A REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE PRACTICE
OF THE
VISUAL ARTS AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

This report is, in large part, an interim report. Since its appointment in July 1957, the Committee has, by continuing study, consultation and discussion, sought to evolve an educational program which will fulfill the complex and sometimes seemingly diverse needs of faculty and students in the area of the visual arts. It does not purport here to present a final program but rather to summarize the Committee’s thinking to date and set forth the general framework within which the Visual Arts Center will function. Many questions of organization, course, content, and activity are deliberately left unanswered. The Committee feels it fruitful to continue its discussions and consultations with a variety of distinguished critics, historians, and artists before a final structuring of the activities of the Center.

This report, of course, has its genesis in even earlier reports and suggestions by members of the several Harvard Faculties and friends of Harvard who share a mutual interest in the visual arts.

General Statement of Policy

The term “Visual Arts Center” will seem to imply a facility devoted to the training and development of artists or teachers of art. This is not the aim of the Harvard Visual Arts Center. It is, rather, to train the “enlightened amateur”; the student who, in his mature years, will have increasing need of tools to grasp and understand the complex and confusing visual world around him and who will have the capacity and opportunity to influence that world in terms of discriminating acceptance. Artists and architects must inevitably respond more freely and effectively to a trained and exacting audience. It is important also, in an era of increasing leisure, that the meaningful use of leisure time be enriched by perceptive awareness of the visual arts.

This concept of a broad introduction to the visual arts can best be likened to teaching “pure mathematics” as compared to “applied mathematics.” There must be an understanding of the philosophy and logic underlying the visual arts as evidenced in such phenomena as form, texture, color, proportion, and scale. A competent examination must, of necessity, cross academic boundaries and enlist
teachers in fields which, ordinarily, are not considered related to the visual arts. It should include philosophy (aesthetics), physics (physics of optics), psychology (psychology of vision), as well as the more direct associative areas: painting, sculpture, architecture, and city planning.

This didactic program, however, is meaningless unless the student can apply these theories in his own creative processes by physical contact with various materials. This will enable him to grasp more readily the sensory values involved in his total experience. Within a studio workshop atmosphere then, the Visual Arts Center must encourage the student actively to sharpen his sensory awareness of the visual world, release his latent creative faculties and develop his capacity for visual communication.

Within this dual program of instruction and immersion in the creative process, the student will use many different materials and processes involved in creative work. These processes, however, are incidental to the educational aim of the Visual Arts Center and must never become ends in themselves. The program will involve the use of specialized visual media: typography, photography, ceramics, etching, cinema, and other aspects of visual communication. These will not be pursued as art forms in themselves, however, but rather as aids and avenues of experimentation within the more comprehensive program.

While the main emphasis of the Visual Arts Center will be a broad introduction to the visual arts, there will be opportunity for more advanced instruction in studio work.

Tentative Program

1. The program, to begin with, will be built around one strong core course: a full year’s introduction to the visual arts. This will involve an examination of form, texture, color, proportion and scale in painting, sculpture, architecture, and city planning. It will include a discussion of perception and the creative process: of meaning and the problems of visual communication. It will emphasize the development of the student’s sensitivity to works of art and his understanding of the creative process of our time. This basic course will invite course discussion by visiting artists and scholars in various disciplines.
2. Each student taking the basic course will be required, in addition, to take three or more hours of studio work a week. At the start these studio workshops will be three in number and the student will be allowed some elective choice among them. The three workshops are described below. Workshops involving such areas as etching, typography, ceramics, etc., will not be developed as distinct activities. Physical facilities and instruction will be provided but only as part of the coordinated program in the basic studio workshops.

3. **Workshop I (two dimensional)**
   Will involve freehand sketching and drawing emphasizing control of line, texture, values, and color. The work will involve experimentation with different media, typography, etching, etc.

4. **Workshop II (three dimensional)**
   Will involve training the student to visualize in space and to develop sensitivity to form, structure, space, texture, and color. It will include the development of manual dexterity in three-dimensional work by means of construction experiments employing different materials and forming processes.

5. **Workshop III (light and communication)**
   A comprehensive introduction to complex modes of expression based on photography and sound reproduction. Primary emphasis will be on two fundamental properties of the photographic arts: light and movement. Will involve individual experimental projects.