
CONTEMPORARY

ART

ACADEMY

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Artist: Dara Vandor

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Date: March 2026

INTRODUCTION

This Personal Development Plan outlines a tailored mentorship and professional development programme designed to support Dara Vandor's studio practice, international positioning, and long-term career sustainability within the contemporary art world.

The programme responds to Dara's ambition to expand beyond the Canadian art ecosystem and engage more actively with international curators, critics, and institutions. It is designed to provide critical dialogue, strategic guidance, and network expansion to support the next phase of her career.

The mentorship will aim to strengthen Dara's professional infrastructure, broaden the context in which her work is discussed, and help position her practice within wider international conversations over the next 6–12 months and beyond.

CONTEXT

Dara is a mid-career artist based in Canada whose work has received significant critical attention, including press coverage in the *New York Times*. She reports that her practice is currently progressing well and that she feels confident in the direction of her work.

However, she feels that the Canadian art ecosystem presents certain limitations due to its relatively small scale and its strong reliance on government funding structures.

Her recent and current activities include:

- Preparing for a major exhibition at Western University in March
- Continuing to develop a conceptual body of work
- Maintaining relationships with artists, writers, and thinkers who provide feedback and dialogue

Dara previously worked with a UK commercial gallery, Runway Gallery, which later closed after she shifted her practice toward a more conceptual direction.

Currently she operates without gallery representation and balances her artistic practice alongside professional work as an auctioneer and communications specialist.

While she receives informal feedback from peers and writers within her network, she feels that deeper critical engagement and broader international connections are currently missing from her professional

environment.

AMBITION

Short-Term

- Successfully deliver the upcoming exhibition at Western University
- Continue refining the conceptual direction of her practice
- Begin expanding professional conversations around the work
- Initiate connections with curators, critics, and artists outside Canada

Medium-Term

- Expand the scale and ambition of her artistic projects
- Secure funding to support larger or more complex work
- Develop relationships with curators, critics, and institutions internationally
- Re-establish gallery relationships or other forms of professional advocacy
- Increase opportunities for exhibitions and critical engagement outside Canada

Long-Term

- Position her practice within an international contemporary art context
- Achieve sustained recognition and dialogue beyond Canadian networks
- Develop a strong support structure of curators, writers, and advocates
- Transition toward financial sustainability through her artistic practice

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Success for Dara would involve both professional and personal shifts in the trajectory of her career.

Professionally, it would include increased visibility and discussion of her work outside Canada, including exhibitions, publications, and relationships with international curators, critics, and institutions.

It would also involve the development of advocates who can help champion and contextualise her work within broader contemporary art conversations.

Personally, success would include reaching a stage where she is able to reduce or leave her current day job and focus more fully on her artistic practice. It would also mean feeling that her work is operating within the scale of discourse and opportunity that it merits.

CHALLENGES

- Limited scale and opportunity within the Canadian art ecosystem
- Lack of a key advocate or professional champion for her work
- Absence of gallery representation following the closure of a previous dealer
- Discomfort with direct self-promotion and marketing
- Limited access to curators and critics within her immediate network
- A sense of waiting for the right moment or individual to help catalyse a breakthrough

NEEDS

Dara would benefit primarily from professional development support, complemented by meaningful

critical engagement.

Professional Development

- Expanding connections with curators, critics, and internationally active art professionals
- Developing strategies for positioning work beyond Canada
- Rebuilding forms of professional advocacy previously provided by gallery representation
- Identifying pathways toward exhibitions and opportunities in larger art centres

Critical Dialogue

- Engaging in deeper intellectual conversations about her practice
- Receiving thoughtful critique from experienced curators, writers, and artists
- Identifying blind spots and new perspectives within her work
- Strengthening the contextual and historical framing of her practice

Dara has expressed particular interest in engaging with thoughtful and critically engaged mentors who can provide both strategic insight and rigorous discussion.

CAPACITY

Dara is currently preparing for a major exhibition at Western University in March, which represents her primary short-term focus.

Following this exhibition, she will have increased capacity to engage in mentoring sessions and broader professional development.

Her availability includes:

- Afternoon sessions to accommodate the time difference between Canada and the UK
- Flexibility across weekdays
- Preference for either fortnightly or monthly sessions

Dara demonstrates strong readiness for this development phase. She has an established practice, significant critical recognition, and a clear ambition to expand the reach of her work. Her openness to dialogue, feedback, and new perspectives indicates strong potential for meaningful engagement with the programme.

WHAT WOULD MAKE THIS EXPERIENCE VALUABLE

For Dara, the most valuable aspect of this programme would be the opportunity to broaden her intellectual and professional environment.

Key outcomes would include:

- Exposure to fresh perspectives and rigorous critique
- Opportunities to identify blind spots within her practice
- Engagement with curators, critics, and artists outside her current network
- Strategic insights into how her work can operate within international contexts

A successful experience would feel expansive and intellectually stimulating, providing both critical challenge and professional momentum.

If the programme results in stronger professional relationships, clearer positioning of her work, and increased opportunities for international engagement, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

PROPOSED SCHEDULE

MONTH 1 (APR)

WEEK 2 – Max Presneill (Curator, Artist)

- Mentee to present prior experience, current interests and aspirations, highlighting areas needing support, development, or specific attention
- Mentor presents summary of experience
- Explore exhibition ecosystem & opportunity
- Together decide on tasks/research/discussion topics for the follow-up session

WEEK 4 – Sarah Kent (Art Critic, Curator, Artist)

- Analyse critical context of mentee's practice
- Mentor to advise on research & furtherment of contextual awareness
- Together decide on tasks/research/discussion topics for the follow-up session

MONTH 2 (MAY)

WEEK 2 – Michael Petry (Curator, Writer, Artist)

- Mentee to present prior experience, current interests and aspirations, highlighting areas needing support, development, or specific attention
- Mentor presents summary of experience
- Explore exhibition ecosystem & opportunity
- Together decide on tasks/research/discussion topics for the follow-up session

WEEK 4 – Emily Steer (Art Writer)

- Analyse critical context of mentee's practice
- Mentor to advise on research & furtherment of contextual awareness
- Together decide on tasks/research/discussion topics for the follow-up session

MONTH 3 (JUN)

WEEK 2 – Liane Lang (Artist)

- Artist crit
- Together decide on ongoing tasks/research

WEEK 4 – Milly Burroughs (PR & Marketing Expert)

- Mentee to present prior experience, current interests and aspirations, highlighting areas needing support, development, or specific attention
- Mentor presents summary of experience
- Analyse mentee's PR & marketing output
- Advise on future PR & marketing output
- Together decide on tasks/research/discussion topics for the follow-up session

MONTH 4 (JUL)

WEEK 2 – Max Presneill (Curator, Artist)

- Follow-up session to Month 1 Week 2
- Together decide on ongoing tasks/research

WEEK 4 – Sarah Kent (Art Critic, Curator, Artist)

- Follow-up session to Month 1 Week 4
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- Together decide on ongoing tasks/research

MONTH 5 (AUG)

WEEK 2 – Michael Petry (Curator, Writer, Artist)

- Follow-up session to Month 2 Week 2
- Together decide on ongoing tasks/research

WEEK 4 – Emily Steer (Art Writer)

- Follow-up session to Month 2 Week 4
- Together decide on ongoing tasks/research

MONTH 6 (SEP)

WEEK 2 – David Risley (Artist/Curator/ Writer)

- Artist crit
- Together decide on ongoing tasks/research

WEEK 4 – Milly Burroughs (PR & Marketing Expert)

- Follow-up session to Month 3 Week 4
- Together decide on ongoing tasks/research

MONTH 7 (OCT)

WEEK 2 – Zavier Ellis (Co-founder)

- Review

CONCLUSION

Dara Vandor is at a significant moment in her practice. With strong critical recognition and a major exhibition underway, the next stage of her career involves expanding the reach and context of her work beyond the limitations of the Canadian art ecosystem.

Through structured mentorship, critical dialogue, and targeted introductions to curators and critics, this programme aims to support Dara in strengthening her professional network and positioning her practice within broader international conversations.

With sustained engagement and strategic support, the coming phase of Dara's career has the potential to move from strong national recognition toward a more internationally connected and sustainable artistic trajectory.

Investment Summary:

- 1-hour 1-2-1 mentoring sessions - £95 each (fees are paid in monthly instalments starting two months ahead of the planned start date, or immediately if the programme begins sooner)
- Start Date: March 2026
- Session Frequency: Fortnightly
- Optional supplementary 1-2-1 mentoring sessions - £95 each
- Optional course add-ons - £95–£295

