

## Learning for art's sake

### New Victoria school expands opportunities for budding artists

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Susan Macdonald stands at an easel, using fine grit sandpaper and plenty of elbow grease to rub down a thick layer of painted foliage that meanders across her canvas.

"I'm going to paint over it," says the professional event planner, who has recently begun indulging her love of painting by taking classes at the Vancouver Island School of Art.

"I wish I could do this for a living," Macdonald says, and some day she dreams of combining these new skills with her business background and opening an art gallery.

Students attending the new school -- which opened in September with just 47 students and now has 129 -- range in age from their late teens to their mid-80s and come for many reasons.

"Not everyone can afford to go back to school full-time," says school founder Wendy Welch.

"Some have to work away at courses over several years, and that's why we hope to be accredited for both full- and part-time students."



**CREDIT: John McKay, Times Colonist**  
Wendy Welch, left, talks with student Cindy Bouchard about her sculpture at the Vancouver Island School of Art.

Now that the school has completed two semesters of classes, she plans to apply to the Private Career Training Institutions Agency for accreditation.

Jim Wright, registrar of PCTIA, says any new school must be registered with his agency for at least a year before it can go through a quality assessment and be accredited. "We look at all dimensions of the school, appoint a review team that spends time on campus, interviews all the students and staff ... it is a very rigorous process."

There are currently close to 700 private training institutions in B.C. providing all kinds of vocational and career type

programs, and a few, such as the Vancouver Film School do offer both full- and part-time courses in fine and creative arts, said Wright.

Welch, who has taught at the Victoria College of Art, as well as UVic and Camosun College, finds many people are "quite serious about art, but have to work at other things, so I wanted to offer high quality education on a part-time basis, which could lead to university or college level."

Two-thirds of her students are part time.

Her goal is also to provide an urban art centre, "in line with the city's 2020 plan to have more educational venues in the downtown core. That's the different niche we want to fill."

Victoria College of Art director John Harris, who took up the post in September, declined to comment on the new school, or how it will fit into the Victoria scene. But he did say his 30-year-old college was accredited in 2000. It now has 60 full-time students in its diploma program, 30 part time, and 75 to 100 in spring extension courses. It also offers a summer institute, with an intensive program for young artists, as well as workshops.

Welch is quick to acknowledge she applied for the job of director at the Victoria College of Art last summer and, when she didn't get it, decided to leave. "My vision is to provide a dynamic, lively environment for both beginners and more advanced artists. I also wanted to offer an eclectic range of art-related events such as musical performances,

poetry readings and film nights, and I invite community participation to create excitement about art in general." She says all seven instructors at VISA are successful artists with good teaching skills and masters degrees.

They include Megan Dickie, a former a teacher at the University of Saskatchewan who exhibited last summer in the Interface show at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; Charles Campbell, a University of London graduate, who taught at Edna Manley College in Jamaica and exhibited through the Caribbean, the United States, Canada and Europe; Eva Campbell, who has taught at UVic and the College of Art in Ghana; John Luna, who teaches at UVic, Camosun and Quadra Arts Centre and who recently exhibited in the LAB space at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; and Xane St. Phillip, a University of California grad who has taught at the Victoria College of Art and Pearson College summer school.

"The level of professionalism here is really good," said associate director St. Phillip, who notes that down the road the new school wants to offer first- and second-year university level courses. "Along with courses for people who just want to be visually educated in art," so they can appreciate travel more, or going to museums.

"Art is for everyone, but it is also a luxury to study art and students want good value, and options," says Welch, who is excited about "Victoria having two art schools."

VISA's new line-up features 18 courses - ranging from drawing, painting, mixed media and sculpture to colour theory, contemporary art/critique, photography and art history. It offers full-time sessions, as well as six-week courses, weekend workshops and week-long summer intensives. Summer classes will also include art crafts such as textiles

and beadwork.

The school is located in 1,000 square feet of a two-storey commercial building at 578 John St. (above Island Temperature Controls). Its website is [vancouverislandschoolart.com](http://vancouverislandschoolart.com).

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