

MEDIA CONTACT

Donna Zeng | z.donna@cca.edu

California College of the Arts announces Abby Chen and Michael Vanderbyl as 2026 honorary doctorate recipients



Right: Abby Chang Chen. Left: Michael James Vanderbyl.

San Francisco, CA—April 30, 2026—California College of the Arts (CCA) is proud to award honorary doctorate degrees each year at its Commencement Ceremony to visionary artists, designers, and thinkers who have made lasting contributions to culture and society.

For its [119th Commencement Ceremony](#), held on Saturday, May 16, at the Sydney Goldstein Theater, CCA will confer honorary doctorates on alumni Abby Chang Chen (MA Visual and Critical Studies 2011) and Michael James Vanderbyl (BFA Graphic Design 1968).

“As we celebrate the Class of 2026, we’re pleased to recognize two artists who exemplify creative excellence and a deep commitment to our CCA community,” said President David C. Howse. “Abby’s curatorial practice and Michael’s design work have each expanded the

boundaries of their disciplines. They've built practices that are thoughtful, influential, and deeply engaged with the world around them. We look forward to the insight and inspiration they will share with our graduating students as they begin their next chapter.”

The honorees will be celebrated at a private reception before the Commencement Ceremony. Michael Vanderbyl will speak at the undergraduate ceremony, while Abby Chen will address the graduate ceremony.

About Abby Chang Chen

Abby Chen is the Head of Contemporary Art and Curator at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. She joined the museum in 2019 to spearhead its expansion into contemporary Asian, Asian American, and Asian diaspora art, as part of the museum's groundbreaking Transformation project completed in 2021.

Chen's experimental approach often integrates the intersectionalities of race, sexuality, gender, borders, migration, and especially technology in both the United States and Asia. The award-winning exhibitions, attendant programs, publications, and different endeavors initiatives organized by Chen—which span from curating to community building—have helped the Asian Art Museum in a few short years to reshape the narrative of contemporary Asian art outside of Asia.

Key exhibitions in her portfolio at the museum include *After Hope: Videos of Resistance* (Asian Art Museum, 2019; Peabody Essex Museum, Salem MA, 2023); *Chanel Miller: I was I am I will be* (Asian Art Museum, 2021; Asia Society Texas, Houston, 2022); *Kongkee: Warring States Cyberpunk* (Asian Art Museum, 2022; Wrightwood 659, Chicago, 2023; Tai Kwun, Hong Kong, 2024); and *Into View: Bernice Bing* (Asian Art Museum, 2022). The latter, an exhibition *The New York Times* says “rewrites history,” underscores Chen's wider ambitions for building new canons in the museum field and is also reflected in her wide-ranging commissions from living artists and acquisitions of important Bay Area artists including Bing, Kay Sekimachi, Carlos Villa, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Chen was appointed curator of the exhibition *Everyday War* representing Taiwan at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024 and co-curator of the inaugural American Pavilion at the 2024 Gwangju Biennale, presenting *Rhythmic Vibrations*, a landmark exhibition interrogating Asian and Asian American artistic voices and representation in an era of profound collective anxiety.

During this period, Chen also launched the Practice Institute and RAD at the Asian Art Museum, a platform to examine and reimagine institutional processes to increase their relevance and emotional resonance for increasingly diverse art audiences.

Previously, she served for over a decade as the Curator and Artistic Director at the Chinese Culture Foundation and Center of San Francisco. With numerous acclaimed projects such as *WOMEN我們*, *XianRui* and the Chinatown Public Art advocacy, she transformed the organization into an internationally recognized platform. In 2024, she was the recipient of the National Art Education Association Asian Art and Culture Interest Group Distinguished Art

Educator Award in recognition of her community-focused role in uplifting immigrants' voices into the very heart of American art history.

Chen received a Master of Arts in Visual and Critical Studies from the California College of the Arts in 2011.

About Michael James Vanderbyl

Michael Vanderbyl has achieved international recognition as a designer, educator, and advocate. Since founding Vanderbyl Design in San Francisco in 1973, he has led a multidisciplinary practice spanning identity, communications, interiors, retail environments, signage, and product design. His work has received recognition in major design competitions across the United States and Europe, is held in the permanent collections of multiple museums, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and has been widely published internationally.

He has also played an active role in the cultural and academic design community, including service on the Architecture and Design Accessions Committee at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and teaching at leading institutions such as Cranbrook Academy of Art and ArtCenter College of Design. In 1968, he earned a BFA in Graphic Design from the California College of the Arts (then CCAC).

While running his practice, Vanderbyl also served as a professor for over 40 years, including 16 years as the Dean of the School of Design at CCA. He has held significant leadership positions within AIGA and is a member of Alliance Graphique Internationale. His honors include the AIGA Gold Medal and induction into the Interior Design Hall of Fame.

About California College of the Arts

Founded in 1907, California College of the Arts (CCA) educates students to shape culture and society through art, architecture, design, and writing. The college offers free public events and exhibitions that engage artists, designers, and the broader public in conversations around contemporary questions. Its interdisciplinary programming provides a space for creative exploration and collaboration across artistic practices. CCA faculty and alumni continue to transform art and design in the Bay Area and beyond.

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