

LOCAL NEWS

CSUF's new Visual Arts Complex fosters collaboration, community engagement

Gallery space and green-screen room among innovations



Joanna Cisneros (center) takes portraits inside CSUF's new Visual Arts Complex on Wednesday, October 9, 2024. (Photo by Drew A. Kelley, Contributing Photographer)



By **CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

UPDATED: October 21, 2024 at 7:15 a.m.

Students, faculty and the local arts community are benefitting from a major upgrade to Cal State Fullerton's College of the Arts. Originally planned seven years ago and completed on schedule in August, the Visual Arts Modernization Project includes two new buildings and major renovations to two existing structures. The result: enhanced collaboration between students and significantly greater engagement between the College of the Arts and the outside community. In addition, students now have greater access to all manner of technical resources that will better prepare them for work in today's ever-changing arts world.

Constructed in the 1960s, the original Visual Arts Complex was planned for 1,100 students. Today, CSUF is home to 2,600 visual arts students. "We've done some amazing things with the 1960s buildings," said Arnold Holland, dean of the College of the Arts, "but as the arts change, it's important that we change with them and create spaces that serve our students in their work for the years to come."

Holland stressed greater community engagement as a focal point of the project. Building G — a one-story, 15,000-square-foot addition that houses the Nicholas and Lee Begovich Gallery, three student galleries and an arts research library — does just that. Before, galleries were located in separate locations; now, they're in one space.

"The building is dedicated to exhibition spaces, which we didn't have before," Holland said. "With the addition of our gallery spaces, we now have a facility that enhances the way our community engages with the visual arts. Our graduate gallery was only open when the exhibiting students were present: between classes and on nights and weekends." Now, he added, staff members will keep all the spaces open, and the public can visit far more often.

A key element of Building G, outward-facing windows, makes CSUF's visual arts, well, more visible. "If you walked around our prior gallery (with inward-facing windows), you had no idea what was in it," Holland said. "So, we created spaces where people can see art and art classes being taught. You get to see teaching and learning happening in a way that is unprecedented."

he two-story, 37,000-square-foot Building H is the Visual Arts Complex's other new structure. Its first floor is home to the dean's office, computer labs, computer commons (spaces where students can work between classes or after hours) and lecture and seminar spaces. The second floor furnishes spaces that, Holland notes, focus on digital work: entertainment arts and animation, gaming art, graphic design and more. This includes a green-screen (motion-capture) room, a film screening area and computer labs.

"The green-screen room is unique in arts colleges," Holland said. "It's the same technology that students will use when working at Disney, Pixar and Blizzard Entertainment. ... Two of the spaces (in Building H) that I'm most proud of, a critique room and a seminar classroom, include floor-to-ceiling glass."

Buildings A and E underwent significant renovations. Now home to the Department of Visual Arts offices, Building A formerly housed the Begovich Gallery. "We took that space and created a number of studios for grad students," Holland said. This includes a studio space, painting and drawing areas, and a collaborative makerspace.

Along with drawing and painting rooms, a 2D foundations classroom and additional instructional space, the first floor of Building E contains faculty offices. "As we grew since the 1960s, we put faculty wherever we could, in different locations," Holland said. "Now nearly all of our faculty members are in a single suite. It's easier for the students."

Building E's second floor hosts the photography department, with two studios, a room for large-scale printing, a darkroom and a photo computer lab. Despite the ever-expanding focus on digital art, "We're one of the few programs committed to maintaining some of the (traditional) foundational labs, such as 'wet' darkrooms," Holland said.

The overall design of the complex helps to bridge gaps between students studying different arts disciplines. For example, "Our motion-capture room is a place where visual and performing arts students can work together," he said. Dance students, he noted, can strut their stuff in front of the green screen. And, while the old complex separated students by arts specialty, the new design allows a variety of disciplines to be taught and observed in shared spaces.

Holland is understandably proud of the new facility. "We're now the largest visual arts department in the CSU system, which makes it one of the largest in the state," he said. ... Cal State Fullerton has been a hub of arts and culture in the region for a while. This new complex will only enhance that. We're bringing in tens of thousands of people each year, and we hope that we can grow that number and engage that much more with Orange County."