

Art as life

Many of us dream of being artists: free to express ourselves, to create beautiful paintings and drawings, sculptures and photographs that inspire us and others. Why not turn that dream into a real-life experience?

Nestled in a charming old school building in Oak Bay is a thriving college of fine arts, where students enjoy the lavish attention of experienced faculty who not only teach, but are living and working as artists. Studios with high ceilings and enormous windows provide a space for the intimate exchange between student and teacher, light and form, paint and canvas, pencil and paper. There is an intense life energy that buzzes throughout the building, even though quiet concentration pervades.

Barbara Hirano is the Director of the University Canada West Academy of Fine Arts, formerly known as the Victoria College of Art. "This school has been here for decades; the name has changed, but this incredible resource is still here, providing emerging artists with the wonderful combination of a foundation of classic skills and practical information about succeeding in the business of art," she explains.

Offering a wealth of options for people in all phases of life and development as artists, the UCW Academy of Fine Arts provides a three-year diploma program, as well as short courses and workshops.

"You can come and do one course, a six-week evening class, or a half-day workshop; it doesn't have to be a huge commitment," Hirano says. "We have an exciting array of classes beginning in January and continuing through the spring, and intake for our diploma program takes place in January as well. All the information is available on our website." The college has recently added courses in creative writing and "the business of art" to its extensive offerings in the visual arts.

The public is invited to the Academy's Christmas show on December 14 from 6-10pm. The entire school will be transformed into a gallery featuring student work, and light hors d'oeuvres will be served as a three-piece jazz combo plays festive music. Tour the studios and imagine yourself having the real-life experience of learning new skills, becoming part of a vital and creative community, and expressing yourself in ways you have only dreamed.

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The Academy on Bank Street



Barbara Hirano



Andrew Wooldridge and student

