MFA in art
Our process begins with curiosity. A reflection that leads to questioning: *how come, what if, why not?* We investigate. We reconfigure, reframe, and reconsider. We seek alternate approaches and points of view. We challenge limited notions of research and embrace the role of creative practice in the creation of new knowledge. Fueled by the energy and expertise in our research university community, our concepts take shape and *make an impact on the world.*
Here’s what you can expect:

Yes

- Rigorous research and inquiry
- Studio and post-studio work
- Creation of culturally relevant work
- Support for taking creative and conceptual risks
- Collaborators across fields of study
- Commitment to international engagement
- Ample facility space
- Deep and meaningful connections with visiting artists
- Transparent financial processes
- Opportunity to be part of the cultural renaissance of Detroit
- Close working relationship with faculty mentors
No

Media-specific majors

Studio isolation

Stagnation
Performance by Ruth Burke
Stamps MFA students join a supportive, curiosity-filled culture of makers and scholars. Idea and material work together at Stamps, as the curriculum supports students in the creation of culturally relevant work with a clearly articulated context. Graduates leave the Stamps MFA program with a newfound clarity on how their work reflects and intersects with the world-at-large. The outcomes are limitless.

“MFA students synthesize knowledge, skills, and experiences into creative work that provides (and provokes) new insights about life, environments, culture, society, and the complex networks and relationships that bind them together.”

- Elona Van Gent, Professor
Highlights

- Two-year program

- Mentorship from a creatively diverse community of 27 highly engaged Stamps faculty members (plus faculty from across the university)

- 33,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art, grad studio facility

- Exhibitions in the new, 8,000 square-foot Stamps Gallery in downtown Ann Arbor

- Self-directed international project

- Career preparation, networking, and post-graduation career planning process

- Course electives throughout the university

- Financial support

- Post-graduate professional opportunities

- Curricular support for creative work driven by research and inquiry
Students conduct their creative work in spacious, fully equipped studios in a 33,000 square-foot building that also houses faculty studios, project spaces, wood shop, metals shop, digital media studio, and large shared working and meeting areas.

At Stamps, graduate students also have 24/7 access to large state-of-the-art metals, fibers, ceramics, sculpture, wood, printmaking, digital media, and digital fabrication studios, as well as a range of resources only available at a top research university, such as audio engineering booths, robotic labs, virtual reality studios, specialized libraries, institutes, collections, botanical gardens, and much more.
Stamps Visiting Artists, Writers, and Curators

Recent Visitors to the MFA Studios:

Alison Wong
Gallery Director

Anthony Marcellini
Critic and Artist

Ben Davis
Writer and Critic

CAMP
Artist Collective

Chido Johnson
Artist and Professor

Gregory Volk
Critic, Writer, and Professor

Hamza Walker
Curator

Hannah Whitaker
Artist and Professor

Laura Mott
Curator (Cranbrook Museum)

Leslie Rogers
Artist

Lily Cox-Richard
Artist

Lumi Tan
Curator (The Kitchen)

Lynn Crawford
Critic and Writer

Mark Dion
Artist and Professor

Mary Mattingly
Artist

Rosie Sharp
Critic, Writer, and Artist

Steve Panton
Gallery Director

Taylor Aldridge
Curator (DIA)

Ted Purves
Artist and Professor

Tracey Snelling
Artist

Trisha Holt
Artist

Vince Carducci
Critic, Writer, and Professor

Will Brown
Curator (MOCA, Cleveland)

Yesomi Umolu
Curator (Logan Center for the Arts UChicago)
Students have direct access to the wide array of creative innovators who are part of the Stamps Distinguished Speaker Series and the Witt Visitors Program. Visiting artists and lecturers meet with graduate students for individual studio visits.

Recent Penny Stamps Speaker Series Visitors:

Alexis Rockman  
Painter

Andrea Zittel  
Social Practice Artist

Antony Gormley  
Sculptor

Dave Hickey  
Arts Writer and Cultural Critic

Ernesto Neto  
Installation Artist

Hank Willis Thomas  
Photo Conceptual Artist

Heavy Industries  
Web Art Group

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle  
Video and Installation Artist

Janine Antoni  
Multimedia Artist

Jeremy Deller  
Video and Installation artist

Julian Schnabel  
Painter and Filmmaker

Mariko Mori  
Video and Photographic Artist

Mary Sibande  
Installation Artist

Matthew Coolidge  
Curator and Advocate

Nick Cave  
Sculptor

Philip Glass  
Composer

Pussy Riot  
Activists

Robert Wilson  
Director and Playwright

Sally Mann  
Photographer

Sanford Biggers  
Interdisciplinary Artist

Shahzia Sikander  
Painter and Video Artist

Superflex  
Social Activist Artists’ Group

Tania Bruguera  
Activist Performer

Vik Muniz  
Artist and Photographer

Wangechi Mutu  
Painter and Collagist

William Pope.L  
Performance Artist

Zandra Rhodes  
Fashion Designer
Summer Fieldwork

During the summer between their two years, each student conducts research, either domestically or internationally, that will have an impact on their thesis work.

Stamps recognizes that creative practice is global in its scope and impact. With funding support from the school, each student conducts a self-directed research and creative practice trip. Past trips included researching the residual effects of colonialism in South Africa; recording sound in Egypt’s museums, tombs, and temples; developing film in Iceland’s volcanic baths; uncovering alternate narratives of early exploration history with the Igloolik community in the Canadian Arctic Circle; working with porcelain sculpture artisans in Jingdezhen, China; and participation in a two-month residency at the MeetFactory International Center of Contemporary Art in Prague.
Ann Arbor is consistently ranked one of America's best college towns, offering a rich cultural and intellectual life and a vibrant sense of community. We're just a short drive away from Detroit, where arts and culture are driving urban revitalization.

Metro-Detroit & Ann Arbor

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Explore the region online:

artdetroitnow.com
culturesource.org
pulp.aadl.org
hyperallergic.com (search Detroit)
visitannarbor.org
A Stamps MFA prepares creative practitioners for incredible careers.

Stamps MFA students have gone on to a wide range of careers, including exhibiting artists, entrepreneurs, cultural critics, professorships, community arts organizers, commercial and non-profit arts administrators. Post-graduate support — including residencies, grants, and a certificate program in museum studies — are also available.

“The Stamps emphasis and unique embrace of research first as a methodology for teaching artistic practice is excellent. This emphasis prepares your graduates for rich careers that are not bound by medium or subject, or even a conceptual history/frame that can be limiting.”

- Will Brown, Assistant Curator (MOCA, Cleveland)
A visiting artist, critic, curator, or gallery director participates in nearly every MFA crit, providing MFA students with an opportunity to receive multiple perspectives and form a robust professional network.

Having experienced dozens of MFA thesis shows over the years, I was incredibly impressed by the supportive and ambitious environment of the Stamps School of Art & Design. It was rare to visit a thesis program in which the execution of the work, the conceptual aspects of the work, and the presentation of the work were all equally considered.”

– Lumi Tan, Curator (The Kitchen, New York)
Access to Unparalleled Knowledge Communities
Resources

- world-class studios
- 8,000 sq. ft. Stamps Gallery
- radiology lab
- state-of-the-art digital media labs
- multi-camera HD video studios
- robotics institute
- virtual reality cave
- 3D printers, routers, and scanners
- physical computing studio
- materials library
- computer and video game archive
- nanotechnology institute
- industrial knitting machines
- map libraries
- 7-axis robotic fabrication system
- large-format printers
- electronic music studios
- 24-ft astro-tec dome planetarium
- 7 U-M museums
- artificial intelligence lab
- motion capture facility
- MRI scanners
- museum of zoology collections
- anatomy labs
- professional audio recording studios
- botanical gardens
- entrepreneurship clinic
- 121 music practice rooms
- dance studios
- Gamelan ensemble
- 1.7 million plants in the herbarium
- marine hydrodynamics lab
- & more...

Collaborators

- engineers
- filmmakers
- dancers
- climatologists
- architects
- astrophysicists
- playwrights
- urban planners
- musicians
- art historians
- public policy makers
- journalists
- microbiologists
- nanotechnology researchers
- anthropologists
- curators
- sound engineers
- social workers
- chemists
- ecologists
- neuroscientists
- botanists
- information architects
- data analysts
- cancer researchers
- egyptologists
- poets
- forensic scientists
- screenwriters
- entrepreneurs
- public health experts
- 3D modeling experts
- & more...
Your Faculty

While Stamps MFA students select their own personal faculty advisor, Stamps is a tight-knit creative community with 27 highly engaged faculty members who act as mentors and collaborators to Stamps MFA students.

Throughout the two-year program, our faculty of artists and scholars work closely with students to shape an intellectually-rigorous program of study, individually suited to each candidate’s areas of interest and expertise.

With six NEA recipients, two Fulbright Scholars, two Guggenheim Fellows, and a Pulitzer Prize winner as just a small sampling of the faculty accomplishments at Stamps, MFA students are able to make powerful, life-long connections to prominent culture-makers of our time.

Read more Stamps faculty news online:
stamps.umich.edu/news
Stamps Faculty Expertise

Faculty Research Interests Include

- Art and commerce
- African American history, culture, and representation
- Displacement, migration, and alienation
- Narrative and memory
- Women’s criminalization and censorship
- Reproductive technology
- Sustainable communities
- Feminist theory and contemporary aesthetics
- Social practice
- Relational aesthetics
- Monsters and the monstrous
- Hybrids
- Art and health
- Cosmology and dark matter
- Cross-border identities
- Shelter and vulnerability
- Disability culture

& more...

Mediums Include

- Photography
- Illustration
- Sculpture
- Painting
- Drawing
- Ceramics
- Printmaking
- Textile design
- Installation
- Audio narrative
- Performing arts
- Rapid prototyping technologies
- Video
- Computational and interactive technologies
- Video projection and shadows
- Functional/non-functional objects

& more...

There’s such a range of expertise among the faculty here. I was able to find faculty who mentored me and helped me define the perfect creative practice linked by sound, history, and performance art.”

- Juliet Hinely, MFA student
Outcomes

Graduates of the Stamps MFA program have successfully secured positions in higher education, non-profit organizations, and in the commercial sector. Many secure gallery representation, artist residencies, and/or tenure-track teaching positions. The outcomes are limitless.
In 2015, Trevor King received the International Sculpture Center’s Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture award.

In 2015, Parisa Ghaderi was named Assistant Professor of Graphic Design in Michigan State University’s Department of Art, Art History, and Design.

In 2015, Cosmo Whyte was named a faculty member at Morehouse College in Atlanta and was awarded the 2016 Atlanta Artadia Award, $10,000 in unrestricted funding to support the creation of new work.

In 2018, Shane Darwent was featured in Artforum Magazine’s “Critics’ Picks” section for his solo exhibition at the Spencer Brownstone Gallery in NYC. Critic Wallace Ludel wrote: “One thing I love about Shane Darwent’s show here [...] is that it feels uniquely American – imbued with a plainspoken sentimentality for this country’s rural and suburban spaces.”

In 2019, Alisha Wessler was featured in an exhibition of emerging sculptors at the Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in 2014, and she was selected for a 2015 artist’s residency at Wave Hill in New York City.

In 2015, Carolyn Clayton was awarded the prestigious Dedalus Foundation MFA Fellowship in Painting and Sculpture.
Student Work

Ruth Burke | Ruminant

Artist Ruth Burke’s creative practice exists in both the studio and the pasture. Working side-by-side with a small herd of dairy cows, combining experiential and philosophical research, her practice centers on interspecies relationships. Ruminant brings the viewer through the barn, into the pasture, the territory of the cow. The work uses sound, video, installation, sculpture, and performance to explore interspecies kinship, ultimately posing the question “what does it mean to have kinship with a cow?”

ruthkburke.com
Robert J. Fitzgerald | Offscreen

*Offscreen* uses installation, sculpture, video, and performance to investigate the construction of masculinity through movement. Inviting the viewer into a teenage bedroom circa 1989 to investigate the role of media in the development of public performance and private identity, Fitzgerald poses the question, “what does it mean to move like a man?” [robertjfitzgerald.com](http://robertjfitzgerald.com)
Carolyn Clayton  |  Chain of Contagion

Chain of Contagion is part extraction laboratory and part morgue/seed bank for second-hand objects. Embracing the common human belief that everyday objects have an ability to retain and absorb invisible histories through contact, Carolyn Clayton uses sculptural machines and a participatory archive in an attempt to extract historical residues from objects with ambiguous or untraceable pasts.  carolynclayton.net
Carolyn Gennari’s creative practice finds new ways to engage with the past and present. With a process rooted in archival research, Gennari’s works invite viewers to reconsider the role of narrative in history. *Searching For What Isn’t There* is a film and installation piece about arctic exploration. Combining 19th-century captain’s journals, Inuit oral histories, and first-person research, this work investigates archival instability, myth, and the affective endurance of stories surrounding the arctic.  

[carolyngennari.com](http://carolyngennari.com)
Shane Darwent | The Wilds of Washtenaw

The Wilds of Washtenaw mines the suburban built vernacular to create a garden of contemporary contemplation. This sprawling sculptural installation is anchored by a fast-food inspired grotto— the destination of a journey through vinyl siding, landscape edging, and gas station talismans. The Wilds of Washtenaw serves as a roadmap for pedestrian discovery. shanedarwent.com
Mike Bianco  |  Hive

Hive examines issues of sustainability and environmental and social justice, with a focus on honeybees. Mike is pursuing his PhD at SymbioticA, the art and biology research lab at the University of Western Australia, where he has been awarded a prestigious Australian Postgraduate Award.  biancoprojects.com
Jon Verney | Thermophile

Tracing the artist’s journey across an array of volcanic landscapes, Thermophile presents the process and results of using geothermal water and mud to redevelop silver-based photographs. This elemental installation of photography, video, and painting explores the notion of co-creating artwork with the earth, and allowing natural systems equal agency in the process of transformation. jonverney.com
The sculptures in home/Body deal with the mother-daughter bond, gendered role-play, and self and body, drawing on personal experiences, memory, and feminist theory.  mollyvdierks.com
Cosmo Whyte | Wake the Town and Tell the People
Wake the Town and Tell the People is an installation of drawings, photographs, and sound sculptures that explore postcolonial identity as a liquid identity, one in a constant state of flux, co-existing in multiple locations. cosmowhyte.com

In 2015, Cosmo received the International Sculpture Center’s Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture award. He is currently a faculty member at Morehouse College in Atlanta.
Trevor King | Listener

A contemplative installation including ceramics, installation, video, sound, photography, and sculpture, Listener encourages sensory consideration of the human being as a vessel. trevorkingart.com

In 2015, Trevor received the International Sculpture Center’s Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture award.
Please Come Again is a multimedia exhibition exploring the sensory environment and culture of love hotels in Japan. The show includes photography, installations, and a three-channel projection navigating the themed rooms in love hotels as a metaphor for the female body in contemplating one’s memory, sexuality, and cultural identity. alisayang.com
Charles Fairbanks
Charles is a filmmaker and wrestler whose work focuses on Lucha Libre in Mexico. He fights as the One-Eyed Cat with a camera built into his mask. Recently, Charles was selected by Werner Herzog for the first Rogue Film School. In 2012, he received a Guggenheim Fellowship in the Creative Arts Film and Video category based on his work while a graduate student at Stamps.  

[Website Link] charlesfairbanks.info
MFA Degree Requirements

**MFA students** complete 15 credits of coursework per semester for a total of 60 credits at the completion of the two-year program. The curriculum is designed to accommodate a range of art practices, and combines studio-based inquiry with more scholarly, research-focused work.

**Summary**

**Directed Studio (year 1) – 12 credits**
Each semester, students engage in intense exploration, research, production, and critique of their individual creative work.

**Thesis Studio (year 2) – 12 credits**
An independent project conducted by each MFA candidate during their second year, is guided by a thesis committee, and culminates in an exhibition at the Stamps Gallery, a public talk, and a written thesis describing the work and its significance.

**Critique – 12 credits**
Provides students with weekly opportunities to articulate the ideas and context underpinning their work and receive feedback from faculty, visiting artists/critics, and their peers.

**Elective Courses – 9 credits**
Students choose elective courses to meet their individual MFA curriculum and research goals.

**Stamps Graduate Seminars – 6 credits**
Seminar topics include “Research Methods,” “Professional Practice,” and other topics related to contemporary art practice.

**History/Theory/Criticism – 6 credits**
These courses – offered by Stamps, History of Art, or other U-M units – support the student’s field of inquiry.

**International Project – 3 credits**
Stamps supports a three- to five-week international experience for all graduate students during the summer between their first and second year.
Successful applicants will:

- Hold a bachelor’s degree in art
- Demonstrate an interest in interdisciplinary inquiry
- Identify faculty at Stamps and within the University with whom to work
- Have a strong portfolio of creative work and a record of exhibitions
- Have substantive life experience to draw on in charting new directions for creative practice
- Be prepared for intensive, focused creative inquiry and production

Generous financial support: stipends, assistantships, and tuition waivers

The Stamps School offers generous financial support to graduate students, in addition to teaching/research assistantships, stipends, and discretionary funds that offset studio expenses and international travel. Financial awards are held throughout both years of study and enable focused creative work as well as opportunities to gain experience in teaching and arts management.

Contact us:

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