Contemporary culture is now almost entirely composed of brands. Everything we consume—even the most basic commodities like water and salt—are brands. Experiences are brands. People are brands. Our role models are people, and thus our role models have become brands. Brands are so persuasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected and unaltered. Any knowledge of culture is impossible now without an understanding of the implications of “brand.” We have entered a day and age where brand is an extension of human facility, whether it is psychic or psychological.

Rarely are design, branding and strategy discussed in terms of a synergistic relationship in academia. There are design schools and there are business schools, but there is no one academic environment that comprises a rigorous, robust education of the intersection of design and business in the art and science of branding. The world’s first-ever Masters in Branding is the only program in the world which offers a unique opportunity to pioneer the examination of the relationship between design and strategy, and the power of brand thinking as a way to combine creative skills with the problem-solving and decision-making processes of design and business.

The School of Visual Arts Masters in Branding provides a radical, innovative look at the relationship between design, branding, science and strategy, and focuses on how students can use learned skills to generate and sustain new market opportunities.

Come and join us. Your future is waiting.

—Debbie Millman, chair
The Master of Professional Studies is a one-year graduate degree program that examines the relationship between design and strategy, and the power of design thinking as a way to combine creative skills with the problem-solving and decision-making processes of design and business.

It is the first program of its kind in the United States and offers its students a unique opportunity to study with some of the most accomplished branding experts working today.

Students graduating from this program will be able to take advantage of new market opportunities, and to deliver innovative, successful and sustainable project outcomes in the worlds of design, advertising, marketing and business.

During the year, students develop an understanding of diverse branding strategies, brand valuation and brand development life cycles. Students will explore important themes in behavioral science and relevant cultural themes as they relate to branding. We will investigate marketing challenges involved in creating and sustaining brands and gain an understanding of corporate-level discourse.

The required course work for this degree program will be organized into five progressive segments: culture, behavior, business, commerce and creative. Each discipline will work both independently and cohesively with the others, but rigorous attention will be paid to each field to determine and define the modern practice of branding.
Every year the students of the SVA Master’s in Branding program have the opportunity to work with real clients, and experience a true client/consultant relationship. In the first five years of the program, students have had the opportunity to work with some of the world’s leading companies and leading brands. The following show just a few of their collaborations.
The Joyful Heart Foundation is a non-profit organization established by Mariska Hargitay in 2004 to support survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse. In 2016, the program began a visual identity project to unify all sub-brands under the JHF umbrella, align with a new mission and position the organization for growth. The students went through an extensive immersion process; throughout the semester they met with the JHF communications team for working sessions and critiques. As the students and the client team narrowed in on an identity, the entire team had the honor of presenting their final recommendation to Mariska Hargitay.

The JHF executive board endorsed the new identity and the students worked through the summer to finalize the JHF brand guidelines for roll out throughout the organization. The revitalized brand expression communicates both the strength and compassion of the organization. In addition, the new brand architecture has created unity among initiatives, which reflects the comprehensive and collaborative nature of the organization's programs and services.

In May 2013, MoMA unveiled Destination: NYC, a collection of 200 products for sale through their retail operations, which were designed or manufactured in New York. Students in the program initially developed five strategic approaches and basic design explorations. These were eventually refined and worked up to the point where the strongest, most appropriate direction was chosen. From that strategic position, a full 360-degree program of applications were created, including visual and verbal identity systems, advertising, digital applications and retail environments.

The relationship with MoMA extended through 2014 as the students were asked to develop three smaller projects. The first, a new photographic strategy, enabled MoMA's retail division to present products in a more expressive manner. The other two projects re-examined MoMA’s strategy toward holiday greeting cards and branded items—specifically how new products are solicited, designed and selected. Students then presented appropriate examples that fit within those frameworks.
KAPPA HARLEM MIDDLE SCHOOL

For 2015, the program began a relationship with KAPPA IV, a public middle school in Harlem that had been facing greater enrollment competition from other public and charter schools. After multiple visits to the school and local neighborhood; interviews with students, teachers and community members; and strategic workshops with the client; a brand platform, which worked within Common Core requirements, was established. From there, a visual identity system, environmental designs, parent/teacher communication tools and teaching aids were created.

Curriculum/ Sample Program

All students must complete a total of 36 credits in 10 months, as well as defend a thesis judged by a panel of experts and faculty. All courses are graded on a pass/fail system. Students are required to attend every scheduled class meeting, complete required readings, participate actively in class discussions, and create an original body of work, culminating in the successful defense of the graduate thesis.

FALL

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A BRAND CALLED YOU
The good news: We are now living in what Businessweek has called a “creative economy.” The bad news: More than ever before, design will be called upon to deliver a return on investment and measured performance in the marketplace. How can you truly quantify your talent and develop strategic and competitive intelligence? How can you quantify meaningful differentiation in a world already filled with branding firms, creative strategists and brand gurus?

This course will address: How to create a meaningful philosophy that can guide your career; how to present yourself in meetings and interviews; how to network and stand out from your competition; how to create discipline in your approach to work; and how to sell yourself with more confidence.

BRAND PHYSICS
Brands, at their best, create emotional bonds between people and organizations, movements, businesses or products. They guide and shape behavior, establish instant recognition, and become valued and valuable by facilitating achievement of ambitions, large and small. In order to ensure a brand is meaningful, relevant and remarkable, a brand brief is created. The brief acts as a guideline, instructions and a set of tools that unify understanding, intention and action. Over the course of our semester, students will learn the physics or indisputable truths of branding and how to apply them to create differentiated and desired brands. In the first seven weeks we’ll hone skills in pattern recognition, and learn how to identify critical observations and their business implications. We’ll also practice the art and science of evidence-based insight development through qualitative and quantitative research design methods. And we’ll study etymology and storytelling in service of creating emotionally connective and differentiated brand positioning. In the subsequent eight weeks, students will apply all of these skills as we work with an actual client who will provide us with a real brand challenge to solve.
BUSINESS AND BRANDING STRATEGIES
From developing a brand personality to discovering invisible brand assets, this course is about creating brand value, strategy and business literacy. We’ll review core branding disciplines such as developing brand positioning, mission statement, brand character, naming and brand architecture. We’ll take a look at financial valuation models, as well as creative methods for discovery and ideation, and why a strong brand strategy is like an organization’s DNA, serving as a blueprint for strategy and informing other activities such as leadership, marketing, product development, communication, design and advertising. Discussions based on case studies and readings will also use worksheets as a lens, and provide a platform to examine forces and dynamics that shape brands from traditional corporate to entrepreneurial startups. We’ll touch on globalization, technology, critical thinking, culture and lifestyle.

THE EVOLUTION OF CPG BRANDS AND PACKAGE DESIGN
Consumer brands, and the retail marketplace that supports them, have evolved through several stages in the last 150 years. Each has been strongly influenced by culture, events and the changes of the retail markets of which they are a part. The first three stages, from the 1850s through the 1990s, can be described as the era of the retailer, the era of the manufacturer and the era of the brand. The last decade has seen an evolution of brand activity toward a focus on consumer experience and lifestyle. Where does the CPG brand stand today and what is its future?
This course will review the historical evolution of CPG brand identities though the lens of retail brand identity and package design. We will review, decade by decade, the relatively brief history of CPG brand identities, and the aesthetic and cultural influences that have shaped their path. While reviewing these historical precedents, students will develop an informed judgment on where CPG brand identities are today and where they may be headed.
A UNIFIED THEORY OF BRANDING

Leading the definition and evolution of a world-class brand requires more than intellectual rigor and insight. You must unify and leverage the expertise and efforts of an astounding array of people—leaders, followers, scientists, artists, magicians, consultants, engineers, establishmentarians and revolutionaries. In this course, you will learn to use powerful frameworks that harmonize and focus the efforts of diverse teams as they develop ambitious brand programs.

Using real-world case studies—including Caterpillar, Bank of America, DuPont, Harley-Davidson and National Semiconductor—we will look inside the processes that enable organizations to define the future of their brands. The course will provide you with a unique perspective on how research, strategic definition, identity, expression, communications and behavior are shaped into great brands.

THE MEANING OF BRANDED OBJECTS

Brands transform objects into meaning-bearers. This course will explore the collective and individual history of this transformation. As we have evolved from hunter-gatherers into robustly cultural beings, objects themselves have also evolved: from disposable, purely functional extensions of the body to deeply personal, even cherished, expressions of an individual’s life. We will examine the history and insights of individual and social psychology in shaping the context for 21st-century perceptions of, and relationships with, the things that surround us. Concretely, we will investigate the increasingly sophisticated manner in which brands have gained and integrated quantitative and qualitative insights into our lives (and our cultural contexts) to create opportunities for complex, meaning centered relationships between people and things. Students will use their own experiences as the starting point for this exploration into the lived-meaning of individual brands and their collective role in the construction of modern personal identity.

PRACTICES IN DESIGN AND MARKET RESEARCH

Brands have historically relied heavily on marketing techniques to help establish and strengthen their presence. That is changing quickly, as instant global communication and various forms of social networking have replaced the need for consumers to rely on brands for confidence in a purchase. In this project-based course, students will learn how to create a research plan, find participants, and integrate research methods in the context of a specific branding project. Some of the topics explored will be qualitative, quantitative, online and ethnographic interview techniques, video and photo documentary, immersion, participant-aided data gathering, prototype-assisted observation, methods for organizing data, finding patterns and distilling insights that lead to actionable and inspiring design directives. We will also explore the differences between market research and design research, and understand the goals and appropriateness of each.

One of the biggest assets of the program is that the teachers are involved and active in the industry. So they have knowledge that is current and fresh.”

—Maria Silva, MPS 2015
The program prepared me to tackle complex problems collaboratively within interdisciplinary groups by being continuously inquisitive.

—Gena Cuba, MPS 2014
APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS
For detailed instructions, visit: sva.edu/grad/howtoapply
- Online Application and $80 Application Fee: sva.edu/apply
- Essay
- Résumé
- Letters of Recommendation
- Official College Transcript

Some applicants may be required to submit the following:
- Proof of English Proficiency
- Copy of Permanent Residency Card
- Declaration of Finances
- Verification of Finances
- Foreign Transcript Evaluation

DEPARTMENTAL REQUIREMENTS
For specific guidelines about these requirements, visit: sva.edu/grad/deptreq
- Interview

DEADLINES
For information on application deadlines, visit: sva.edu/grad/timeline

IMPORTANT LINKS
- FAQ: sva.edu/grad/faq
- International students: sva.edu/grad/intl
- Tuition and fees: sva.edu/tuition
- Visit SVA: sva.edu/grad/visit
We encourage applicants to visit our department. Contact us directly to schedule a departmental tour or sign up to attend an Information Session. For more information and to register, go to: sva.edu/grad/visit.

If you have any questions about the application process, contact Graduate Admissions at 212.592.2107 or email: gradadmissions@sva.edu.

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The School of Visual Arts has been authorized by the New York State Board of Regents (www.highered.nysed.gov) to confer the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Advertising; Animation; Cartooning; Computer Art, Computer Animation and Visual Effects; Design; Film; Fine Arts; Illustration; Interior Design; Photography and Video; Visual and Critical Studies; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts on graduates of the programs in Critical Theory and the Arts; Curatorial Practice; Design Research, Writing and Criticism; and to confer the degree of Master of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Art Practice; Art Writing; Computer Arts; Design; Design for Social Innovation; Fine Arts; Illustration as Visual Essay; Interaction Design; Photography, Video and Related Media; Products of Design; Social Documentary Film; Visual Narrative; and to confer the degree of Master of Professional Studies on graduates of the programs in Art Therapy; Branding; Digital Photography; Directing; Fashion Photography. Data required by the U.S. Department of Education on “Gainful Employment” for each of the above programs may be found on each individual program page at sva.edu/ge.

The School of Visual Arts is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (msche.org), 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, 267.284.5000. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation.

The School of Visual Arts is accredited institutional member of the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (nasadarts-accredit.org).

The Interior Design program leading to the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interior Design is accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (accredit-id.org), 206 Grandville Avenue, Suite 305, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503-4014.

The Master of Arts in Teaching in Art Education program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

The Master of Professional Studies in Art Therapy degree program is approved by the American Art Therapy Association, Inc., and as such meets the Education Standards of the art therapy profession.

CREDITS
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I gained invaluable knowledge that includes an understanding of the frameworks and tools used to guide complex engagements for global corporations that span strategy, visual identity and in-market experiences.”

—Andrew Miller, MPS 2012