

INTERDISCIPLINARY ART: A PIONEERING ORIENTATION IN POSTGRADUATE ART EDUCATION

Pham Minh Quan¹

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that interdisciplinary art should be recognized as a vital direction for postgraduate art education in Vietnam, where current training models remain largely organized around discrete artistic disciplines. By examining the hybrid nature of contemporary art practice, the study underscores the increasing need to integrate knowledge and methods from visual arts, music, design, science, technology, and the humanities. Drawing on Tanya Augsburg's theoretical framework, interdisciplinary art is conceptualized as a mode of connecting research and creative practice, thereby expanding the role of the artist from maker to knowledge producer. The article further discusses contemporary research methodologies such as art-based research and practice as research, emphasizing the adaptability of interdisciplinary art within today's creative industries. Through an analysis of postgraduate programs at Macao Polytechnic University, Simon Fraser University, and OCAD University, the article identifies shared structural features that may inform similar initiatives in Vietnam. The findings suggest that interdisciplinary art can serve as a strategic pathway for modernizing and internationalizing postgraduate art education in the country.

Keywords: *Interdisciplinary art; postgraduate art education; art-based research; practice as research; creative industries; artist-researcher.*

NGHỆ THUẬT LIÊN NGÀNH: MỘT KHUYNH HƯỚNG TIÊN PHONG TRONG ĐÀO TẠO SAU ĐẠI HỌC

Phạm Minh Quân

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TÓM TẮT

Bài viết đề xuất nghệ thuật liên ngành như một hướng đào tạo cần thiết cho bậc sau đại học trong bối cảnh hệ thống giáo dục nghệ thuật Việt Nam vẫn duy trì cấu trúc phân ngành truyền thống. Từ việc phân tích đặc điểm giao thoa của nghệ thuật đương đại, bài viết khẳng định nhu cầu tích hợp tri thức giữa mỹ thuật, âm nhạc, thiết kế, khoa học, công nghệ và nhân văn. Dựa trên khung lý thuyết của Tanya Augsburg, nghệ thuật liên ngành được xem như một phương thức kết nối giữa nghiên cứu và thực hành, đồng thời mở rộng vai trò của nghệ sĩ thành chủ thể sản xuất tri thức. Bài viết cũng trình bày các phương pháp nghiên cứu hiện đại như nghiên cứu dựa trên nghệ thuật và thực hành như là nghiên cứu, qua đó nhấn mạnh khả năng thích ứng của nghệ thuật liên ngành trong thời đại công nghiệp sáng tạo. Trên cơ

¹ Faculty of Arts and Design, School of Interdisciplinary Sciences and Arts, VNU Hanoi
Email: quanpm@vnu.edu.vn

sở khảo sát ba mô hình đào tạo tại Đại học Bách khoa Ma Cao, Đại học Simon Fraser và Đại học OCAD, tác giả rút ra những đặc điểm chung có thể vận dụng vào bối cảnh Việt Nam. Kết luận cho thấy nghệ thuật liên ngành có tiềm năng trở thành định hướng chiến lược, góp phần hiện đại hóa và quốc tế hóa giáo dục nghệ thuật sau đại học.

Từ khóa: *Nghệ thuật liên ngành; giáo dục nghệ thuật sau đại học; nghiên cứu dựa trên nghệ thuật; thực hành như là nghiên cứu; công nghiệp văn hóa; nghệ sĩ – nhà nghiên cứu.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Arts training programs in Vietnam, particularly at the postgraduate level, remain largely structured around disciplinary specialization. Under Circular 09/2022/TT-BGDĐT issued by the Ministry of Education and Training, the Arts field (code 821 at the master's level and 921 at the doctoral level) is divided into several subfields such as Fine Arts, Performing Arts, and Applied Arts. These subfields comprise specific majors including Art Theory and History, Music Studies, Industrial Design, Graphic Design, and Film and Television Arts. While this structure ensures a high level of professional specialization, it may, in certain contexts, limit dialogue, exchange, and connectivity across creative domains. In practice, however, contemporary art has moved beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplines. Creative forms such as performance art, installation art, visual art, digital art, and community art combine multiple elements of sound, image, movement, space, and text. Artists today rarely work within a single medium. Instead, they frequently integrate diverse materials, methods, and conceptual frameworks to address issues related to society, technology, the environment, and cultural identity.

At the same time, the clear disciplinary divisions that structure arts education in Vietnam have produced a certain degree of compartmentalization. This stands in

contrast with the hybrid and interactive nature of contemporary artistic practice. Emerging forms of creativity including performance art, visual art, installation art, digital art, and community art arise from the intersection of multiple bodies of knowledge. Artists no longer operate exclusively within the traditional domains of painting, music, or theatre. Instead, they increasingly work across disciplinary border zones where the boundaries between art, technology, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy become fluid.

These transformations signal an urgent need for an educational model that can integrate knowledge, cultivate critical thinking, and expand the capacity for artistic practice beyond the limits of single disciplines. This need is particularly pronounced at the postgraduate level, where the goal is not only to refine skills but also to develop research capacity and independent thinking. In this context, the emergence of *interdisciplinary art* as a direction for training should be understood as a necessary development. It enables learners to approach art as an open knowledge system in which theory, practice, and creativity are brought together within a unified process.

In recent decades, contemporary art practices in Vietnam and internationally have expanded beyond medium-based definitions. Artists engage with archives, conduct

fieldwork, collaborate with communities, and work across digital, spatial, and performative formats (Thuc, 2022). These shifts are not marginal phenomena; rather, they have become increasingly central to artistic production. A common argument maintains that such practices are merely extensions or hybridizations of traditional forms, and that institutions therefore only need to provide strong disciplinary foundations, leaving interdisciplinary exploration to artists after graduation. This perspective rightly emphasizes the importance of technical depth and historical grounding. However, when artistic practice itself becomes research-driven, socially embedded, and conceptually structured, the question is no longer only about mastering a medium. It concerns the capacity to formulate problems, to navigate multiple knowledge systems, and to construct meaning through methodical inquiry. In this context, postgraduate art education may need to reconsider its orientation. Rather than training practitioners alone, it may aim to cultivate artist-scholars who are capable of generating knowledge through their own creative processes. Art, therefore, functions not merely as aesthetic production, but also as a cognitive tool, a mode of inquiry, and a means of interpreting the world.

2. DEFINING INTERDISCIPLINARY ART

In the broader scientific context, interdisciplinary thinking has developed as an approach to addressing complex issues such as those in environmental studies, healthcare, or urban studies. In the arts, this concept assumes a more generative and liberating character. It is not only concerned with problem solving but also with expanding human capacities for perception, cognition,

and emotion. Julie Thompson Klein (1991) argues that interdisciplinarity in the arts not only produces new knowledge but also “redefines how people understand and experience the world.” Basarab Nicolescu (2002), the founder of transdisciplinarity theory, likewise emphasizes that art has the ability to connect different levels of reality and deepen human awareness of the wholeness of existence.

Tanya Augsburg (2017) notes that although relationships among artistic disciplines have become increasingly common, interdisciplinary art has not yet received adequate scholarly attention within interdisciplinary studies. She suggests that one reason for this is the tendency to conflate interdisciplinary art with art history or musicology, even though its nature extends far beyond these academic domains.

Augsburg observes that definitions of “interdisciplinary art” remain unsettled, partly because artists themselves often resist being confined within rigid conceptual categories. Nonetheless, she highlights two definitions that help delineate the scope of the term. First, according to James W. Davis (2009), interdisciplinary art consists of “original creations that combine theory and practice, integrating two or more expressive elements such as sound, image, movement, text, or space and time.” Second, the Interdisciplinary Arts undergraduate program at Arizona State University West defines it as “an approach to learning and training that focuses on how artistic fields combine in an integrated way to produce new concepts, experiences, and modes of making art.”

From these definitions, Augsburg identifies integration as the core

characteristic of interdisciplinary art. This integration occurs not only among artistic forms, media, or materials but also between ideas and practice, between theory and creativity. In her view, interdisciplinary art reflects and constructs relationships with other areas of knowledge both inside and outside the arts. It therefore embodies a form of “broad interdisciplinarity,” a term previously articulated by William Newell and Julie Thompson Klein. Such an openness fosters an inclusive, flexible, and continually evolving mode of artistic practice.

Augsburg outlines five major integrative trajectories that have shaped the foundation of contemporary interdisciplinary art. However, Augsburg does not treat these five trajectories as a simple chronological progression. Rather, she presents them as overlapping integrative logics that continue to shape contemporary interdisciplinary arts.

The first trajectory, Wagner’s concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is often reduced to the idea of total fusion. Yet as Augsburg notes through later scholarship, Wagner’s model was more paradoxical than what the above interpretation suggests. It seeks unity while preserving the autonomy of each medium within the larger dramatic structure. The “total work of art” therefore already contains tensions between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity: it resists medium purity while refusing complete dissolution. Importantly, it also extends beyond aesthetics into political and social imagination, linking artistic integration to visions of collective experience. The second trajectory, the historical avant-garde, shifts the emphasis from unity to radical juxtaposition. Here, integration does not mean harmony but productive collision. Collage, montage,

readymade, sound poetry, and performance dismantled medium specificity by forcing heterogeneous materials into proximity. This logic of shock and discontinuity reframed integration as epistemic disruption rather than synthesis. Interdisciplinarity becomes a method of unsettling perception.

The third trajectory, post-World War II intermedia and multimedia practices, further destabilized disciplinary boundaries. With Happenings, Fluxus, Cage’s experiments, and later multimedia environments, simultaneity and in-betweenness became central concepts. Dick Higgins’s notion of “intermedia” described works that exist between established forms rather than combining them externally. Here integration operates spatially and temporally, positioning art within transitional zones instead of fixed categories.

The fourth trajectory concerns the intersections among art, science, and technology. Augsburg emphasizes that this domain does not merely introduce new tools into artistic practice. It confronts opposing epistemologies. Artists working with biotechnology, digital systems, or networked media negotiate between scientific research and critical theory, between participation in research and critique of technological culture. Integration thus becomes methodological and epistemological, involving hybridization, collaboration, and the redefinition of artistic research itself.

Finally, Augsburg identifies interdisciplinary arts as an emergent field with its own discourse. This fifth trajectory synthesizes earlier traditions while also developing new metaphors such as hybridity, collision, interference, and transvergence. Rather than seeking definitive definitions, the field embraces openness, inclusivity, and

ongoing transformation. Interdisciplinarity here is not a stylistic choice but a structural condition of contemporary artistic practice.

Taken together, these trajectories suggest that interdisciplinary art has evolved from a quest for aesthetic unity into a complex mode of integration across media, knowledge systems, and research paradigms. The shift is not merely formal. It reflects a broader reconfiguration of how art relates to knowledge production.

According to Augsburg, interdisciplinary art resists attempts to define, classify, or confine it within conventional theoretical systems. It rejects the purity associated with individual art forms and challenges the notion of artistic autonomy that dominated modern aesthetics. Interdisciplinary art does not seek complete synthesis. Instead, it values points of contact, friction, and dialogue among media and between art and everyday life. This orientation also reframes the role of the artist. Rather than functioning solely as a creator, the artist becomes a researcher and a producer of knowledge whose creative work is simultaneously a process of thinking, analysis, and discovery. Interdisciplinarity is therefore not only embedded in the structure of the artwork but also in the ways artists formulate questions, engage with the world, and reflect upon their own practices.

From this perspective, interdisciplinary art is not simply the combination of different media or skills. It constitutes a methodology, a way of organizing creative and intellectual processes. It encourages learners to view art as an open system that moves across and between domains of knowledge. It affirms artists as knowledge producers who create, investigate, and critically reflect upon their own creative actions. This approach

underpins the transformative value of interdisciplinary art within contemporary postgraduate art education, where the boundaries between research, theory, and creative practice are increasingly fluid. It lays the groundwork for a new educational model in which learners not only master techniques but also cultivate the capacity to construct conceptual frameworks, articulate interpretations, and pose questions that resonate with society at large.

3. INTERDISCIPLINARY ART AS A PIONEERING AND ADAPTIVE ORIENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Contemporary art is no longer defined by fixed forms or materials. It is shaped instead by its capacity for reflection, critique, and the continual redefinition of what “art” itself means. Within this evolving landscape, interdisciplinary art has emerged as a pioneering orientation because it provides artists with a flexible foundation for engaging with the complex issues of the present world. As the boundaries between art, science, technology, sociology, philosophy, and anthropology become increasingly porous, interdisciplinary art does more than reflect these changes. It helps shape new ways of thinking about creativity and knowledge.

One reason interdisciplinary art has such high adaptive capacity lies in its ability to merge research and practice. Methods such as *art-based research*, *practice as research*, and *research-led practice* are now widely applied in postgraduate art education across the world. Unlike traditional research models that separate theory from artistic creation, these approaches treat the creative process itself as a form of knowledge production. Henk Borgdorff (2012) argues that in practice-based research in the arts, the

artwork does not merely illustrate research findings. It is the site where knowledge is generated, expressed, and tested.

This perspective reshapes the role of the artist. They are no longer understood simply as creators of images or sounds but as “producers of knowledge,” a concept articulated by Carolina Ha Thuc (2022). Artists use their creative tools to question structures of perception, social systems, and the relationship between humans and technology. The artwork becomes the outcome of an investigative process, and the act of creation becomes a journey of thinking, discovery, and world-making. The artist thus functions simultaneously as researcher, thinker, and practitioner, operating in an open environment where different forms of knowledge intersect and transform one another.

This characteristic makes interdisciplinary art especially aligned with the needs of contemporary cultural and creative industries. These industries require individuals who can connect art with technology, aesthetic sensibility with social analysis, and personal creativity with community engagement. An artist trained in an interdisciplinary program not only masters expressive techniques but also learns how to organize projects, conduct research, develop ideas, and collaborate across fields. As a result, they can participate in diverse creative spaces ranging from traditional art to experience design, from digital media to public art, from academic research to social action.

In addition, interdisciplinary art embodies a mode of adaptation well suited to the digital era. New forms such as new media art, bio art, interactive installation, and AI-generated art require collaboration between

artists and experts from multiple domains. These forms do not merely incorporate technology as a tool: they restructure artistic processes around collaboration, research, and systems thinking. As data, imagery, and technology become creative materials, interdisciplinary thinking becomes essential for artists to understand, use, and critique the tools of the age. Interactive art projects, works involving artificial intelligence, and pieces grounded in synthetic biology are not only technological products. They are also forms of dialogue about ethics, perception, and the nature of humanity within an emerging world.

New media art, for instance, often operates at the intersection of coding, sound design, spatial architecture, and user experience. The works of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer demonstrate how interactive installations transform viewers into participants. In projects such as large-scale biometric installations, data such as heartbeats or voice patterns become dynamic visual environments. Here, technology functions not only as medium but as a framework for examining surveillance, embodiment, and public space. The artwork becomes a social interface.



Figure 1: Atmospheric Memory by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Text Stream II.

Source: Photographer, Zan Wimberley @zanwimberley.

Bio art pushes interdisciplinarity even further by entering laboratory environments. Eduardo Kac's well-known transgenic project Alba involved the creation of a fluorescent rabbit through genetic modification. While controversial, the work did not simply display scientific

novelty. It provoked ethical debate about authorship, life, and the boundaries between natural and artificial creation. In such cases, artistic production requires collaboration with molecular biologists and research institutions, and the artwork unfolds as a site of philosophical inquiry.



Figure 2: Eduardo Kac, Le Lapin Unique (from the “GFP Bunny” series), public installation at Le Lieu Unique, Nantes, France, from March 14 to May 4, 2003.

Source: <https://www.ekac.org/alba.publicart.html>

Interactive and immersive installations frequently draw on real-time data and artificial intelligence. The practice of Refik Anadol exemplifies this tendency. By training machine learning systems on vast image archives, he produces data-driven visual

environments that reconfigure memory as a dynamic, computational process. His works blur the distinction between authorship and algorithm, prompting reflection on machine agency collective archives, and the changing conditions of artistic creation.

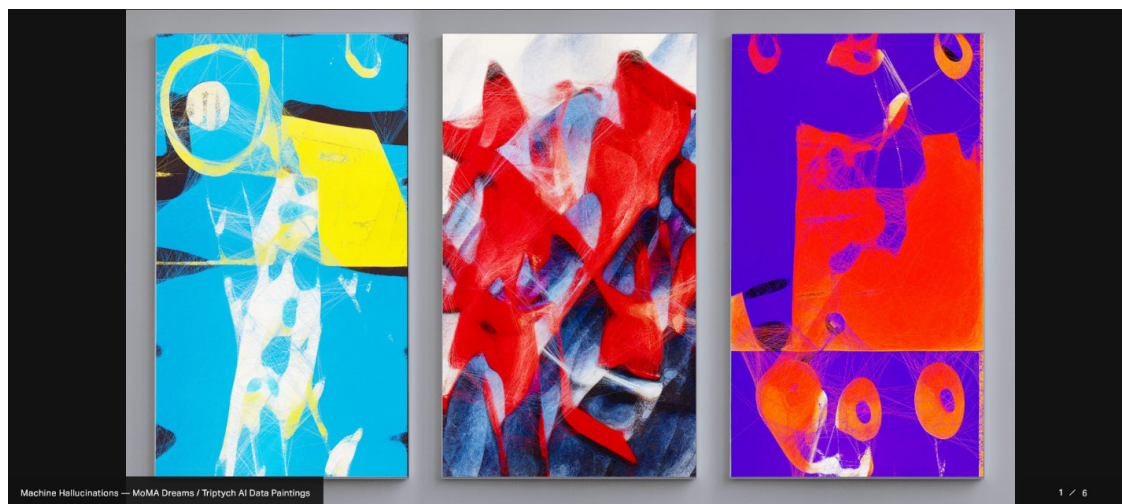


Figure 3: Refik Anadol, Triptych AI Data Paintings, Unsupervised - Machine Hallucinations - MoMA Categories Exhibition, NFT Collection, Metaverse, MoMA, 19 Nov 22 - 29 Oct 23.

Source: <https://refikanadol.com/works/unsupervised/>

AI-generated art challenges inherited ideas of creativity even more broadly. When artists employ generative adversarial networks or large language models, they do not simply delegate image or text production to machines. Rather, they design systems, curate datasets, and intervene critically in algorithmic processes. The creative act shifts from manual execution to conceptual design, system orchestration and critical framing. This redefinition of authorship demands not only technical literacy but also philosophical engagement with questions of bias, automation, and the future of labor.

Across these examples, interdisciplinary practice becomes indispensable because

the materials of art are no longer limited to pigment, stone, or sound. They now include code, genetic sequences, datasets, sensors, and network infrastructures. Consequently, artworks grounded in artificial intelligence or synthetic biology are not reducible to technological products. Instead, they operate as platforms for dialogue about ethics, perception, agency, and the meaning of humanity within rapidly evolving techno-scientific systems. In this sense, interdisciplinary art does not simply respond to the digital era. It actively interrogates and shapes it.

From an educational perspective, interdisciplinary art training enables the

integration of theory and application, academic research and creative practice. This model encourages students to develop individual projects that draw on multiple fields while also equipping them with research methodologies appropriate to the specific character of each project. The integration of formats such as thesis and exhibition or research paper and creative practice creates a flexible structure for postgraduate programs. Students therefore learn not only how to produce artworks but also how to understand, articulate and generate meaning through their creative processes.

Interdisciplinary art thus introduces a new grammar for contemporary art education. Earlier models of arts training largely viewed education as the cultivation of technical proficiency. The present moment, however, demands a broader cognitive journey characterized by experimentation, synthesis, and critical engagement with the limits of art itself. This shift is particularly important in a globalized and knowledge-driven context. A forward-looking system of art education must expand the scope of inquiry, nurture collaborative capacities, and enable multidimensional forms of creativity.

Instead, it must move toward an open form of artistic scholarship in which fields of knowledge intersect, resonate, and co-produce new understandings of the world.

At the societal level, interdisciplinary art does more than produce artistic works. It contributes to the generation of new forms of knowledge that enable individuals to engage with the complexities of contemporary life. Its openness and integrative capacity make interdisciplinary art a strategically significant direction for the future of arts education.

More importantly, it underscores the idea that art education can no longer rely on the fragmented disciplinary model of the previous century. Instead, it must move toward an open form of art scholarship in which academic fields intersect, resonate, and co-produce new understandings of the world.

4. POSTGRADUATE MODELS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY ART EDUCATION

Many international institutions have recognized the need to cultivate interdisciplinary thinking and practice in the arts. This recognition has led to the development of postgraduate programs that integrate theory, research, and creative practice. Three representative examples include the *Master of Interdisciplinary Arts* program at Macao Polytechnic University, the *Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Arts* at Simon Fraser University in Canada, and the *Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design* at OCAD University in Toronto.

Although these programs differ in focus and structure, they share a common educational philosophy. All three view art as a field capable of generating new forms of knowledge through creative practice, interdisciplinary dialogue, and social engagement.

It is noteworthy that these examples are situated primarily at the postgraduate level. This positioning is not accidental. Interdisciplinary integration often presupposes disciplinary depth. Before artists can meaningfully traverse or integrate fields, they must possess a strong grounding in at least one medium, tradition, or methodological framework. Postgraduate education therefore becomes a site of synthesis rather than initiation. It

offers a space where prior specialization can be critically reoriented toward broader conceptual and research-driven inquiry.

At the same time, the emergence of such programs within comprehensive universities, and in some cases institutions with strong scientific or technological profiles, reflects structural conditions. Interdisciplinary art frequently relies on access to research laboratories, digital infrastructures, and cross-faculty collaboration. Universities that host engineering, computer science, social sciences, and humanities faculties are institutionally equipped to support such interactions. The organizational ecology of the comprehensive university thus becomes conducive to interdisciplinary experimentation.

By contrast, many traditional art academies were historically structured around medium-specific studios and master-apprentice pedagogies. While these models remain crucial for cultivating technical rigor, they may not always provide the institutional framework for sustained cross-disciplinary research collaboration. The recent appearance of interdisciplinary postgraduate programs suggests not a rejection of disciplinary training, but a recognition that contemporary artistic practice increasingly unfolds within complex knowledge networks that exceed single-medium expertise.

In this sense, the postgraduate interdisciplinary model does not replace foundational artistic education. Rather, it builds upon it. It acknowledges that in the contemporary landscape, artistic inquiry often requires fluency across media, theories, and social contexts, alongside the depth acquired through prior specialization.

Macao Polytechnic University: Integrating Art, Humanities, and Creative Management

Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) is a public higher education institution in Macao, China, established with a mission to integrate education, research, and community service within the Greater Bay Area. The university emphasizes internationalization and global collaboration, particularly in interdisciplinary research and innovation, with an aim to bridge linguistic and cultural boundaries. According to the QS World University Rankings 2026, MPU appears in the 901–950 range globally and is ranked 402 in the QS Asia University Rankings, reflecting its growing reputation and research capacity in the regional and international academic landscape. These rankings reflect the university's growing academic reputation and expanding research capacity within both regional and international contexts, particularly in relation to interdisciplinary education and the creative industries.

At the undergraduate level, Macao Polytechnic University offers programs in Visual Arts that provide students with foundational disciplinary training in studio-based practice. At the postgraduate level, however, the shift toward an Interdisciplinary Arts framework significantly broadens the scope of enquiry for creative practitioners, enabling them to move beyond medium-specific expertise toward integrative and research-oriented form of practice.

The Master of Interdisciplinary Arts program at MPU aims to cultivate the capacity for interdisciplinary artistic thinking and interdisciplinary practice in the arts. A distinctive feature of the program is its integration of concepts from design, fine

arts, and music in order to develop students' artistic and humanistic competencies in a comprehensive way. The curriculum consists of three components: compulsory courses, elective courses, and a thesis project. The compulsory courses include *Research Methodology I*, *Research Methodology II*, and *Creative Thinking in Interdisciplinary Arts*. The elective component allows students to choose among courses such as *Contemporary Visual Arts*, *Seminar on Arts of Design*, and *Art Education*.

Courses such as *Creative Thinking in Interdisciplinary Arts* and *Cultural Creativity and Art Management* demonstrate the program's orientation toward combining creative theory with applied knowledge in the cultural and creative industries. The program therefor does not merely seek to train artists or designers in the conventional sense. It aims to prepare creative professionals who are capable of project planning, exhibition management, and market research. This approach reflects the university's educational philosophy. Art education is not limited to expressive skills but also involves the cultivation of cultural awareness, critical thinking and social creativity.

The program is designed to attract students from diverse backgrounds including fine arts, music, and design. This diversity creates an environment where interdisciplinary dialogue and mutual learning are actively fostered. The resulting interactions contribute to a dynamic creative atmosphere that prepares learners for the adaptive demands of contemporary art and global creative industries.

Simon Fraser University: Developing Artistic Practice in a Collaborative Interdisciplinary Space

Simon Fraser University (SFU) is a comprehensive public research university located in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, founded in 1965. SFU has a strong reputation for research excellence, innovation, and an open academic environment, offering more than 130 programs across diverse fields including arts, sciences, and technology. In the QS World University Rankings 2025, SFU is placed at #319 globally, consistently positioning it among Canada's leading comprehensive research universities. Additionally, the university is recognized for its societal impact and commitment to sustainability. The presence of interdisciplinary arts programs within such a research-intensive environment reflects SFU's institutional support for hybrid knowledge production and creative inquiry.

The Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Arts at SFU is designed for artists who work within or across dance, film, music, theatre, and visual art. The central goal of the program is to develop each student's artistic practice within an interdisciplinary, collaborative framework that integrates creativity, research, and critical inquiry.

A notable feature of this program is the flexibility built into its curriculum. Students select pathways that align with their own creative practices. Courses such as the *Interdisciplinary Graduate Seminar*, *Studio in Contemporary Arts*, and the *Graduate Project* encourage students to pursue individualized directions, explore the boundaries among art forms, and cultivate reflective and socially aware practices.

Students work closely with faculty members who are internationally active

artists, theorists, filmmakers, and researchers. Through these collaborations, they participate in broader networks of artistic and intellectual exchange. The MFA thesis typically consists of a substantial artistic project accompanied by a critical written component. This structure reflects the program's central pedagogical principle: postgraduate art education is not concerned solely with the production of artworks, but also with the development of analytical capacities and the positioning of creative practice within wider social, cultural, and theoretical contexts.

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OCAD University: Unifying Art, Media, and Design through Decolonial and Multicultural Perspectives

OCAD University, based in Toronto, is Canada's oldest and most comprehensive university dedicated to art, design, and visual culture, tracing its origins to the Ontario School of Art established in 1876. The university offers both undergraduate and postgraduate programs with a strong emphasis on creative practice, critical theory, and research in art, media, and design. While OCAD University does not appear in the

overall QS World University Rankings, it is listed in the QS World University Rankings by Subject for Art and Design within the 101–150 band globally. This subject-specific recognition underscores the university's international standing in creative and design-oriented disciplines and reinforces its role as a centre for interdisciplinary artistic research.

The Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design (IAMD) at OCAD University represents one of the most pioneering models of interdisciplinary art education today. The program positions art as a space where tradition, technology, indigenous knowledge, and decolonial methodologies intersect.

Students are encouraged to develop critical research methods and engage with courses such as *Directed Studio*, *Critical Theory Seminar*, and *Indigenous and Decolonial Praxis*. In addition, *Writing as Praxis* is a distinctive highlight of the curriculum. It integrates academic writing with creative thinking, enabling students to articulate theoretical ideas through their artistic processes. Rather than separating academic writing from studio production, this component treats writing as a parallel mode of artistic inquiry. Students may produce research-creation papers, annotated process journals, or hybrid texts that intertwine visual documentation with theoretical reflection. For instance, an installation project might be accompanied by a written work that traces its conceptual genealogy, methodological choices, and ethical considerations. In this way, writing becomes a space where artistic intuition is translated into articulated argument, thereby consolidating practice-based knowledge into communicable research. Through

these interconnected activities, IMAD does not simply encourage interdisciplinarity in principle. It operationalizes it through studio critique, theoretical translation, community engagement, and research-based writing, demonstrating how creative practice can function as a mode of knowledge production.

The program offers three degree pathways: Master of Fine Arts, Master of Design, and Master of Arts. Students choose a degree based on their primary orientation in creative practice, design, or theoretical research. They work with a primary advisor and an academic committee throughout the development of the thesis. The final thesis combines an artistic project with a reflective written document and demonstrates the student's ability to integrate theory, method, and creative practice.

One of OCAD's unique strengths is its integration of practice-based research with writing as praxis. Students not only develop artistic works but also cultivate writing and reflective abilities that allow them to articulate their academic arguments through their creative practice. Courses such as *Indigenous and Decolonial Praxis* reinforce the program's strong humanistic orientation, emphasizing the artist's role as a dialogue partner with local knowledge and non-Western intellectual traditions.

The learning environment is open and encourages interaction with exhibition venues, symposiums, and international artistic communities. Students are regarded as members of a creative ecosystem where knowledge is built through collaboration, critique, and performance. The thesis, which integrates a creative project and a written reflective component, embodies the core spirit

of interdisciplinary training by synthesizing theoretical insight, methodological rigor, and artistic innovation.

A further question must nevertheless be addressed: is interdisciplinary art education a marginal phenomenon, confined to niche institutions, or has it been adopted by leading universities worldwide?

Evidence suggests the latter. Interdisciplinary and research-based art programs are increasingly embedded within globally recognized institutions. For example, Massachusetts Institute of Technology hosts the Art, Culture and Technology program within a science- and engineering-driven environment; Aalto University integrates art, design, and technology through its School of Arts, Design and Architecture; University of the Arts London has developed research degrees that combine creative practice with critical theory; and Royal College of Art, consistently ranked among the world's leading institutions in Art and Design, continues to advance interdisciplinary doctoral models. These examples demonstrate that interdisciplinary art education is not peripheral but increasingly aligned with research-intensive and internationally ranked universities.

What distinguishes this global trend is not the abandonment of disciplinary foundations, but their expansion. In many cases, strong single-medium training remains central at undergraduate level, while postgraduate study becomes the site of integration, experimentation and knowledge production. Interdisciplinary models thus emerge not as alternatives to disciplinary rigor, but as its evolution within contemporary knowledge economies.

5. DISCUSSION: POSSIBILITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN VIETNAM

To better understand how interdisciplinary art education is conceptualized in different institutional contexts, it is useful to compare three postgraduate programs that share a common commitment to integration, yet diverge in emphasis and orientation. While all three situate artistic practice within broader knowledge frameworks, each articulates interdisciplinarity through distinct pedagogical priorities and institutional cultures.

The Master of Interdisciplinary Arts at MPU emphasizes the connection between art, the humanities, and creative management. Its curriculum is structured to cultivate interdisciplinary thinking while opening pathways for applying artistic practice within the cultural and creative industries. In this model, the artist is trained not only as a creator, but as a project developer, cultural organizer, and active participant in socio-cultural life. Artistic production is thus positioned within broader systems of cultural policy, administration, and public engagement.

At SFU, the Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Arts focuses on the development of individual artistic practice within a collaborative, research-driven environment. Students are encouraged to construct creative projects grounded in sustained inquiry and theoretical reflection. The relationship between artistic production and academic research occupies a central role in the postgraduate experience. Through this integration, students cultivate both scholarly rigor and social awareness, framing artistic practice as a form of critical engagement with contemporary realities. Meanwhile, the Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design at OCAD University

demonstrates a pronounced critical and theoretical orientation. Courses foreground practice-based research, writing as praxis, and Indigenous and decolonial approaches. Students are guided to situate their creative work within contemporary intellectual and cultural debates. In this framework, art becomes a dialogical space in which multiple epistemologies intersect, and creative practice functions as a mode of theoretical articulation.

A clear common feature emerges from the three models discussed above. Each program maintains a balanced integration of theory, practice, and research. Interdisciplinary art does not aim to replace traditional artistic disciplines. Rather, it creates a shared space where learners can connect different fields, expand their perspectives, and develop new methodologies of artistic inquiry. Together, these three programs demonstrate that interdisciplinary art education is not a singular model, but a spectrum of approaches ranging from cultural management and industry integration, to research-led artistic practice, to critically grounded epistemological dialogue.

In many countries, such developments have emerged in response to transformations within artistic practice itself. In Vietnam, similar shifts can already be observed. Many emerging artists are working across media, combining installation, video, performance, and community-based practices. This tendency is evident in the work of artists such as Nguyễn Trinh Thi, whose projects frequently merge moving image, archival research, and sound; Tuan Andrew Nguyen, whose practice integrates film, installation, and historical narrative; Nguyễn Phương Linh, whose

work engages installation, environmental inquiry, and community participation; and Trần Lương, who has played a central role in the development of performance and socially engaged art in Vietnam. These practices often engage with urban transformation, memory, and social change, indicating that interdisciplinary thinking is already present at the level of artistic production, even if not fully reflected in formal training structures. Independent art spaces, workshops, and residency programs have increasingly become sites where such experimentation takes place, fostering collaboration across artistic, social, and technological domains.

This reveals a visible gap between contemporary artistic practice and institutional education. While artists increasingly operate across disciplines, formal training remains largely structured around medium-specific specialization. The issue, therefore, is not simply one of adopting international models, but of responding to internal dynamics. Vietnam is undergoing rapid socio-cultural transformation, from urbanization and digitalization to shifting forms of cultural memory and public experience. These conditions generate complex questions that cannot be adequately addressed within single-medium frameworks. At the same time, the expansion of cultural and creative industries calls for practitioners capable of working across artistic, technological, and social domains.

This gap is not only conceptual but also reflected in concrete conditions within Vietnam's cultural and educational landscape. Current art training models remain largely discipline-based and oriented toward traditional studio skills, with limited integration of technology, media, or creative industry frameworks. As a result, graduates

often possess technical abilities but lack competencies in project development, curatorial practice, intellectual property, or cultural entrepreneurship.

Recent data underscore these structural challenges. According to the *Yearbook of Fine Arts, Photography and Exhibition* (Department of Fine Arts, Photography and Exhibition, 2019), Vietnam has approximately 3,279 painters and 455 sculptors, while the number of professional photographers is around 2,544, a modest figure relative to population size and market demand. The creative workforce is also aging rapidly, with artists under the age of thirty accounting for only 2.4% of painters and 1.1% of photographers. At the same time, enrollment in fine arts programs has declined, from 2,370 students in 2015 to 2,089 in 2017, with most training still concentrated in traditional disciplines such as painting, sculpture, and graphic arts.

By contrast, the cultural and creative sector is expanding significantly. According to the Vietnam Association for the Development of Cultural Industries, the country currently has approximately 70,000 enterprises operating in this sector, employing more than three million workers and contributing around 7% of national GDP (Thời báo Ngân hàng, 2024). New professional roles such as curators, creative directors, and cultural producers are increasingly prominent within contemporary artistic production. However, the supply of adequately trained personnel remains limited. The cultural and arts workforce accounts for only a small proportion of the broader cultural, sports, and tourism sector, indicating a significant gap between training capacity and industry demand.

Taken together, these conditions suggest that the need for interdisciplinary approaches in art education in Vietnam does not arise merely from global trends, but from internal transformations in both artistic practice and the creative economy.

The implementation of interdisciplinary art education in Vietnam would, however, require specific conditions. These include the development of faculty capable of supervising practice-based research, the establishment of flexible curricular structures that integrate studio work with theoretical inquiry, and institutional frameworks that support collaboration across disciplines. Access to shared resources such as digital laboratories, exhibition platforms, and partnerships with cultural organizations is equally important. Rather than replicating international models, such programs would need to be adapted to local contexts, drawing on existing artistic practices and cultural infrastructures.

The question, therefore, is not whether Vietnam should adopt interdisciplinary art education, but how it can articulate its own model based on local practices, institutional realities, and cultural priorities.

6. CONCLUSION

Applying this interdisciplinary model in Vietnam could begin with the establishment of a postgraduate program in interdisciplinary art that allows students to choose research, creative, or applied orientations suited to their abilities and career goals. The curriculum could draw on the flexibility found in the programs at Simon Fraser University and OCAD University, while also incorporating local cultural elements in the way that Macao Polytechnic University does. Such an approach would reflect the particularities of Vietnamese culture and the needs of the domestic creative industries.

A program of this nature would not only improve the quality of postgraduate art education in Vietnam. It would also provide a foundation for the development of contemporary and internationally integrated art scholarship in the country. With its openness and integrative capacity, interdisciplinary art has the potential to become a cornerstone for a new generation of artist researchers and contribute to shaping the future of Vietnamese art within the global creative landscape.

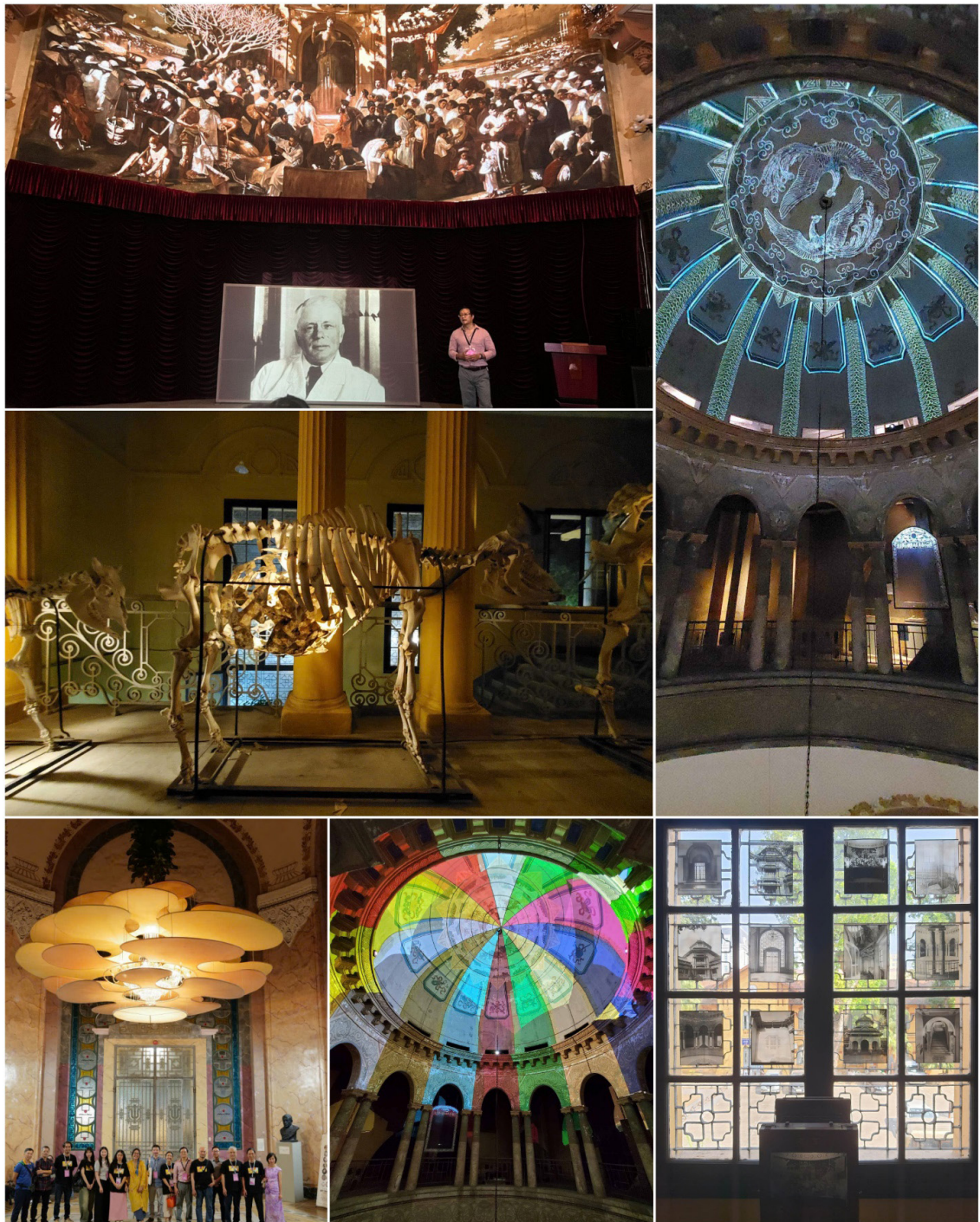


Figure 4: Exhibition view of “Indochine Sense” (2024), presented as part of the Hanoi Creative Design Festival 2024, curated by Nguyễn Thế Sơn, with the participation of numerous artist-lecturers from the School of Interdisciplinary Sciences and Arts, Vietnam National University, Hanoi. The exhibition brings together interdisciplinary artistic practices that combine visual art, installation, archival materials, and spatial narratives, reflecting emerging modes of research-based and cross-media creation in Vietnam. *Source: Nguyễn Thế Sơn*

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