Pacific Northwest College of Art

Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), founded in 1909 by the Portland Art Association as the Museum Art School, was originally part of the Education Department of the Portland Art Museum. Anna Belle Crocker, the first director of the museum, was also the first principal of the Museum Art School. From the beginning, many notable educators and artists taught at the school, including Harry Wentz, an early proponent of Oregon regionalism, who served as dean from 1910 through 1941.

The Museum Art School continued to grow a larger regional student body as influential faculty members helped position it as a progressive leader in the arts community, especially during the post-war period. Painter and printmaker William Givler served as dean until 1973. Douglas Lynch and Leta Kennedy established a program of study in commercial and graphic design. Painters Jack McLarty, Louis Bunce, Michele Russo, George Johanson, Harry Widman, sculptor Manuel Izquierdo, and potter Bennet Welsh also left important imprints on art teaching in the region. They brought influences from Abstract Expressionism, Modernism and native, Asian, and European traditions, while developing and reifying Oregon regionalism. Many renowned American artists were students of the school in the twentieth century, including Thelma Johnson, Lee Kelly, Duane Zaloudek, and Sally Cleveland.

PNCA later became an independent college of art and design, changing to its current name in the fall of 1981, and separating entirely from the Portland Art Museum in 1994. During this period, the school changed its approach of emphasizing a strong regional aesthetic toward a national and international vision, gradually developing as a stronger driving force in the visual arts. The years from 2005 to 2011 have been a time of significant growth at PNCA, as this broader vision of educational programming comes to fruition.

The college offers bachelor of fine arts programs in communication design, contemporary animated arts, general fine arts, illustration, intermedia, painting, printmaking, and sculpture. There are also graduate programs, including a mentor-based MFA in visual studies and an MFA in applied craft and design, a program developed in collaboration with the Oregon College of Art and Craft. In fall 2011, PNCA will launch an MFA program in collaborative design.

With the support of the Ford Institute for Visual Education, founded in 2007 with a gift of $15 million from Hallie Ford, PNCA established a partnership with the Museum of Contemporary Craft in 2009. The arrangement allows the two institutions to present a coordinated schedule of public exhibits, lectures, and visits by internationally recognized artists, academics, and designers.

The college receives regional accreditation through the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities and nationally through the National Association of Schools of Art and Design. Faculty members have included renowned artists, writers, and educators such as Rose Bond, Monica Drake-Alonso, MK Guth, Anne Johnson, Arnold Kemp, Paul Missal, Barry Sanders, and Morgan Walker.

Written by Dan McClure

Further Reading:

Pacific Northwest College of Art. http://www.pnca.edu/.

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