

The Value in Opportunities:

Wielding Student Experiences

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Graduation comes much quicker than many undergraduate students think; within the blink of an eye you've completed your four-year degree and you're on to bigger and better things. But what are those things? How can we find those avenues we'd like to pursue without experiencing them firsthand?

This is just one of the reasons why exhibition, internship, and curatorial opportunities are so important within the undergraduate academic institution. As a graduating undergraduate student myself, I have been lucky to attend an art institution which provides, in my opinion, repeated opportunities for my work to be displayed on campus and beyond. This semester, through my internship at the Artlab, I wanted to contribute to this environment by organizing a series of four solo exhibitions for the Artlab Vitrine, a display space between the Artlab and Cohen Commons galleries. I wanted to not only provide my peers with opportunities to broaden their CVs, and also have the chance to coordinate a solo exhibition series within a professional gallery setting. Having the experience of working with my peers in this way emphasized to me that student run opportunities are crucial to growing comfortable working with galleries and museums.

To gather insight into this topic, I interviewed all four artists who participated in the vitrine exhibition series about their thoughts and opinions on the quality and availability of similar programming within the Visual Arts Department. Each of the interviewed artists are in separate years of the BFA program, which created some varying viewpoints. For anonymity's sake, I will not be directly quoting, but instead will paraphrase their responses.



Exhibition: I Never Said It, *Megan Goddard*.



Exhibition: In fact, it wasn't on my mind at all, *Tia Bates*.

Overall, the response I received from my peers regarding the vitrine exhibition series was positive. All the artists felt that this exhibition opportunity was something they had been lacking, and that it was a nice way to gain valuable experience working with a student intern. Some mentioned that this relieved some pressure, as working with professionals in the field right away can be

intimidating, and the BFA program hasn't given us many opportunities to practice (especially during this year of COVID pandemic and pause). Another shared opinion was that the BFA program does not lend itself easily to offer solo exhibition opportunities such as this one due to large class sizes. A student-led exhibition series is a perfect opportunity for both the artists and the coordinator to gain valuable experience in the field without the pressure of perfection.

When asked more generally about their experiences within the BFA program, opinions differed for each artist. Some of the artists have found that the exhibition opportunities provided to students have been underwhelming or disappointing; some feel that the opportunities are not as hands-on as they would like, or that they are too disorganized for students to gain any takeaway experience. Other students view their time in the BFA program with a more neutral perspective, where they have not gained or lost anything from it. Everyone agreed that these types of student-led, student-centric exhibitions are still important as they are a great way to build a CV before graduation.



息抜き / ikinuki: to relax, to take a breather, *Holly Granken*



Exhibition: formful, *Tyler Jafelice*.

Overall, the consensus I gathered from these artists was that though the Department provides opportunities for students, and they see the value in these events, there is room to improve the professional experiences which the students have. Increasing the frequency of exhibition opportunities (whether in the Visual Arts building or virtually through social media) would inspire and motivate students to become more involved in their own practices and in their arts

communities, both on and off campus. Seeing more of these opportunities advertised would likely foster future student-hosted events as well. Opportunities such as solo exhibitions can be more appealing to students, especially when group exhibitions are the norm, and I encourage my fellow students to take part in all calls for submissions they see.

More importantly, I encourage you to take the initiative to organize your own events and exhibitions, whether on your own or with your peers or student groups like the Visual Arts Supporters Association (VASA) or the Arts and Humanities Students' Council (AHSC). These are all great ways to expand your CV, create valuable connections for your future endeavours, and more importantly, gain hands-on experience in showcasing and fabricating your art.

Sam Wagter was born in London, Ontario and graduated from Western University with her BFA, and will be continuing her studies in UWO's MFA program in the fall of 2021. Gaining inspiration through her struggles with society's beauty standards for women, and the internal organs of our own bodies, her work challenges external beauty and seeks to bring a new understanding of our own internal and physical selves.

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I would like to give special thanks to the artists who participated in the exhibition series and interview: *Tia Bates*, *Megan Goddard*, *Holly Granken*, and *Tyler Jafelice*. Working with you all was a pleasure and I wish you the best in your future endeavors. I also would like to thank Ruth Skinner for not only her help and patience with this publication, but with all the support, help and mentoring she has provided me over the course of my time as Artlab Intern.

View the Artlab's Vitrine Exhibition series in more detail at www.uwo.ca/visarts/artlab/vitrine/