The University of Vermont has a long tradition of excellence in the fine arts. Leaders and stewards of the University have invested in the fine arts since well before the Fleming Museum was established in 1929 to house the University’s collection of art and artifacts. Janie Cohen, Director of the Fleming and noted Picasso scholar, continues this legacy as she employs and teaches the most innovative curatorial technology. This spring, she used a variety of new visual technologies and cultural sources to curate “Staring Back: The Creation and Legacy of Picasso’s Demoiselles d’Avignon.”

The University, with the generosity of alumni and friends, continues to support fine arts across campus. Last summer alumna Michele Cohen ’72 and her husband Martin enabled the University to acquire the Taft School, adjacent to campus, to expand space for Department of Art and Art History. In addition, summer interior renovations will begin in the Music Building and Recital Hall. After celebrating its 40th Anniversary this past fall with a visit and lecture from playwright Tony Kushner, the Department of Theatre will soon begin renovations of its much beloved Royall Tyler Theatre.

Over the last two centuries, UVM has attracted a multitude of artists, writers, and musicians. Our faculty includes poets Stephen Cramer and Major Jackson, author Greg Bottoms, scholar/artist Tina Escaja, composers David Feurzeig and Patricia Julian, and musician and 2015 - 16 University Scholar Ray Vega, to name only a few. The Departments of Theatre and Music and Dance engage the University and the local community with exciting live performances throughout the academic year. The Lane Series collaborates with the Flynn Theatre to bring world-class performing artists to Burlington, and this is just one of our partnerships that foster the arts in the community.

Why is it so important for the University as a research institution of higher education to invest in the fine arts? Critics of higher education often complain that the study of sculpture, music, or theatre will not prepare students for a competitive job market. UVM’s successful graduates, however, demonstrate the undeniable benefits of a broad liberal education with extensive
offerings in the fine arts. Studying the theory, application, and discipline of the fine arts at the University develops creativity and problem-solving skills and enables students to find rewarding careers.

For instance, students have found inspiration at UVM that launched remarkable careers in the creative arts like Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Annie Proulx ‘69, best-selling author Gail Sheehy ‘58, sculptor Richard Erdman ‘75, fashion designer Rachel Comey ‘94, former President and CEO of Sotheby’s Bill Ruprecht ‘80, and film producer John Kilik ‘78. Many UVM students study photography or perform in one of the many musical ensembles at the University while studying diverse majors. Studies show that students involved with activities on campus excel in their academic courses and are more likely to graduate on time. Most importantly, by participating in the fine arts, our students advance creativity and discover community, pleasure, meaning, and the aesthetics of life.

New research from Dr. James Hudziak, Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Vermont Center for Children, Youth and Families, connects brain maturity and learning with musical training and understanding; the study supports Plato’s assertion that “the patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning.” In the fall of 2014, American Cartoonist, MacArthur Fellow, and UVM Marsh Professor-at-Large Alison Bechdel demonstrated the principle of learning through the practice of art when she offered medical students a workshop on drawing to help them connect with patients.

At UVM, we long have known that the fine arts engage the heart, nourish the spirit, and create a thirst for discovery that extends well beyond college. The arts are essential for a richer understanding and deeper appreciation of the purpose and meaning of life. As we work together to create a bright future for the University, the fine arts will continue to flourish and to stimulate our vibrant community for generations to come.