech was a lonely march towards the hanging. As I described the motifs and themes, my voice sounded hollow in the large room. When the mentors did provide their feedback, it was a long list of errors and omissions. Every acknowledgement was grudging, every remark a jab that pierced the core of my work and pulled out fragments I had considered essential.

The room itself felt complicit in the trauma, with each shadow silently witnessing the loss of our artistic identities. Far from being a constructive furnace, the critique was a relentless storm, crashing down on the shores of our confidence and ruining the landscapes of our imagination. As the session ended, the relief was tinged by the lingering effects of artistic trauma. The art critique at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda was an ordeal disguised as pedagogy—a dreary trip through a merciless environment where our paintings, once brilliant with possibility, lay withered in the aftermath of critical storms.

The question that arises very starkly now in my mind when I look back at this experience is what the professors were trying to deduce. Were they trying to judge if we were working hard enough? Were the paintings "good" or "bad"? On what parameters do you judge something as subjective as art? If all that was being offered in our first and second years were technical skills, then were the parameters for judgement purely skill-based?

## **Interview**

### **Introduction**

As part of my research into the academic environment at Maharaja Sayajirao University's Faculty of Fine Arts, I had the chance to talk to Professor Akitham Vasudevan. Professor Vasudevan is a well-known figure in Indian art education and used to be Head of Department for Painting at M.S.U. The objective of this talk was to get into more detail about how complex art education is, the ways to find a balance between learning skills and thinking about big ideas, and how art education in India is changing. With his decades of experience and deep insights, Professor Vasudevan gave an in-depth account of the educational philosophies that support the M.S.U. framework. He also explained how these approaches affect students' intellectual and artistic growth. The sections that follow now summarise what we discussed as well as show how it fits into my academic path and the bigger picture of education at M.S.U.'s Fine Arts Faculty.

## **Early Inspirations and Academic Beginnings**

In the interview Akitham Vasudevan discusses his sources of inspiration and the transition from his upbringing in a Kerala village in India to pursuing formal art education. Vasudevan nostalgically recalls the atmosphere at Maharaja Sayajirao University during the 1980s. He reminisces about how Gulam Mohamad Sheikh, who transitioned from painting to teaching art history and visiting artists like Timothy Hyman contributed to establishing an engaging learning environment. Later in the conversation he notes that this period at M.S.U was marked by endeavours to infuse vitality into expressions within contexts. Vasudevan emphasises the faculties' approach of not viewing art in isolation but as a collaborative realm enriched by components such as music, psychology and cinema. This inclusive perspective influenced his journey guiding him to perceive painting as an entity that interacts with trends and various art forms.

## **Maharaja Sayajirao University's Unique Position**

Professor Vasudevan talks about what makes Maharaja Sayajirao University unique in the Indian art education scene. Akkitham states that M.S.U is a great example of how to teach art in a way that blends old and new ideas. This new way of teaching, he says, isn't just a mix of old and new; it's a mix that works well and makes the university's curriculum better. It stands out in art education because its philosophy is based on integrating different things together.

Akkitham points out that M.S.U is a lively and active place to learn where traditional Indian art forms are taught and respected while also being used as a starting point for new artistic exploration. This method helps students fully understand and value their rich cultural heritage while giving them the tools and information they need to participate in and add to the global art scene. The university's dedication to this dual-focus curriculum ensures that students learn about classical techniques and theories which is an essential part of their artistic growth.

This way of thinking about education has a huge effect on students. M.S.U encourages artistic quality and versatility by putting students in situations where they are free to try out a lot of different art forms. This holistic approach to education helps students become flexible, well-rounded artists ready to contribute to the art world at home and abroad. Akkitham's comments on M.S.U's method show that he deeply understands the need for an education system that values tradition while also welcoming new ideas and change.

## **Teaching Philosophy**

Professor Vasudevan talks about his teaching methods and lays stress upon a sequential model in which technical skill development comes first and is the basis for conceptual thinking. Akkitham believes that it is important to master the basic skills in art before moving on to more abstract and conceptual work. This way of thinking comes from his belief that artists need a strong technical foundation in order to express and explore their new ideas.

Further in the interview, he mentions that his teaching philosophy focuses on implementing the basics of art giving importance to skills such as composition, understanding colour theory and various techniques. He makes sure that his students fully grasp these skills as he considers them to be the foundation blocks of expression. He recognizes that this initial phase requires dedication and aims to instil a comprehension and appreciation for the process of artwork creation. He firmly believes that these skills act as instruments and symbolise a language that students need to learn in order to communicate their ideas effectively.



Once students demonstrate a strong command of these technical skills, Akkitham gradually introduces them to conceptual thinking. This transition is carefully orchestrated; he believes that students, now equipped with a solid skill set, are better prepared to engage with and express complex ideas. The curriculum at this stage encourages students to experiment with their newfound skills, pushing the boundaries of their creativity and exploring art beyond its traditional forms.

Throughout this progression, Akkitham mentions personalised mentoring. Recognizing that each student's journey is unique, he tailors his guidance to suit individual needs and aspirations. This individualised approach ensures that students are technically adept and develop a personal artistic voice capable of conceptual depth and innovation.

### **Feedback and Criticism**

During the interview Akkitham also talked about how valuable feedback and criticism are in art education highlighting the resilience they build in students. He describes critique sessions where teachers thoroughly analyse a student's artwork often leading to emotional reactions from students. Although these moments can be challenging he believes that they are essential for helping students develop character and prepare for the broader art world. Vasudevan stressed the importance of critique processes considering them components of a well rounded art education program. Through this evaluation students not only improve their technical skills and creative thinking but also learn to handle feedback with grace and a positive mindset. He concludes that this aspect is crucial for their growth as artists and individuals who can critically assess their work effectively.

### **Future of Art Education**

Professor Vasudevan provides a forward-thinking analysis of art education emphasising the need for flexibility, inclusivity, and the incorporation of new technologies. He envisions a setting where art education embraces a more all-encompassing and holistic approach, transcending conventional boundaries. Akkitham emphasises that because the art world constantly changes, educational institutions must be flexible enough to adapt.

The use of new technologies is another important part of Akkitham's vision for the future. His goal is for art education to include both new technologies and traditional art forms that are respected and kept alive. Adding virtual reality, digital art, and other cutting edge tools to the curriculum is part of this. By doing this, students can explore new ways to be creative and express themselves. This will help them get ready for a future where art and technology will come together more and more.

Additionally, Akkitham stresses the value of adaptable teaching strategies. He recommends that curricula be responsive and dynamic, able to change to accommodate emerging trends and technological advancements. This flexibility guarantees that students are knowledgeable about modern techniques and the foundational ideas of art, enabling them to be flexible and well-equipped to meet the changing needs of the art industry.

Finally, Akkitham imagines a time when technological advancement, inclusivity, tradition, and innovation coexist harmoniously in art education. He thinks that by encouraging these qualities, art schools can produce artists who are not only technically skilled but also culturally sensitive and creatively adaptable, prepared to make a significant contribution to the world of art.

## **Conclusion and parting advice**

Towards the end of the interview, Professor Vasudevan Akkitham offers wise words and suggestions to budding artists and educators, stressing the vital role that creativity, flexibility, and a firm grounding in traditional skills play. He advocates a well-rounded approach to art education that guarantees a solid grasp of traditional methods while encouraging artistic innovation.

Akkitham highlights the significance of adopting a tough attitude towards creativity for individuals aiming to pursue a career in the arts. He motivates them to recognize both their achievements and setbacks, as components of their development. Akkitham recommends that budding artists should constantly try things and venture into new territories to broaden their creative horizons. At the time they should invest into honing their skills. According to him this multilayered approach empowers artists to distinguish themselves in the domain by nurturing a viewpoint and creative vision.

Akkitham advises art educators to design stimulating and demanding learning environments for their students. He emphasises how important it is for teachers to be receptive to novel concepts and approaches and to modify their methods in response to the changing needs of their pupils.

When asked for his concluding remarks or any last guidance he wishes to impart to aspiring educators, Akkitham reiterates the value of combining innovation with tradition. He underscores the necessity of staying up to date with the trends and technological advancements while also stressing the importance of skills. He is confident that this strategy will provide emerging artists and educators with the depth and adaptability required to succeed in the constantly evolving field of art.

## **The Evolution of My Artistic Voice**

As I conclude Chapter 3, it is critical for me to consider how my M.S.U experience influenced my artistic identity. This rigorously skill-focused educational journey moulded me into the artist I am today. M.S.U taught me the value of skill acquisition, which has had a significant impact on my creative expression.

With its focus on learning traditional methods, M.S.U's curriculum gave me a robust toolkit necessary for any artist. These abilities, which ranged from painting and drawing, were the foundation for my ability to use art to explore and communicate complex concepts. In the early phases of my artistic journey, this rigorous focus on skill development was essential because it enabled me to translate my visions accurately and clearly into tangible creations.

Even though M.S.U taught me a lot of technical skills, it also made me a little apprehensive about receiving criticism and exhibiting my work in public. This fear and the university's late emphasis on conceptual thinking, which was primarily introduced in the final year, limited earlier opportunities to engage with and benefit from constructive criticism.

As my education continued and I pursued my Master's of Fine Arts, the emphasis on skills melded more smoothly with conceptual exploration. The emergence of a more complex and nuanced artistic language was made possible by a fusion of skill and concept, and M.S.U

ensured I had the skills. It allowed me to explore the concepts and subjects that captivated me more thoroughly and turn them into works of art that spoke on several levels.

Learning how to make art during this M.S.U journey was always prioritised over learning how to think like an artist. Although it felt limiting then, the skill-based curriculum increased my creative language by giving me a solid base to work with. The conventional methods I acquired served as the vocabulary for expressing my thoughts, enabling a deeper, more meaningful interaction between my audience and my work.

Upon contemplation of the development of my creative voice, it is evident that my stay at M.S.U had a profound impact. The later introduction of conceptual thinking, while initially perceived as a limitation, eventually compelled me to seek a balance between skill development and conceptual freedom in my work, enriching its depth and complexity. My work has become more affluent, dynamic, and multilayered due to my rigorous focus on skills that gave me the tools I needed to express ideas.

## **Chapter 4**

### **California Institute of the Arts**

#### **A Leap into the Unknown**

California Institute of the Arts was a shot in the dark. I knew I wanted to pursue a master's degree after receiving my bachelors degree from M.S.U in May 2017. Even so, I was not sure where I would like to get my master's degree from. Since there were more prospects outside of India for my field and not everyone could afford a master's degree outside of India, the thought of moving abroad was alluring. All I needed was some clarity on how I would choose which institutions to apply to.

In contrast to the previous time, I could only rely on the information found online and would not have the option of visiting the colleges in person. To apply to international universities, I would need a strong portfolio, which is time consuming. I decided to work on the portfolio during my year off.

Instead of returning to my hometown, I spent that year living with my girlfriend and our two pet guinea pigs in Baroda, surrounded by my M.S.U friends, and working on my portfolio. In retrospect I realise how significant that year was to my artistic practice. I had time to reflect upon my M.S.U experience and hone the talents I picked up. This challenge was clearly different from my M.S.U application process. I had no admission examinations to give, but I felt more confident in my abilities and had created my language with oil paints. I had to submit ten paintings as part of my portfolio to be admitted. The prominent American institutions all open for admission in January, and there is a considerable wait after that. Below are some of the works I had submitted as a part of my portfolio.



**Figure 6:** Paintings from my M.F.A application portfolio

I was only half sure that I would be admitted anywhere, much less get to choose the college I wanted to attend, until I received my first affirmative response. By summer I was accepted into the following institutions: California Institute of The Arts, Savannah College of Art and Design, New York Academy of the Art, Otis College of Art and Design, Maryland Institute College of Art, and School of the Museum of Fine Arts at TUFTS. These were all well known colleges and universities. At last, I narrowed the selection down to the following two universities: the New York Academy of Art and the California Institute of the Arts. Although I would have had more exposure to the city and the art business in New York, yet CalArts had a higher name and reputation. This was a decision that could not be made alone. I had to rely on the internet and my teachers. To further complicate things, you must submit a deposit form even before receiving a response from each college you apply to, a highly unjust practice. By May, I had decided that I was joining CalArts.

### **The CalArts Way**

CalArts had the reputation of being very different from anything I had ever encountered considering my prior exposure to a traditional art school in India. Originally, the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music and the Chouinard Art Institute merged to form this institution. In 1961, Walt Disney and his brother Roy founded it (Abrams & Keohane, 2016). Since its founding, CalArts has gained a reputation for advocating for an integrative approach to arts education that breaks down traditional barriers and fosters experimentation and creativity. This completely differed from M.S.U, where the departments comprised the university's essential organisation. While CalArts also had comparable departments, these departments'

borders were more flexible. This programme was named "Studio Arts" as opposed to my undergraduate "Painting" programme.

One of the most unique aspects of CalArts was its interdisciplinary approach to art education. Unlike other institutions that compartmentalise different art forms, CalArts encourages collaboration and cross-pollination between disciplines. As an art student who primarily worked with Paintings, my cohort consisted of people with a more multidisciplinary approach to art. I had the opportunity to exist closely with not only painters and graphic designers but also sculptors, performance artists and artists who worked with installations. This expanded my artistic horizons and taught me how to communicate and work effectively with individuals from different backgrounds.

The beginning of the first few months at CalArts went by on automatic pilot. Having never lived outside of India, it was an exciting experience to learn how to survive independently in a new country from scratch. That meant learning how to open a bank account, get a cell phone number, get a social security card, etc. These things sound so mundane and easy now, but experiencing them for the first time is intimidating. I still remember my first meal after reaching Santa Clarita. It was at McDonald's. I remember experiencing no jet lag even though the flight was 16 hours long. I guess it was the adrenaline I was experiencing.

Our studios were not to be assigned until after the classes started. I could take my time exploring the school because I lived in the dorms on campus. The main structure, just a maze of hallways, had an odd hospital-like feel. Everything was first come, first served on registration day. The online registration website contained very little information about the classes. The information was shared in person while sitting next to the lecturers. Aside from the required classes, which I shall discuss later, the "Independent Study" component of my CalArts curriculum was the high point. These 'Independent studies' were one-on-one meetings with professors, apart from our designated mentor, where they would come to your studio for an hour to discuss the advancements you have been making in your artistic practice. As far as the framework for our studio practice goes, that was it.

A month following the start of school, our studios were allocated. John Baldessari, who incidentally had a significant influence on the curriculum at CalArts, is honoured by the studios that master's students in the Studio Arts department are entitled to. The foundational art curriculum of CalArts was influenced by Baldessari's tenure there from 1970 until 1988. Baldessari stressed conceptual thinking, which completely changed how students handled their work. Instead of focusing just on technical skill or beauty, he challenged them to investigate the ideas behind their creations in greater detail. Entering those studios as someone who had never attended this school of artistic training was a surreal experience.

## **Freedom and Exploration**

The foundation critique course was the only prerequisite for our first semester at CalArts. The purpose of placing this class in the first semester was to expose the cohort as a whole to your work. Numerous comparable critique classes with comparable frameworks were offered. As with everything else, there was a marked difference between how critiques were handled compared to those at M.S.U.

As it was the beginning of our first semester, students were generally showing their past work. The civility almost took me aback. They were almost genuinely interested in learning more about my work. No one was being attacked. You always had the option to speak about your work before the criticism started or after it was over, or you could ultimately wish to stay silent about it and take the feedback. This is a choice that is frequently missed and is only



genuinely valued by students who experience varying degrees of anxiety. I recall presenting the pieces I had included in my portfolio (Figure 6).



**Figure 7** : Painting from undergraduate final year at M.S.U.

The piece titled "Wuss" is one of many that I included in my portfolio. In addition to being a part of the final show at M.S.U, this was also my last project there. This piece is significant because it is the first time I had personified using my pet Guinea Pig. The chair and the setting in the background are an attempt at truthful representations of our studio at M.S.U. My goal in making this piece was to describe how I felt internally about the studio we shared during my final year at M.S.U. The fact that this is the first time I intentionally set out to build a narrative and convey a message through my artwork also makes it an essential artwork for me. While technical skills, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, were prioritised in my formal training at M.S.U, they gave root to my conceptual artworks.

The one unexpected aspect of campus life was the lack of a rigid framework for studio practice. Unlike at M.S.U, the faculty at CalArts trusted us to figure out how to steer our creative ship within the confines of our studios, leaving us alone except for Independent Studies and visits from our mentor. At CalArts, we had a chance to exhibit our work twice in front of the whole campus, once in the middle of the academic year and once at the end of

the residency. There were both large and small galleries on campus, and students were assigned to them via a lottery system. Mid-residence shows often began early in December since they were scheduled with the graduating second-year students in mind.



**Figure 8** : Painting from 1st Year M.F.A at CalArts



One significant class I took at CalArts was called "Art of the Dead". To summarise the class, it was exactly as the class title suggests. This class revolved around the practice of art-making related to death as a phenomenon in various cultures globally. It was a fluid class, which meant on some days, it functioned as a seminar where we learnt about the cultural significance of "The Day of the Dead (Spanish: *el Día de Muertos*)", while on others, we visited a beautiful cemetery in L.A. The class would culminate with us creating an artwork revolving around death.

This work (Figure 8) is essential to me for multiple reasons. One of them is because I was still learning how to build narratives using my artwork. Also, I remember conversing with my Mentor, Darcy Huebler, during one of our one-on-one meetings. I remember trying to hide this work as it did not look aesthetically pleasing. I recall my mentor cautioning me against measuring my artwork with that yardstick, also making sure that I realised the importance of cataloguing and documenting my works, even the ones I believe were not my best works.

Moreover, she was correct. This is a pivotal piece because it was the first time I tried the image transfer technique on a canvas, which has since been a standard element of my painting process. Since I was unhappy with the painting's aesthetics, I was frantic about improving it by adding something new. The "missing" billboard in the painting's lower right corner was the first picture I successfully transferred using Gel Medium. Despite its seeming small step to my artistic development at the moment, this experimentation is precisely what is encouraged in the ethos of CalArts.

## **The Critique**

The open-ended discussions that characterised the transformative critique sessions at CalArts created a supportive atmosphere for artistic experimentation. This approach prioritised constructive criticism and concentrated more on the artist's personal development than evaluating the piece's success.

The critique sessions at CalArts were characterised by a collaborative spirit, where faculty and students engaged in discussions more akin to a collective exploration of artistic possibilities. This method pushed the bounds of my traditional artistic mediums by encouraging greater self-reflection and a willingness to try new things. Feedback was given regarding the work's ability to provoke thought and evoke deeper meanings in addition to its immediate impact. I could hone my artistic voice and make it more complex and resonate because of this respectful and encouraging atmosphere.

On the other hand, M.S.U's critique procedure was more regimented and concentrated on technical proficiency and respect for conventional art forms. Although it gave a strong foundation in art fundamentals, this often felt restrictive regarding conceptual exploration and individual expression. The criticisms were frequently prescriptive, which made it harder to encourage unconventional or divergent thinking.

The way feedback was given at CalArts being more open and supportive had an impact on my creation practice. It encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone, take on challenges and approach art with more adaptability and resilience. The constructive criticism and understanding environment allowed me to grow as an artist by enabling me to convey ideas with depth and subtlety. Engaging with critiques of artists' work not only shaped my perspective on art but also influenced how I engage with it. Overall the experience at CalArts broadened my voice and expanded the range of ideas I could express through my work.

## The Evolution of Art Practice

Gradually experimenting with this paper transfer technique gave me much more confidence to find a voice. Being exposed to so many incredible budding artists and getting to know their works through the critiques led me to a semi-existential crisis regarding my work. With the mid-residency show looming, I started introspecting what I wanted to achieve from my work. Maybe a part of me staying alone in a foreign country for the Christmas Holidays had something to do with it. I started focusing on modern-day behavioural addictions and substances which are not banned from society but are still very detrimental to our mental well-being. I started dealing with the notion of "Dope" in the context of millennial culture and its negative implications on the human brain and society at large. My work started investigating pornography, fast food culture, social media, and binge-watching as modern forms of psychological addictions. This was a significant departure from where my work was a year ago.



**Figure 9** : Works from final year M.F.A

My experience at CalArts greatly broadened my understanding of conceptual thinking and influenced the development of my artistic style. An open-ended curriculum that focused heavily on freedom to do whatever one believes in was a defining feature of my education there. The courses were not just educational; they were also means of inquiry, challenging me to reconsider and reinterpret what art is. Initiatives aimed at encouraging creativity developed into significant turning points, each taking the field of conceptual thinking one step further.

The progressive atmosphere of CalArts fostered a conversation between various artistic disciplines by fusing performance, digital art, and multimedia into a seamless conceptual exploration story. My view of art as a language for ideas and dialogue expanded significantly due to this multidisciplinary approach, going well beyond the visual arts.

Throughout my CalArts journey, my creative process was greatly nourished by the insightful criticism provided by faculty members and peers. Rather than just acting as assessments, the critique sessions were collaborative conversations that helped me refine my conceptual framework. My artistic voice was transformed beyond academic exercise during this period of intense exploration at CalArts. It was a journey of self-discovery. Because of the challenges and growth that I experienced during this time, I now view art as a medium that can be used to skillfully express ideas while also questioning, reflecting, and altering societal narratives.

When I reflect on my development as an artist, it is evident that CalArts offered a unique environment that supported the growth of a strong conceptual comprehension. The experiences at CalArts were life-changing, allowing a transformation from conventional artistic methods to a more sophisticated, idea-driven art practice.

## **Interview**

### **Introduction to Interview with CalArts Professor**

As a part of this thesis, I had the unique opportunity to interview my professor from CalArts. John Mandel has been with CalArts since the late sixties. If anyone has seen CalArts closely and its development throughout the decades, it would be John. An art school, or, for that matter, any educational institute, is forever in motion. Students go in, and students go out. It was a forever-churning cycle, but he stayed put in one institution for almost half a century. Suppose I had to know more about CalArts. This was my guy. He is in his late 80s now, so agreeing to participate in this interview was very special for me. One important thing to mention here is that I was his teaching assistant for a painting class in my final year at CalArts.

The interview was scheduled for an hour but lasted almost two hours. I began by outlining my thesis. I had my questions prepared, and the questions were identical to the ones that were used for my other interview with my professor at M.S.U. To keep the interview natural and flow as freely as possible, the questions were only used as guides to keep the conversation flowing.

## **Personal Journey and Philosophy of Art**

When asked about his background and his own experience as a student, John mentions the significant events that shaped his life and his practice. He describes his initial years in the art world as being traditional and very much focused on technical skills and conventional art forms. John reflects on the limited artistic identities available in the past by saying “It wasn't easy to get media back then. There were only so many different types of artists you could have been. You could have been an "abstract" painter or a "representational" painter. This also goes for sculptors.” His art practice evolved with time from being mostly representational to focusing more on the ideas behind the works. His teaching philosophy now includes a more holistic approach towards teaching and art making which emphasises on personal expression and exploration over traditional methods. “No instruction if not necessary” is what his mantra is towards building traditional skills.

Further in the interview John shares what he thinks the role of art is and what an artist should strive for. John believes that art is a vital tool for communication and understanding. He asserts that art is unique in the sense that no other medium is more capable of capturing the complexity of human experiences. He further advocates for the concept of art as exploration of one's position in the cosmos which he mentions is a far greater objective than just a pursuit of technical mastery. This perspective is very evident in his teaching approach which advocates students to engage with the uncertainties of creation and the enigmas of life through art.

## **Evolution of Art Institutions and Education**

When asked to reflect on his extensive stint at California Institute of the Arts, he mentions the dynamic nature of art institutions and how he was a witness to this change by teaching at an institution which was at the forefront. John strongly believes that art mirrors society. With movements like Pop Art in the 60's the art world was getting more and more democratised. According to him the curriculum in various art schools soon followed this change and gradually shifted from being a traditionally skill based programme to becoming more inclusive and holistic while emphasising conceptual thinking and individual expression. He highlights the flexible and innovative educational model at CalArts which emphasised on meaning making. He underscores the importance of evolution of art programmes with time, stressing its role in shaping future artists.

When it comes to finding the balance between honing skills and conceptual thinking the professor shares a very balanced and thoughtful perspective. He acknowledges the importance of skills in art education while cautioning against placing much emphasis on technique at the expense of deep conceptual understanding. John advocates for an approach that sees skill development and conceptual thinking as unifying aspects of art education than conflicting ones. In his view mastering skills enables artists to bring their ideas to life while embracing conceptual thinking adds originality and significance to their work. He argues that this holistic approach is crucial for preparing students for careers in the arts, where both creative thinking and technical proficiency are highly valued. John's viewpoint demonstrates a grasp of art as a multifaceted realm where critical and imaginative thinking are just as crucial, as the ability to bring ideas to fruition.

## **The Role of Art Educators in CalArts**

When asked what role Institutions like CalArts play in the modern-day Art scenario? John opened up regarding the philosophy that drives that art school. He again mentions the fundamental philosophy behind Calart's curriculum: "No instructions without requirement". Teachers at CalArts are facilitators, not just teachers, leading students on a path of self-discovery in the creative process. This method is based on the idea that since art reflects the individual, it should be as distinctive as the creator. He mentions that at CalArts, instructors place a high value on fostering an atmosphere where students can experiment and express themselves without feeling pressured to follow set artistic conventions or fads. It is believed that fostering individual expression is essential to the growth of artists who can produce unique and significant work for the art world.

The discussion then moves towards CalArts' teaching philosophy, which prioritises concepts and content over technique. While acknowledging the importance of technical proficiency in art education, John emphasises the development of a strong conceptual base and the ability to think creatively and analytically about one's artistic endeavours as the primary goal. This approach is rooted in his belief that art should convey ideas, arouse feelings and allow for expressiveness and intellectual stimulation. By prompting students to explore their intentions and motivations John is able to cultivate a deeper sense of self awareness as creators in his students. The overarching aim of prioritising ideas and substance in art over skills is not only to nurture proficient artists but also to foster innovative thinkers capable of pushing boundaries in the realm of art.

John believes that CalArts is dedicated to transforming the role of art educators as seen in its principles. By not imposing a fixed curriculum, instructors at CalArts are encouraged to be flexible catering to needs and creative paths of an individual student. This approach prioritises student independence and personalised learning strategies aligning with a trend in the art industry. It contributes to our perception of art as an evolving domain that continually generates fresh concepts and methods. At CalArts the focus is not on teaching techniques but on cultivating a generation of artists who are thinkers and who push the boundaries of artistic possibilities. By placing emphasis on ideas and content this goal is achieved effectively.

## **Student-Centred Teaching Approach**

During the Interview John at several instances brought up his "Student Centred Teaching Approach" at the California Institute of the Arts. When asked to elaborate on this he explained that this approach differs greatly from methods led by other instructors. The student centred approach prioritises the learners themselves—their interests, experiences and perspectives. This philosophy emphasises that education should nurture rather than dictate expression because art is a personal voyage of self discovery and creativity. John elaborated on how this strategy fosters an environment in the classroom where students are motivated to take control of their learning and explore subjects and mediums that resonate with their inclinations. Through this empowerment students can become more involved. Develop a sense of ownership over their projects. CalArts aims to cultivate artists who are enthusiastic, independent and self-driven, equipped to make an impact in the art realm by centering the educational journey around each student.

John in the interview then proceeds to highlight the importance of helping students discover and express their identities. He mentions that instructors at CalArts serve as mentors and guides in a student centred environment assisting students in finding their voices and maximising their potential. In this process students delve into their thoughts, feelings and personal experiences to infuse them into their works. John explained how this approach enables students to establish a connection with their art resulting in pieces that're profoundly personal. He believes that nurturing individuality is crucial for nurturing artists who can challenge conventions and bring perspectives to the art community. This methodology also equips students for the challenges of an art career, where success often depends on an individual's vision and aesthetic sense.

## **Conclusion**

Doing this interview with John was a deeply illuminating experience for me as he shed light on the evolution of art education and ways in which educators can foster a student centred approach. John highlighted the evolving landscape of art schools like CalArts indicating a shift towards inclusive, interdisciplinary and concept driven art instruction. His teaching philosophy underscores the importance of enabling students to explore and express their individuality aligning with a trend that values critical thinking and self expression over mastery of techniques. Through his insights we gain perspective on the nature of art education and its impact on nurturing emerging artists.

John's views strongly coincide with the themes discussed in my research. His advocacy for finding a harmony between skill development and conceptual thinking resonates with the research objective of examining variations in art curricula across institutions. The interview provides real life instances of how art education can adapt to keep pace with the evolving landscape offering insights into the theoretical underpinnings of the study. John's expertise and beliefs serve as a reference point for grasping the intricacies and subtleties of art education adding value to this interview, within this broader research endeavour.

## **Preparing for the Future**

Having studied at both a traditional art school and a conceptually driven school, I now have a distinct set of artistic tools and perspectives thanks to the institution's comprehensive approach to education, which combines extensive conceptual exploration with rigorous skill development. I pass on various abilities, from technical proficiency in various media to a deftness in conceptual thought that subverts conventional art paradigms.

My time at CalArts has given me a deep appreciation for how art can both shape and reflect social narratives, and it has given me a sense of obligation to make meaningful and original contributions to the art world. I've been equipped to take on the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead thanks to the support to try new things and push boundaries and the development of a resilient mindset to deal with the uncertainties of a creative career. Looking back, my experience at CalArts was life changing. It gave me tools that built on my technical proficiency to include a profound and innovative approach to art.

## **Chapter 5**

Chapter 5 concludes this research by journeying through varied educational paradigms in art education, reflecting the harmony of skill development and conceptual thinking. The chapter dwells on the transforming insights borrowed from literature, personal reflection, and interviews to underpin creating a comprehensive art curriculum. Balancing these two immensely different educational philosophies of attending Maharaja Sayajirao University and the California Institute of the Arts is an intense experience, underlining the distinction between technical perfection and creative freedom. This chapter lays out my example of a perfect model of an art curriculum that merges structured skill enhancement with the liberty of conceptual exploration, intending to equip the artist with tools fit enough for serving his artistic expression as well as for meaningful engagement within the broader societal and cultural contexts.

### **Reflections on Educational Philosophies.**

The educational philosophies at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) and Maharaja Sayajirao University (M.S.U) present quite a contrast. My time at M.S.U was characterised by a deep dive into traditional art forms and techniques, which laid a strong technical foundation for me. This approach while providing a solid base of essential skills occasionally had the side effect of limiting creative exploration and freedom. In contrast, CalArts embraced a more idea driven conceptual approach. This environment challenged conventional boundaries and encouraged critical thinking, enriching my comprehension of the ideas that underpin my art. It unquestionably expanded my creative possibilities, though, at times, it undervalued technical proficiency.

Balancing skill development with conceptual thinking has been central to my artistic evolution. Skills enable the realisation of creative visions, while conceptual thinking adds those creations with depth and significance. Both aspects are indispensable, yet their relative importance varies depending on the specific context and objectives. I've come to see that an optimal educational philosophy harmonises these elements, nurturing minds ready to make meaningful contributions to the art world and society at large.

### **Lessons from Personal Experience.**

The education I received at Maharaja Sayajirao University and the California Institute of the Arts has changed how I think about an ideal art curriculum. Thinking back on these important milestones, I can perceive an ideal art curriculum that combines M.S.U's structured, skill-based instruction with CalArts's flexible, conceptual approach. A programme like this would give artists the technical skills they need to make their ideas come to life and encourage them to use their art to explore and explain complex ideas. This holistic approach would prove beneficial in preparing students for the ever changing needs of the art world. It would give them the skills to make art and engage in critical thinking and meaningful interaction with their cultural and societal contexts.

Inclusion of skill development and conceptual thinking into an art curriculum is essential for nurturing well-rounded artists. This combination enhances student's abilities by providing depth and relevance to their work. Skill development equips students with the technical prowess to articulate their visions effectively, laying the groundwork for all creative endeavours. Conceptual thinking however, adds an additional layer to their work by

encouraging a deeper exploration of themes, narratives, and ideas that resonate on personal and societal levels.

The role of educators is very important to this integration because they ensure that students learn both technical skills and conceptual thinking. Students can be asked to use their skills to further their conceptual ideas in assignments, and critiques can look at both how well the work was done and how much thought went into it. Interdisciplinary projects can encourage students to combine ideas from different fields, which can lead to new ideas and the breaking down of traditional barriers.

It is very important to create an environment that values failure, success, and experimentation all the same. In this kind of setting, students are free to push their creative and technical limits without worrying about being judged. This helps them make groundbreaking art and grow as people as they learn how to balance artistic expression and self-reflection.

A curriculum that effectively combines skill-based learning with conceptual thinking gives students a complete set of tools for growing as artists and as people. It gets them ready to make important contributions to the art world and to larger cultural and social conversations.

### **Challenges and Considerations.**

Addressing the complexities of developing and implementing the ideal art curriculum could be challenging for various reasons and constraints. These challenges range from time constraints to regulatory norms that may not always align with progressive educational ideologies. Furthermore, the student body's cultural diversity introduces complexities that necessitate a versatile curriculum accommodating diverse learning styles and cultural perspectives. Furthermore, differing philosophical perspectives among faculty on the importance of skill versus conceptual understanding can result in conflicts rather than collaborative efforts in curriculum development. Although diverse perspectives enrich academic discussions, they can impede the development of a unified curriculum that effectively harmonises both elements.

The unwillingness to embrace change is a significant barrier, often stemming from a strong attachment to traditional educational methods. To overcome this resistance, it is necessary to demonstrate the tangible benefits of a more holistic approach to art education, which can be accomplished through pilot initiatives, as well as to showcase successful outcomes and foster open conversations with stakeholders in order to alleviate concerns and highlight the potential for improved student achievement.

Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to teamwork, flexibility, and continuous assessment from educators, administrators, and students, all of whom can significantly impact the curriculum's success. Thus, incorporating skill and conceptual thinking into art education goes beyond curriculum planning; it entails cultivating a culture of innovation, inclusivity, and adaptability to the changing dynamics of art and society.

### **Proposing a New Paradigm.**

Reflecting on my thesis, creating an ideal art program, in my opinion, requires merging M.S.U's structured skill development with the conceptual liberty experienced at CalArts. The literature has revealed the importance of a curriculum that adeptly marries technical



proficiency with creative inquiry. My journey highlighted the transformative potential of oscillating between these distinct educational frameworks, underscoring the significance of flexibility and personal expression within art education. This amalgamation of insights, particularly underscored by conversations with figures like Professor Mandel and Professor Vausdevann, champions a learner-centric approach where individual growth and conceptual richness are as prized as technical acumen. This blend of knowledge forms the cornerstone of my envisaged comprehensive art program.

To foster a more balanced curriculum that equally prioritises skill enhancement and critical thought, I plan to weave together elements that bolster conceptual comprehension, analytical thinking, and interpretative skills with hands-on technical painting exercises. This strategy aims to equip students with the mastery of painting techniques and deepen their contemplation about their chosen subjects, the methodologies they adopt, and the narratives they intend to articulate through their artwork.

Here is an example of said curriculum.

### **Week 1: Introduction to Painting & Conceptual Foundations**

- Classroom Activity: Introduction to painting mediums and tools, alongside a discussion on the purpose of art and the artist's role in society.
- Homework: Write a reflection on what art means to the student personally and how they see themselves expressing ideas through painting.

In the first week students will be introduced to the different aspects of painting including exploring different mediums and tools to prepare them for their artistic journey. The class discussions during this period will focus on the importance of art and the valuable role that artists play in society. As part of their tasks students are encouraged to reflect on their connection with art and think about how they intend to use painting as a way to express their ideas and perspectives fostering self awareness and a meaningful bond with their process.

### **Week 2: Colour Theory & Emotional Expression**

- Classroom Activity: Study of colour theory paired with an exploration of how colours can be used to convey emotions and narratives in art.
- Homework: Create a painting that uses colour to express a specific emotion, accompanied by a brief explanation of the chosen colours and the intended emotional effect.

In the second week of the course the curriculum delves into the world of colour theory exploring the dynamics between colours and their ability to evoke emotions. Students in this week will engage with exercises where they blend colours to form gradients and spectrums, which they later apply in creating artworks that convey particular feelings. To reinforce this week's learning, students are tasked with homework which involves them in creating a painting that intentionally employs colours to express emotions, accompanied by explanations detailing their colour choices. This assignment aims to enhance students' comprehension of how colour serves as a tool for communication, within the realm of arts.

### **Week 3: Composition & Visual Storytelling**

- Classroom Activity: Lessons on composition basics combined with storytelling through art. Discuss how the arrangement of elements can affect the narrative of a painting.
- Homework: Paint a scene that tells a story, focusing on how composition guides the viewer's eye and conveys the narrative.

Week three, the students focus on composing and storytelling. They explore concepts such as the rule of thirds, leading lines and framing to enhance the visual narratives of their work. During class activities they study artworks to understand how composition guides viewers gaze and communicates narratives. As part of their assignments students will create paintings that are driven by storytelling employing techniques to convey stories visually and honing their narrative skills through art creation.

### **Week 4: Texture & Symbolism**

- Classroom Activity: Experimentation with creating textures in painting and how these textures can be symbolic or add depth to the artwork's meaning.
- Homework: Create a textured piece incorporating symbolism, with a written component explaining the symbolism used.

This week's goal is to focus on texture and symbolism in painting. Students get to try out methods for creating textures and explore how these textures can convey themes or emotions in art. The assignment for this week involves students making a textured painting infused with elements prompting them to think about how the tangible features of their artwork can convey messages.

### **Week 5: Perspective & Metaphor**

- Classroom Activity: Instruction on perspective in art, technical (one-point, two-point perspective) and conceptual (using perspective to create metaphorical depth in artwork).
- Homework: Paint a piece that uses perspective as a metaphor, with an explanation of the metaphorical intent.

In this week of the course students delve into perspective and metaphor in art. They explore how perspective can enrich depth and produce illusions in their creations. The lesson further discusses utilising perspective as a metaphor in art to infuse meaning making. As part of their assignment students are required to create a work that utilises perspective as a means to communicate ideas blending skill, with depth.

### **Week 6: Figure & Identity**

- Classroom Activity: Figurative painting focuses on human forms, exploring how figures can be used to explore themes of identity and self.

- Homework: Create a self-portrait or a portrait of a figure that reflects aspects of identity, accompanied by a reflection on the chosen identity aspects.

During week six the class revolves around depicting the body and identity through figure paintings. Students investigate how the physical form can communicate personal and cultural identities. As part of their project students are required to produce a self portrait or a figure painting that captures aspects of their identity or that of their chosen subject infusing narratives into their interpretation.

### **Week 7: Landscape & Place**

- Classroom Activity: Landscape painting with an emphasis on how landscapes can reflect cultural, historical, and personal narratives.
- Homework: Paint a significant landscape to the student personally or culturally, with a narrative explaining its significance.

In week seven the focus is on exploring landscapes and places. Students will delve into the creation of landscapes while also learning their historical importance. The assignment prompts students to create a painting of a landscape that holds cultural meaning intertwining their narratives and ties to the artwork deepening their bond with the subject matter.

### **Week 8: Abstract Art & Conceptual Exploration**

- Classroom Activity: Exploration of abstract art, focusing on how abstraction can be used to explore complex concepts and emotions.
- Homework: Create an abstract painting with a written explanation that represents a complex idea or emotion.

In week eight the main theme is centred around abstract art and conceptual exploration. Students will research art movements and are tasked with creating their own unique pieces that convey intricate concepts. The assignment entails creating a painting accompanied by an explanation prompting students to explain their concepts underpinning their non representational artworks.

### **Week 9: Art Criticism & Peer Review**

- Classroom Activity: Introduction to art criticism and peer review processes, encouraging students to constructively engage with and critique each other's work.
- Homework: Write a critique of a peer's painting, focusing on technical execution and conceptual depth.

In week nine the emphasis is on art evaluation and peer assessment. Students engage in criticism of their peers' artwork honing their ability to offer and accept feedback. This week's assignment, which involves writing a critique of a classmate's painting, allows them to enhance their analytical abilities and broaden their insight into various artistic methods.

### **Week 10: Art in Context & Research**

- Classroom Activity: Discuss art movements' historical and cultural context, encouraging students to research and present an art movement or artist that resonates with them.
- Homework: Research and present on an artist or art movement, focusing on its conceptual foundations and influence on contemporary art.

Week ten focuses on the connection between art and its context as research. Students delve into the cultural backgrounds of art movements before sharing their insights on a particular artist or movement that has left an impact on them. By taking a research oriented approach this week ties together cultural insights, with artistic expression helping students expand their perception of arts significance in society.

### **Week 11: Integration of Other Media & Interdisciplinary Connections**

- Classroom Activity: Workshop integrating other media into painting (collage, digital elements) and connections between painting and other disciplines (literature, history, science).
- Homework: Create a mixed media painting that incorporates elements from another discipline, explaining the interdisciplinary connection.

In week 11 the curriculum explores the use of media and interdisciplinary connections, urging students to blend elements from diverse disciplines in their artwork. The assignment for this week involves creating a mixed media piece that delves into a theme from a discipline fostering creativity and originality by highlighting how different forms of knowledge and expression are intertwined.

### **Week 12: Social Themes & Artistic Responsibility**

- Classroom Activity: Discuss art as a medium for social commentary and the artist's social responsibility.
- Homework: Create a piece that addresses a social issue important to the student, accompanied by a rationale for the chosen issue and approach.

In week twelve students explore topics and the role of artists in society motivating them to produce art that tackles social issues. The assignment, centred on this theme, prompts students to leverage their art for advocacy and self expression highlighting the power of art to transcend boundaries.

### **Week 13: Final Project & Reflection**

- Classroom Activity: Students begin their final project, integrating skills and concepts learned throughout the course into a comprehensive piece.

- Homework: Complete the final project, accompanied by a reflective essay that discusses their artistic journey throughout the course, how their skills and conceptual understanding have developed, and how they have applied these in their final piece.

Week thirteen wraps up with the culmination of a project and a reflective component. Students put into practice the skills and ideas acquired during the course to craft a rounded work. The reflective essay prompts students to ponder their growth as artists and the shifts in perspectives they have experienced encapsulating their progression throughout the course.

The goal of this curriculum is to develop artists who are not just proficient in skills but are also deeply aware of the power that art holds for critical inquiry and meaning making. The weekly assignments are specifically crafted to push students to explore the significance and impact of their works beyond the canvas.

## **Final Reflections**

Investigating different educational paradigms in art education has been an eye-opening and life-changing experience. This investigation has had a profound effect on my identity as an artist and a person in addition to deepening my understanding of art and its pedagogical approaches. Through my exploration, I found different teaching philosophies that either highlight skill development or conceptual thinking, or blend the two. Interacting with these various paradigms made me think critically about my artistic and educational endeavours. It became evident that creating versatile and thoughtful artists requires a well-balanced approach that promotes both technical proficiency and conceptual depth.

This journey has shown to me just how dynamic the character of art education is, uncovering its nature as something malleable enough to embrace fresh perceptions. I learned so much from the tangled relationships between technique and ideas. I have evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of these educational models, from the traditional models that are skill-based to the contemporary ones, which are concept-driven. The results of this investigation make it clear how important it is to have a curriculum that is flexible enough to change as the art world and broader social contexts do.

This research journey has inspired me to approach art making more holistically and allowed me, as a creator, to delve deeper into my practice. Realising the importance of technical mastery and conceptual foundation has undoubtedly improved my creative expression, and I have gained a stronger sense of purpose and intentionality.

This path has been one of personal development and self-discovery. It challenged me to assess my views on education and the arts critically, which led to a more complex understanding of my responsibilities as a teacher and member of the creative community. More empathy and openness—two qualities that are critical to teaching and artistic practice—have emerged from this process of introspection and investigation.

The findings of this research have broad ramifications. If we promote a curriculum that strikes a balance between skill and conceptual thinking, I think we can better prepare the next generation of artists to navigate the terrain of contemporary art. In this regard, the curriculum exposes the students to the technical tools required for artistic expression as well as the freedom to express themselves and interact with their surroundings in new and substantial ways.

This journey has been one of personal development and self-discovery. It challenged me to assess my views on education and the arts critically, which led to a more complex understanding of my responsibilities as a teacher and member of the creative community. More empathy and openness—two qualities that are critical to teaching and artistic practice—have emerged from this process of introspection and investigation.

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