A History of the Art Department

The Department of Art was established in 1939 when Dr. James E. Shepard, President and founder of North Carolina College, later North Carolina Central University, hired Mrs. Marion Parham Cordice to be director of art studies. In addition to guiding studies and mounting the first student art exhibition, she also laid the foundation for the NCCU Museum by purchasing a number of art works. During this time Mr. William Zorach joined the department and was commissioned to create the statue of Dr. Shepard which stands in the center of the Hoey Administration Building entrance circle.

The Fine Arts Building

Initially, the Department of Art shared space with Music, Dramatic Art, and the Dance Program, but since 1978 it has occupied the entire Fine Arts Building. In the fall of 1960 Mrs. Lynn Igoe was hired. She pushed for the establishment of a Museum and became its first director in 1971. Mrs. Igoe expanded the collection but left the Museum to work on the two-volume bibliography of African-American art, which has now become the standard reference in the field. Mrs. Igoe also hired Mr. Norman Pendergraft, later the director of the Museum, and Ms. Lana Henderson, an art educator who later became chairman. As the number of art majors increased, the department offered the Bachelors of Art Degree in programs of Art Education and Studio Art. In 1973 Mr. Charles Joyner added luster to the department with his fine prints and established a concentration in Visual Communications which has become very popular. Students also chose to concentrate in Drawing and Painting, Ceramics, Printmaking, and General Art. When Mr. Joyner left in 1977, Dr. Melvin Carver, a specialist in graphic and product design, later to be chairman, replaced him.

During her tenure Mrs. Henderson hired Ms. Isabael Levitt in Ceramics and Photography, Professor Achamyelah Debela in Computer Graphics and Mr. Carlyle Johnson in Printmaking. She also worked to improve facilities. Henderson held the chairmanship for 13 years and was succeeded in 1990 by Dr. Melvin Carver, who has held the position since then.

The Visual Communications concentration and digital design are the strengths of the Department, supported by state-of-the-art computer labs. Dr. Carver has started a study-abroad program with the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana. He has also, with the aid of the Red Hat Corporation, established a four-year scholarship in art studies.

The future of the Department of Art is bright. Current professors and instructors are Mr. Kenneth Rodgers, instructor of African-American Art History; Ms. Michele Patterson, instructor of general art history, Dr. John Hughley, director for Art Education and Mr. Connie Floyd, lead instructor for Visual Communications courses and Printmaking. Several adjunct instructors are hired to teach supporting art courses. The Department has signed articulation agreements with community colleges to recruit students holding Associate degrees and seeking the BA Degree in Art. Among HBCUs, the Department and art programs at NCCU are considered outstanding in Afro-American art studies. Among its nationally recognized graduates are Ernie Barnes, Willie Nash, Ivey Haynes, and Beverly McIver. In addition, eight graduates in the past ten years
have progressed academically and received doctoral degrees. Many other graduates have become professionals in various art fields and annually support Art Department programs and activities.

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Sources – Art Department Records
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