

A woman with curly hair, wearing a dark brown turtleneck, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is standing in an art gallery with various colorful artworks displayed on white shelves in the background.

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**OCAD:
LOOKING OUTWARD,
REACHING UPWARDS**



PHOTO BY
GEORGE WHITESIDE

‘I think OCAD
should, and can,
be a world leader
in art and design
learning.’

—SARA DIAMOND



PRESIDENT SARA DIAMOND BRINGS HER VISION TO OCAD

BY JANIS COLE

IMAGES FROM THE
“LOOK INSIDE” EVENT
PHOTOS BY
REGINA GARCIA

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Fanfare and applause greeted internationally renowned media artist Sara Diamond when her appointment as incoming President of the Ontario College of Art & Design was announced before a packed house during a reception held in March 2005. The 18th President expressed excitement at joining OCAD during this phenomenal period of change. She touched on her leadership vision for the next phase of OCAD's transformation and sketched the achievements that have marked her journey. The OCAD community got a glimpse of her wit, charm, confidence and personable style.

Students, faculty and staff of OCAD—past, present and future—share a vested interest in the history and status of the university. We have always had opportunities to celebrate the former and enhance the latter, but never has there been a better time for both than now. President Diamond is poised to lead OCAD through its next phase of development, diversity, interna-

tionalism, multi-disciplinary studies and graduate-level programs and research.

Ms. Diamond is the dynamo behind the evolution of the Banff Centre for the Arts from remote artist retreat to leading arts, research and cultural centre. During her 14-year tenure at Banff, Diamond was Director of Media Arts and Executive Producer of Television Co-productions; Founder and Artistic Director of the Banff New Media Institute; and head of research initiatives for the entire Banff Centre. She developed outstanding interdisciplinary programs, built lasting international relationships and forged research initiatives blending art, social science, humanities and technology.

“WHAT BETTER TIME TO LEAVE THAN WHEN AN INSTITUTION [THE BANFF CENTRE] IS IN GOOD SHAPE, AS OPPOSED TO ITS BEING IN CRISIS”

CONT'D>>

‘I love the idea of being in an environment that offers visual art, design and liberal studies; I like the balance of all three.’



ABOVE
OPEN DRAWING STUDIO
DURING THE “LOOK
INSIDE” EVENT.
PHOTO BY
RICHARDJOHNSON.CA

Her first major event as President of OCAD, held in early October, invited the public to “Look Inside” at our university activities and classroom teaching during regular evening hours. More than 2,500 people attended. Reflecting on the resounding success of the event, Diamond says:

“It shows that OCAD must not only look inward, but also outward. The Look Inside event, which allowed the public to see what we do, was also an opportunity for us to look outward, to see who the community is and to start making connections. Look Inside was great because the parents of students were there...and the parents of potential students. They can feel positive about where their children are going and also become advocates for what we do. If we are confident about what we’re teaching and what we’re doing, then we shouldn’t be afraid to show it.”

Those who have followed Diamond’s arrival at OCAD have witnessed an open-door policy. She says the OCAD community can expect her to engage with learning and teaching methods and with what the curriculum is and should be. She is collaborating on long-

term strategic plans to determine goals for the next five, ten and fifteen years and simultaneously devising two-year and three-year business plans. Pulling the collective brainpower of the institution together in this way will help Diamond find practical approaches to implementing change.

An Adjunct Professor at the University of California, Diamond has taught consistently at the graduate and undergrad level. She appreciates the significance of studies in art and design that incorporate history, theory, practice and criticism. She thrives on institutional commitment to meaningful research and intellectual engagement in art and design outcomes. Her diverse skills will serve as a bridge for the Art and Design streams at OCAD and will connect Art and Design with Liberal Studies.

A self-described institution builder, Diamond creates teams within her organization and reaches out to forge collaborations with regional, national and international partners that can place OCAD within a firmly established network here and abroad. She is committed to providing faculty with the tools to be effective in teaching, so that the students’ learning experience is rich, diverse and the best available—certainly in this country—delivering the combination of practice and theory.

“THE BEST MOTTO FOR LEARNING MIGHT BE ‘CONSTANTLY UPGRADE YOUR KNOWLEDGE.’ ”

While they’re still in school, students should begin to think about exhibiting and about finding their audience, which, as Diamond says, “OCAD already has a history of helping them do.” From the moment they leave school, they should make sure that art and design practice is a daily part of their lives that they do not let slip.

Graduate students need to give themselves space for expression and keep their conceptual muscles exercised. “There is a healthy compulsion that artists and designers face,” says Diamond. “They are compelled to work and they must find the space to enable that drive.”

Besides taking with them a sense of their own practice, students graduating from OCAD need to understand the context for their work and stay aware of the world stage in order to position their practice. They need that fine balance between self-awareness and awareness of context. They need to develop their creative skills for vision, their formal skills for execution and their survival skills in order to sustain a practice. Whether students want to build their own small business or move their art practice into another field, they need to develop the tools to make it happen.



‘Art and design are ways of creating understanding while embracing complexity in the world we live in.’

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The OCAD community can expect strong initiatives in building relationships among art, design and science; art, design and medical research; art, design and business; and art, design and community. Within five years, says Diamond, those initiatives are what OCAD will be involved in, and right now they are initiatives she is planning. She wants OCAD to be both a university networked to research and also a cultural institution with ongoing educational, community and cultural events. It is important to be both.

Part of the excitement of an art and design institution is helping students to discover style and form and to negotiate what is beauty, what gives us pleasure and what we fear. Diamond wants to create an atmosphere at OCAD where students can explore, take risks and understand threat, yet not be fearful. She encourages students to find themselves and their personal expression and style, both during their education and after graduation. Diamond tries to embody these

things in the way she lives and by remaining open to exploration.

“I HAVE MANAGED TO RETAIN CURIOSITY THROUGHOUT HALF A CENTURY. IT COMES DOWN TO ENGAGEMENT, OPTIMISM AND EMBRACING CHANGE.”

By constantly learning new concepts and technologies in her practice and by experimenting with interdisciplinary collaborations and audience outcomes, Diamond has evolved in her art practice, which started with video productions in the late 1970s and includes performance, installation, interactive design and on-line art and design environments.

Her award-winning work has been the subject of retrospectives at the Images Festival and the National Gallery of Canada and is in collections at universities, colleges, libraries, the Art Bank, the Museum of Modern Art and the National Gallery of Canada.

Most recently, she has created CodeZebra <www.codezebra.ca>, a collaborative on-line art and design environment that facilitates software development, performance and the investigation and analysis of on-line debate, chat, erotic engagement, humour and face-to-face dialogue.

“I HAVE JOINED OCAD BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN THE POTENCY OF ITS PAST ACHIEVEMENTS AND FIND INSPIRATION IN ITS POTENTIAL AS A FORCE FOR CREATIVITY IN ART AND DESIGN WITHIN THE LARGER CANADIAN AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.”

Diamond prides herself on never losing sight of the bigger institutional picture during times of change. For OCAD, that means making sure that we are really doing what we say we do, that we are delivering, in seamlessly intertwined combination, a rigorous and describable studio-based education and an equally rigorous intellectual, theory-based and context-based learning environment that evolves constantly.

“It is people who will make the difference, and optimism and engagement that will make things work,” declares Diamond. “Getting people excited about change, and enthusiastic about participating, is crucial.”

President Diamond welcomes students, faculty and staff during her open-office hours in Room 569, Level 5, in the Sharp Centre for Design: Mondays, from 12:30 to 2 p.m., and Thursdays, from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Her Presidential message can be viewed at <www.ocad.on.ca> under Hot Links.

Janis Cole is a Professor at the Ontario College of Art & Design. She is internationally renowned for her award-winning films, which include three theatrical documentaries—*P4W*; *Prison for Women*, 1982 Genie Award winner, and *Hookers on Davie* and *Calling the Shots*, both Genie Award nominees. She writes for publications, including *NOW Magazine* and *POV*, and is developing a dramatic feature with Force Four Films.