

Educational evaluation with external review at the University of Gothenburg

Report for Master of Fine Arts in Fine Arts at the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts

The following people have been part of the review panel:

Magnus Quaife, Professor of Artist Pedagogy, Academy of Fine Art, University of the Arts Helsinki (chair)

Dani Liljedahl, Umeå Art Academy (student representative)

Meriç Algün, Senior Lecturer in Art towards Interdisciplinary Practices, Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design Stockholm

Keith Piper, Associate Professor in Fine Art, Arts & Creative Industries, Middlesex University London

The education's main strengths and weaknesses as well as the review panel's reflections and recommendations

Introduction:

Introduction.

Foremost the panel would like to emphasise the dedication of the staff, the considerable energy and intellectual coherence the team bring to the programme, and to highlight the difference this makes the experience of the students and their education. They draw upon an impressive, diverse range of relevant knowledge and expertise developed through their academic and artistic work which informs the development of the course and the teaching on it. The commitment and contribution of the staff was acknowledged repeatedly by current students and graduates who could see how their learning has led to a deep understanding of their developing practices; allowed them to pursue related careers after graduation; and enabled them to articulate their practices in a variety of contexts including to funding bodies, curators, and other relevant professionals. It is a considerable strength that the programme is designed to facilitate the students to develop a deep understand of what it means to engage a public in a variety of contexts including those beyond the white cube and museum. In short it is clear that broadly speaking the programme is in good health and that the staff team are integral to this.

However, the panel also noted that the staff have a large workload and that this, along with consistent institutional level change, adapting to a relatively new formation of the programme which is still evolving, and in several cases precarious working conditions, is leading to unreasonable levels of stress. It is difficult to envisage the current exceptional levels of engaged pedagogy continuing indefinitely under these conditions.

We would like to acknowledge the openness of both staff and students in their responses to the questions asked. Through exploring the documents provided pre-visit and the insights gained during on site we understood that overall, the programme is well organised and meets the expectations of the institution, of national regulations, and of the large majority of students. The exception to this which was highlighted by several of the current students and graduates is the lack of an in-depth exploration materiality in the teaching. This is something they felt would offer balance and help them in developing

aspects of their practices. This issue is complex due to its relationship with the approach to teaching 'enquiry' led practice and how this is articulated in the description of the course; because it was clear that the staff team understood making and theory as intrinsically connected rather than separate aspects of the course; and due to staff already addressing aspects of this by (for example) bringing theory seminars in to the studio so that material aspects of practice could be understood in relation to critical texts; and in some approaches to studio teaching. With this in mind we do make recommendations below but understand that the programme staff are well placed to address aspects of this in relation to the ambitions of the programme and have the knowledge, experience, and expertise to do so. The students interviewed were also keen to point out that they did not see the staff at fault for any issues they highlighted. Students were keen to praise the teaching they received but believed another member of staff with a more material based practice and approach to teaching might help to with the balance of the teaching on programme, this is something the panel support.

The panel would like to express its thanks for the considerable organisation that went into the review process both before and during the visit. We were able to review a comprehensive range of documents pertaining to the course before the visit and to discuss the course with students, graduates, and a range of staff during the visit. This allowed us to gain relevant insights into the programme and address the specific aspects that we were asked to explore with appropriate rigour. Below we outline our responses to each of these points with recommendations bullet pointed at the end of each section.

1. That the actual study results correspond to the learning objectives and the degree objectives of the Higher Education Regulation.

The programme design has taken the key aspects of the Higher Education Regulations at subject level and used in the basis its design. These include a focus on *enquiry, research, and the role of the artist in society*. This has been combined with the staff teams deep understanding of the increased significance of artistic research both in Scandinavia and beyond to create a programme which, rather than bending to the national regulations, uses them in innovative ways that are appropriate for the education of a particular kind of contemporary artist. As a result, the course sets itself a distinct set of learning objectives upon which it has been validated. This has resulted in an MFA programme which is remarkably clear in defining its aims and the panel would like to praise the vision of the staff in developing this. The examples of student work provided demonstrated a consistently high standard and it was clear to the panel that the results were in line with the learning objectives and degree objectives of the Higher Education Regulation. These study 'results' at the students exit point indicate that the students have by the end of the degree understood these aims, and have come to understand what makes the course distinctive and the value of that approach to art education.

2. That the teaching puts students' learning at the centre

Current students and alumni were unanimous in their praise for the various approaches of the staff teaching on the course. The students developing practices are at the center of the learning and the staff are sensitive and responsive to the work that the students are making in relation to the aims of the programme. More broadly the programme puts the students' learning at the center through course design. The courses are designed to push the students and to provide them with a specific learning experience that includes focuses on *publicness, enquiry, research, and the role of the artist in society*. As a result, the programme centres on students' learning in

relation to these aspects, and as mentioned above, alumnis' reflection on their experience and the students' attainment at graduation demonstrate that this is working well.

This is not a customer service model of student centeredness which simply seeks to fulfill the students existing desires, but one which actively identifies a set of issues relevant to wider developments in the field of contemporary art and uses these as a critical framework for the students to understand their developing practices in relation to. This challenges the students to think beyond what they know and provides them with a shared set of concerns within what is often at other institutions a highly individualistic and atomizing field of education (the MFA in Fine Art). In doing so it aligns with the current pedagogical theory of, for example, Gert Biesta (World Centered Education: 2022) and Simons & Masschelein (In Defence of School 2013). The panel were impressed with the efforts of the staff to keep this up to date with developments in the practice and theory of contemporary art and wider society, and relevant to the makeup of each new cohort by (for example) consistently reviewing and updating course reading and the content of seminars; and the introduction of Skiss Crits.

It is however important to acknowledge that the composition of the learning is sometimes different to the expectations of the students when they arrive on the course. There are several ways that the students and alumni expressed some reservations about this. One alumnus felt they had had to develop their practice in response to the framework of the course in a fairly rigid manner, and that the enquiry and research focuses of this precluded aspects of their approach to making they felt were significant. In particular the student felt it was less possible to rely on the creative instincts they had developed through previous learning. Two others expressed how the programmes' aims had led them to develop their practice in unexpected ways, while in one case (with hindsight) this was seen as a positive, the other student felt they were changing to fit a structure rather than for more meaningful reasons, and that while they had learned a great deal on the course, they expressed uncertainty about how their artistic practice had changed. More commonly several of the students we spoke to felt that that their critical and contextual development were well served but expressed concern that the teaching of material aspects of contemporary art was more peripheral and should be afforded greater focus on the programme. This is compounded by difficulties accessing workshops and the bureaucratic systems put in place around this which the students found hard to navigate (see section 7).

Despite these concerns the students we spoke to felt that they had learned a great deal and the alumni were in a strong position to develop careers away from the art school as a result.

In considering the above the panel reflected:

- That the strength of the programme (in identifying specific aims rather than attempting to be universal) is contingent upon attracting students whose approach to practice is either already engaging in particular frames that the course sets up; or having the ambition for their practice to develop in this way. Consideration should be given to how the institution can best support the programme in attracting these students. It is essential that the marketing of the course adequately reflects its specificity (visually as well as in written language) if it is to attract the right students. We recommend:
 - A comprehensive review of the marketing strategy and materials
 - A consideration of how alumni can be used to support this

- A review of the course title to see if it best reflects the contents of the programme (we note for example the introduction of an MFA in Artistic Research at Malmö).
- Even if the right students are recruited on to the course the panel still recommend the appointment of a member of staff with a more material focus in their practice and teaching.
- Extra staffing should be used to support the introduction of more crits in line with student feedback. This should include visiting artists.

3. That the content and format of teaching are based on scientific and/or artistic principles and proven experience

Together the staff team bring a diversity of relevant knowledge and experience directly to the content and format of the teaching. This includes expertise from studio practice as well as theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches to working, as well as considerable experience and knowledge of teaching in the area. There is a high level and amount of research undertaken by the team that directly informs all aspects of the teaching. The resistance of a fixed reading list and the possibility for the core reading to evolve as a result is evidence that the team are constantly looking at how their experience can feed into the content of the course. As mentioned above there is scope for this to be expanded to include a wider focus on materiality.

4. That teaching staff have up-to-date and adequate subject-specific, higher education pedagogical and subject didactic skills, and that teaching staff numbers are in proportion to the scope and content of the education

Subject specific skills are developed through the staffs professional and academic practice and evidenced by participation in relevant activity as artists, curators, academics, and researchers. However, percentage research time is less than in their own institutions and there is knock on effect in to how deeply the staff are able to engage in these practices. The effect is twofold as they are held back from reaching their potential to contribute to the research and practice culture of the institution (and in professional contexts more broadly), and, while the team are clearly operating at a high level already, they would also be capable of bringing more extra institutional experience to the programme if they were afforded more time. Pedagogical and subject didactic skills emerge in part from this extra institutional work, from diverse experiences of teaching across the team, and from the staffs deep critical reflection on their teaching. Staff commented on pedagogical training available through the institution, reflecting that it was often generic and failed to address the specific nature of fine art teaching and relevant theory. Factoring in more time into the academic calendar for staff to reflect upon their teaching together and to support each other's development would also make a positive impact.

The panel understood that the staff numbers in proportion to the students are lower than in their own institutions (with the exception of Middlesex University) and understood that the associated workload coupled with absences and a further increased workload during the pandemic has led to staff illness. Staff described being "torn" between committing adequate time to different courses they were working in to, and the feeling that increased bureaucracy, keeping up with changing procedures and systems led to them feeling overworked and in some cases close to burn out.

Expanding the staff team would also afford an opportunity to better reflect the diversity of cultures and practices that the programme attracts. This should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

- The SSR should be addressed.
- Research time should be increased.
- Review pedagogical training so that it addresses Fine Art teaching.
- Factor in more time for staff to reflect on their pedagogy together.

5. That the education is relevant to the needs of students and society

The panel understood a relevance to society to be a key objective of the programme. The education is very relevant to the current developments in contemporary art and there is a strong emphasis on putting the student's work in a larger context in relation to the society. The staff team acknowledged that in this regard the programme is still a 'work in progress' but it is clearly already very ambitious and has demonstrated considerable success in meeting these aims. The team have achieved this through developing a programme that trains students to think beyond, but does not exclude, the possibilities of the white cube space, and prevalent art school paradigms of the market and the museum, the students are prepared to engage the needs of society in a variety of different ways on contexts. The education engages the students in critical questioning of how and why their developing practices might become public and its relevance to society is an integral part of this. The students are trained to critically articulate the usefulness of their practice in different ways which leads to graduates having a deep understanding of how they may articulate this leading to them being well placed to explain this to audiences, participants, decision makers, or in grant applications. The foregrounding of enquiry makes a particular contribution to this as the students are able to understand how their process is an integral part of its usefulness. That alumni are able to sustain visible careers as artists working in a range of ways demonstrates that is also meeting their needs. The plans to develop the format of the exam exhibition beyond the museum shows that the staff continue to evolve the programme with these issues in mind.

6. That students have an influence in the planning, implementation and follow-up of the Education

At a departmental level there are clear opportunities for student representatives to be involved in different levels of academic meetings, boards, and committees, and to be involved in decision making as a result. It was less clear what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the student representatives are arcuately reflecting the opinions of the wider student body and what the impact of the voice is in the decision making process.

On a programme level feedback is clearly welcomed, the students are encouraged to provide this through a variety of formal and informal means, including, 'coffee-chat' and meetings between programme representatives and the programme director, as well as Case Conferences on student development across courses at a mid-term point. This is supported by the team nurturing an environment in which the students are "actively encouraged to address concerns, issues, and problems throughout the year". Students find the staff team approachable and available to listen to their concerns, and the staff team were able to offer examples of how this feedback has been used to develop the programme in a variety of ways. There are also feedback

surveys, the results of which are largely very positive, but level of student engagement is low making it difficult to gauge how well it represents the opinion of the whole cohort. Such low engagement in written feedback is typical of the art and design sector and particularly Fine Art programmes.

The panel felt that, as with all such systems, there is scope for the continuous appraisal and improvement of the feedback mechanisms, including increasing the students level of engagement with the various forums, and improving the balance of voices within forums. However, where a programme has set itself a distinct set of objectives (as this one has) there is also a clear role for the course managers to communicate these objectives and their importance in relation to the students feedback. We are not advocating automatic change on the basis of student feedback but striving for an environment in which the students feel that they are genuinely engaged in (rather than consulted upon) the development of the education.

7. That a study and learning environment exists which is accessible and appropriate for all Students

The studios are of a good size and the students are able to negotiate and define how they are organized both in terms of space and which studio they will occupy. This leads to a sense of ownership and belonging in the building from early in the course. Despite this there was concern about how well the studios were being used and the amount of work that was visible. Several students mentioned that temperature can be an issue which impacts upon attendance, and we recommend addressing this as a matter of priority. The programme team would also like to introduce measures that have become important aspects of engaged pedagogy at other institutions. As Daniel Birnbaum (Art Forum; Summer 2007) stated when reflecting on his time as rector at the Stadelshule "Food can be as important as philosophy; the best teaching may happen during meals" (see also: Bell Hooks *Engaged Pedagogy*). Yet institutional policy make it difficult for staff to arrange events that include food as part of their pedagogy. As well as affording unique pedagogical opportunities regular events of this kind can build community, and increase engagement.

There are issues around access to some technical processes and workshops. The panel acknowledges that this is common in institutions where centralised technical resources are expected to service students from a range of disciplines, and specific management mechanisms need to be constantly finessed to address the rapidly evolving needs of an increasingly technically diverse student body. The panel further acknowledges that the head of technical services recognized these issues and was able to provide a clear explanation as to why access had to be limited and the systems that are in place for this. Ideally however, for fine art students, workshops are not simply a place to develop a predefined set of skills, or to realize the fabrication of predetermined forms or objects, but a place for experimentation and play with materials and this requires time. Serious consideration should be put in at an institutional level as to how this can be resourced/facilitated. It is also unusual for a fine art programme not to have print making (graphics) workshops.

Student run galleries are a positive aspect of the learning environment affording students to test ideas in front of their peers from across the academy and to find a particular kind of public within a 'safer' space.

There are potentially ableist aspects embedded in the wider universities “post” pandemic return to campus policy which could discriminate against students and staff who are immune compromised.

While it was clear that there are measures a programme and institutional levels designed to help international students, one international alumni commented that it had been difficult to integrate with the home students who organized separate social and artistic events outside of the institution. International students and alumni also commented that they would have appreciated more advice and support to help with relocation. The panel understands that events outside of the academy are beyond the institutions direct control, but recommend reviewing what measures are in place to facilitate and encourage students to integrate so that some students do not feel marginalized (revising policies around food might be one way of addressing this).

- Address issues of heating in studios as a priority.
- The system of accessing workshops and the level of provision should be reviewed with the aim of making it as easy as possible for students to gain access to this particular kind of support for the material aspects of their practices and with a view to making experimentation and play with materials possible in these environments. The institution must consider how this can be resourced as it is a significant part of the learning environment on MFA Fine Art programmes.

8. That continuous follow-up and development of the education are carried out

The programme staff are very much engaged in the continuous development of the course through the formal and informal measures outlined in section. They are of the issues raised through this and have formulated a variety of developments as a result, many of which can be found in the rewritten programme. Staff provide comprehensive written accounts of the development of the course in programme and course level documents in which they explain what changes are being implemented and why. It is significant, and reflects on the dedication of the programme manager and wider team that staff are also in contact with alumni and are able to take the longer term outcomes and reflections in to account in the development of education.



HDK-VALAND – ACADEMY OF ART AND DESIGN

MFA Fine Art Programme, HDK-Valand Academy – Arts and Design.

1. Reading Guide for the External Review Panel

The MFA Fine Art Programme:

In 2017 the MFA in Fine Art at what was then the Valand Academy (prior to the merger in 2020 with the HDK Academy, now HDK-Valand Academy – Art and Design), was revised in full and re-launched in response to developments in the field, University of Gothenburg and Valand Academy's policies, strategies, action plans and vision documents. Simultaneously, the programme sought to provide an offer that may distinguish it from other MFA Fine Art offers in Sweden, the Nordic Region and more broadly. The first cohort of students began their studies in Autumn 2018 and graduated in Spring 2020.

At its most brief:

This international master's programme aims to prepare students to make critical artistic contributions to questions of publicness and over the role of art and of artists in society. It also emphasises the development of research skills pertinent to artistic practices and practitioners.

Reading the material:

This short text aims to provide a guide to navigating and reading the documents to enable an understanding of the program and its courses.

We have chosen to focus on two academic years: from the Autumn semester of 2020 until the Spring semester of 2022. Therefore the review encapsulated courses that repeat and have been adapted

and changed over this period, as two Autumn semesters (2020 and 2021) and two Spring semesters (2021 and 2022) are included. This also reflects the impact of the global COVID-19 Pandemic on the programme's delivery and development. A specific statement on the COVID-19 impact (3.5 in Folder 3).

Student projects and work samples have been limited to 2020-2022 (but again includes all courses delivered over that time, including those courses that have repeated, but been developed. These can be viewed in tandem with the Canvas pages for each course. Student projects and samples for Elective courses were not available. The panel can make a request for these but the Course Plans and Canvas links for these are included. A statement on Student Projects is in Folder 3 (3.4). In the

Development work on the MFA Fine Art Programme has inevitably also been influenced by COVID-19. Our development priorities and challenges are discussed in Folder 4 (2 Development and Action Plans). These emanate from our regular Team Meetings and Programme Development sessions. As referenced in these two documents a major review of all MFA Fine Art courses was undertaken during 2021-22. Thus, we have included links to the new Course Plans for all courses (3.1 in Folder 3). These became active from the Autumn semester of 2023. They are not included to suggest, in any sense, that the external review occurs after a pre-figuring internal review that led to these revisions, Rather, we welcome analysis and constructive criticism that can lead to further revisions and improvement.

It is our suggestions to read the course documents in the order they are given to students in a progression of courses. It is also our suggestion to start with the Course guides then looking at the courses via the Canvas pages.

Folder 5, whilst named Miscellaneous does include important information regarding the staff resourcing of the programme. It also includes unedited reflective statements on the programme by graduates (5.6) and a statement by Stine Hebert who witnessed final year examination processes and student performances in 2020, 2021, and 2022 (5.7). Hebert was the critical dialogue partner in those exams.

Inventory of Folders:

1. Reading Guide (this document).
2. Governance Documents.

- 2.1 Curriculum and Syllabi.
- 2.2 Governing Documents and Procedures.
- 2.3 Procedures for Courses and Programmes at Faculty-level.
- 2.4 Action and Activity Plans.
- 2.5 Elective Courses.
- 3. Teacher Related Documents.
 - 3.1 Course Guides.
 - 3.2 Schedules.
 - 3.3 Programme Rooms and Workspaces.
 - 3.4 Student Projects and Work Samples.
 - 3.5 COVID-19 Impact Statement.
- 4. Evaluation and Follow-up.
 - 4.1 Course Reports and Evaluations.
 - 4.2 Development and Action Plans.
- 5. Miscellaneous
 - 5.1 Teacher List and Teacher Resources.
 - 5.2 Student Statistics.
 - 5.3 External Information.
 - 5.4 Views of Professional Representatives.
 - 5.5 Admissions Procedures.
 - 5.6 Student Impact.



HDK-VALAND – ACADEMY OF ART AND DESIGN

External Review, Site Visit Schedule – MFA Fine Art 2023

Date: 31 January – 1 February

Time: 09.00 – 17.00

Location: Helma Sanders-Brahms, Vasagatan 50

We will meet you outside the entrance of HDK-Valand Vasagatan 50 at 09.00. Vasagatan 50 is a short walk, 260 metres from your hotel. [Map link](#). We offer morning and afternoon coffee on both days.

Some of your meetings with alumni and faculty will take place digitally via zoom.

Zoomlink for the digital meetings: <https://gu-se.zoom.us/j/63789724804>

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31 January

09.00 – 09.30 Meet and Greet with Hans Ekelund, Assistant Head of Education, Stefan Jensen, Director of Studies, and Jason E. Bowman, Programme Director MFA Fine Art

09.30 – 10.50 Meet/E-meet with four graduates, individually.

09.30 – 09.50: Reyhaneh Mirjahani (Graduate 2020) via zoom.

09.50 – 10.10: Tristan Bridge (Graduate 2021) in person.

10.10 – 10.30: Maja Lindberg Schwaner (Graduate 2022) via zoom.

10.30 – 10.50: Ali Ardalan (Graduate 2022) via zoom.

10.50 – 11.10 Coffee Break

11.10 – 12.00 Meet with existing students, individually.
They will come to the Helma Sanders-Brahms room at the appointed times below:

11.10 - 11.35: Jonathan Lystbæk Jørgensen, current Year 2 student

11.35 - 12.00: Emma Bojsen Lornsen, current Year 1 student

12.00 – 13.00 Lunch (not provided)

13.00 – 14.00 View studios and facilities with a student guide, Alqumit Alhamad (current first year). He will meet you at Helma Sanders-Brahms

14.00 – 15.00 Meet Programme Director Jason E. Bowman

15.00 – 15.30 Coffee Break

15.30 – 17.00 External Reviewers' own meeting

1 February

09.00 – 09.30 Meet with Dr. Maddie Leach via Zoom

09.30 – 10.00 Meet with Dr. Cathryn Klasto

10.00 – 10.30 Meet with Dr. Daniel Jewesbury

10.30 – 11.00 Coffee Break

11.00 – 11.30 Meet with Ann-Charlotte Glasberg Blomqvist

11.30 – 12.00 Meet with Programme Director and Teaching Team together

12.00 – 13.00 Lunch (not provided)

13.00 – 14.30 Meet with Programme- and Department Management:

Klara Björk, Head of Department

Hans Ekelund, Assistant Head of Education

Katarina Andersson, Head of Unit

Jason E. Bowman, Programme Director

Mathias Aderby, Head of Technical Support

Märta Jakobsson, Human Resources Coordinator

Pernilla Månsson, Education Officer

14.30 – 15.00 Coffee Break

15.00 – 17.00 External Reviewers' own meeting