

# Introduction to Art and Design Practice

## Making an Application



*Applicants will be asked to submit a digital portfolio to provide evidence of artistic aptitude and potential which forms an important part of the selection process. You should begin to plan your portfolio as soon as you decide to apply.*

Edinburgh College of Art, Digital Portfolio Guidance.

### What is a portfolio?

A (digital) curated collection of your creative work showing the full variety of your skills, research and development of your project ideas leading to showcasing your resolved work with some reflective text about the projects.



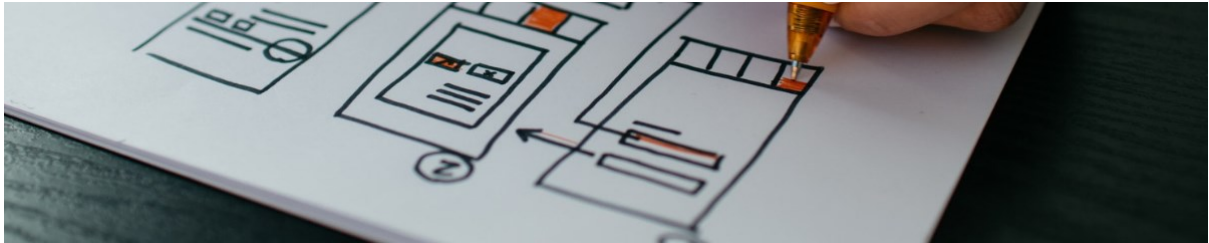
### Why is it important?

Viewing your portfolio is a useful way to encapsulate what you have learned, showcase your skills and demonstrate your creative development. It is useful for you as a student to be able to use critical judgment to edit the portfolio so that it enhances the best of your abilities and shows how

you work through ideas, challenges and lines of visual enquiry. It is also useful for assessors to gauge your progress and suitability for a degree course by observing the following:

### Visual Research and Enquiry

The level of your engagement in intelligent, structured visual enquiry and how well you communicate this.



### Idea Development

Your ability to explore and develop ideas in an appropriate way, and your level of skill in the use of materials and techniques.



### Selection and Resolution

How well you judge which ideas have the most appropriate potential and your ability to bring them to a level of completion appropriate to your intended outcome.



### Contextual Awareness

The extent of your knowledge of the subject you have applied for and how your work relates to it.



### What makes up a portfolio?

You should include sketches, drawings, sequences of your work being developed at different stages (these can also be photographs, audio and video), and completed projects that demonstrate how

you approach an idea or subject and then develop the work from initial enquiry, through experimentation and research, to resolved work. You can also usefully include brief written notes and a summary of your reflective writing on each project.

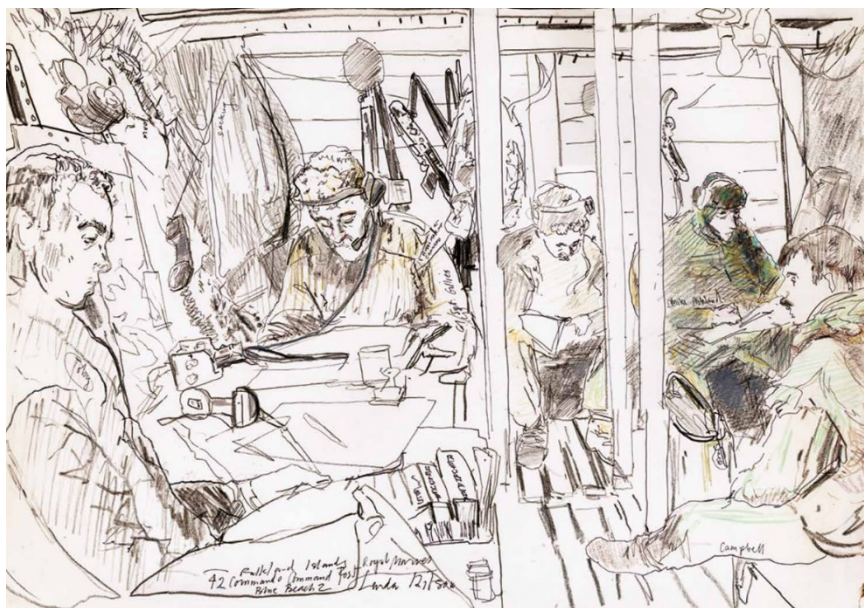
## Michelle Lewis



Exploration of a single theme

## A range of approaches to drawing

Assessors looking at your portfolio will want to see a wide range of drawing techniques in different media, for example, pen, ink, wash. These can be quick observational sketches and/or longer studies. Digital media can be placed alongside more traditional media to demonstrate how you work across different formats with the same idea.

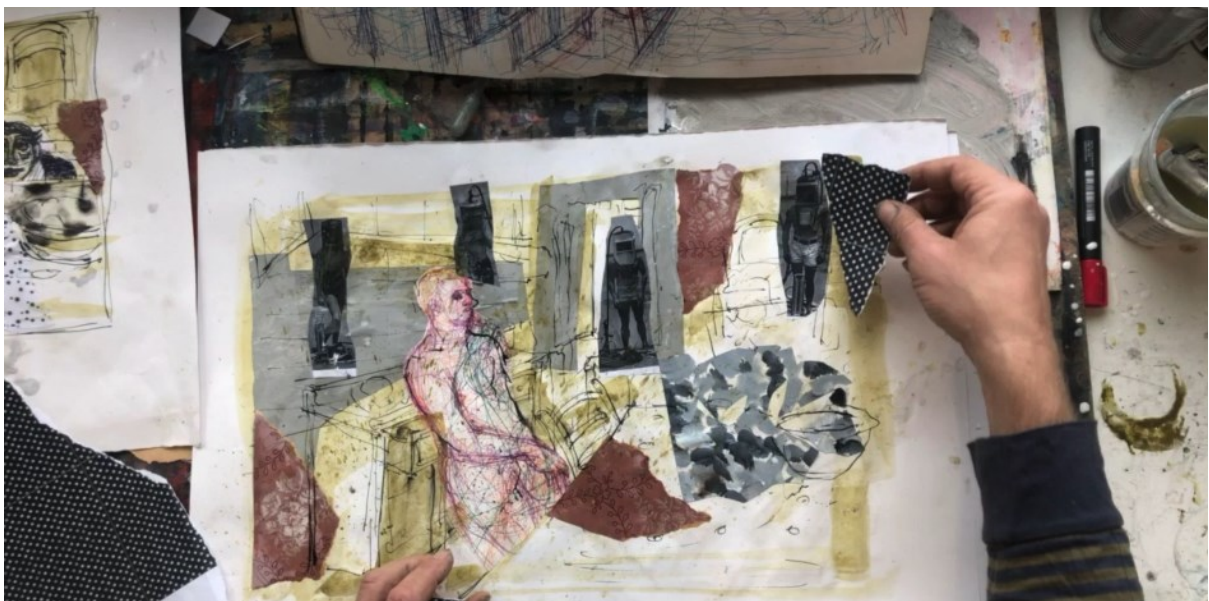




## Sketchbook Images

—  
*A sketchbook is the place to explore nooks and crannies of ideas that seem far-fetched or you can't find a practical use for. It could be totally crazy, but it could also turn into something beautiful and amazing and take you down a new, exciting path of creativity.*  
—

Include photographs of selected pages of your sketchbooks in your portfolio.



For guidance on the use of sketchbooks, see: [Pebble+ Public \(pebblepad.co.uk\)](http://pebblepad.co.uk)

### Engagement with a variety of materials and techniques

Include a wide variety of different media. Studies and experimental work should demonstrate your creative engagement with different materials. An exploration of the characteristics of each medium should be included, along with the techniques that are required to apply them.



A sequence of images that reveal your discoveries as part of your learning journey

Process-led learning is about making, with more emphasis on development through a series of experiments that lead from one stage to the next, and less thought for the finished piece.

Each stage is a different 'thought' about the material, process or idea.

## Isabelle Cotier



Exploring Material

Evidence of how you have developed a visual language through research, experimentation and reflection

You can use the prompts below to help you gather this material for your portfolio:

### What are your interests and influences?

Can you think of an artist or designer whose work you like that has been a major influence on your work? Do you take inspiration from their techniques? The subject of their work? What is it about their work that has stuck in your head?

Your influences might not be a specific person, but an artistic movement, genre or subject matter.

### Where have you come from?

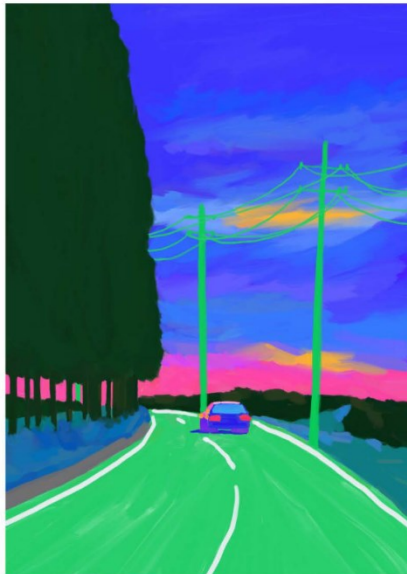
Use your development images and influence images to show your existing training, your education and how you develop a project. This could be sketchbook work, observational drawing, or examples of where you've experimented with different media or techniques.

### Where you are now and where do you want to go?

In your resolved work show what you are good at. If you are a great painter put into your portfolio your most successful paintings. If you are a fashion designer you could put in fashion illustration and photos of your garments. Use this space to show off your technical skill and culmination of your projects.

## How do you work as a creative?

Use a development section to highlight your process work and then show the final outcome alongside it. Through the portfolio you should show every stage of your creative process, from research to initial ideas through experimentation and development to the final outcome.



Frankie  
South Korea  
Good Drawing

## Resolved work

Include finished pieces that are end results of your experimental work. These form a conclusion of the project and contain reflective writing assessing the work.



## Reflective writing

**Brief** written reflections on the challenges that arose during the project and how they were overcome can be included in your portfolio along with **short** suggestions for further work that might 'spin off' from the project. Around 100 words or fewer for each is a good guide. A good approach to introducing (contextual) references to artists, designers and movements etc. is to 'compare and contrast' two works. Remember, your personal response (what you like about a piece) is always valuable. You can usefully include appropriate technical terms (from Art and Design practice), along with contextual (Art History/Theory) terms [see Glossary].

## Writing about your influences

You may include short pieces of writing about your influences: e.g. artists, movements, works of art and design. Tailor these to your own discipline and focus on a particular area, for example specific



techniques, key concepts and creative approaches, information about the period etc. Again, keep these brief (around 100 words).

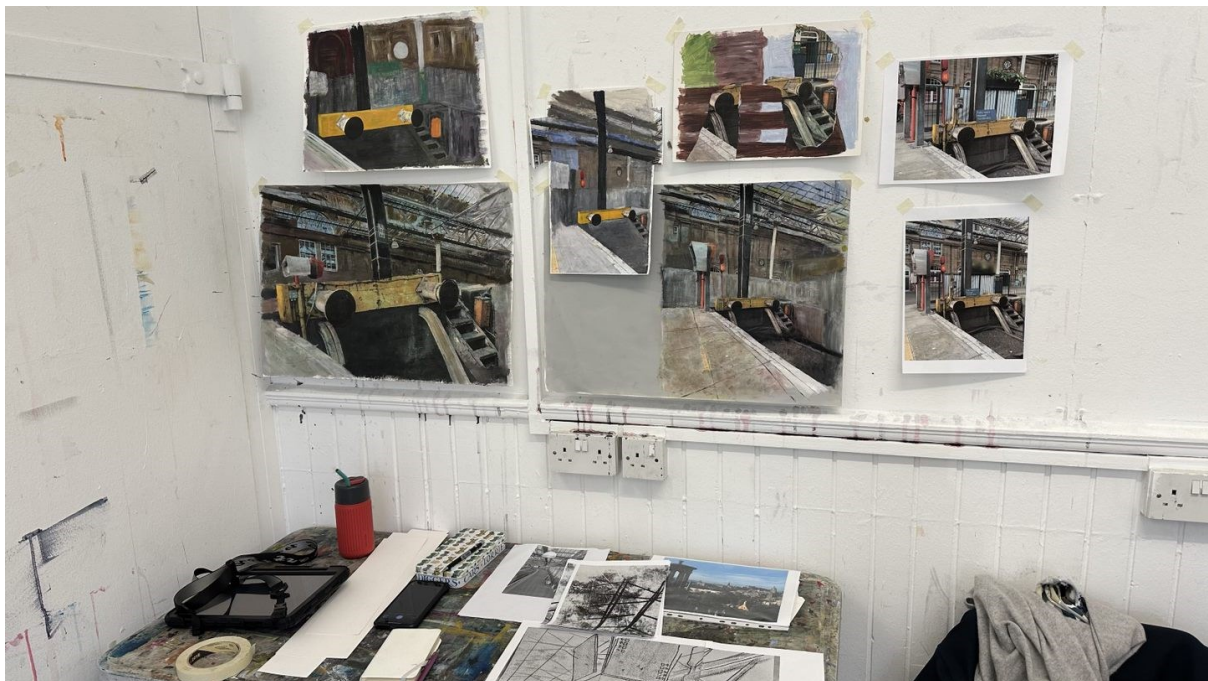
## Labelling your work

You can include annotations that direct the viewer of your portfolio through your projects.

Keep any annotations brief. Your visual language (images) should dominate your portfolio and text should be kept to a minimum.

## Documenting your work

Capture your creative processes and lines of visual enquiry as digital images. You should think about sequences of images showing your projects' development.

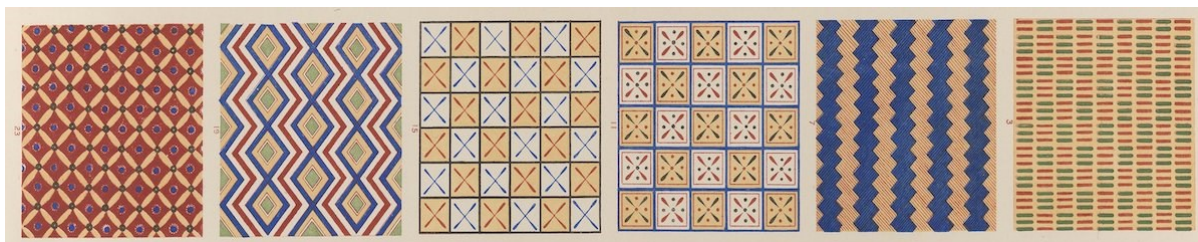


## Photography

Use a digital camera (this can be your smart phone) to take pictures of your work that can then be inserted into your digital portfolio.

## Lighting

When photographing your work try to use natural light (near a north facing window is best or a place that's **not in full sunlight**). Cover a worktop or table with either clean white paper or a white tablecloth to photograph your work. Then, lay your work on the table to photograph from above. If your work is too big, place the work **on the floor** and photograph from a standing position from above, again with the white paper underneath. **Do not stand on a table.** When photographing, make sure you get the whole image or page into the frame-of-view and don't crop the image, we want to see the full work.



## Selecting your work

Much of the following advice which may be applied to all creative disciplines comes from Edinburgh College of Art:

### Editing

Assessors want to see work with conceptual underpinning, not just a random selection of images – be selective and strategic in your choice of work.

Ideas are more important than technical ability.

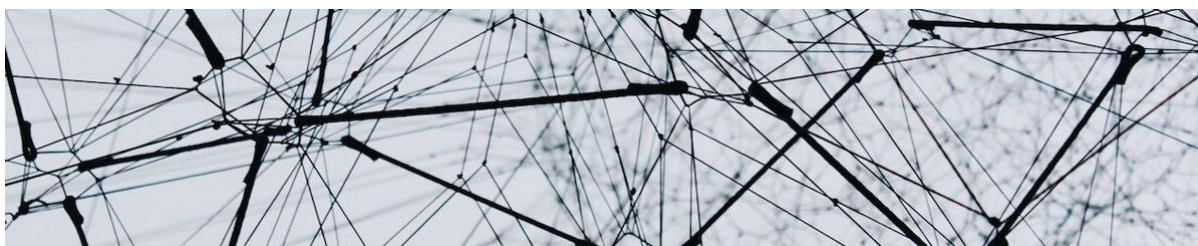
### Sequences

Assessors are interested in how you research and develop ideas in a visual way. How you present your portfolio is therefore important and you should think about how you want the viewer to 'journey' through your projects, for example starting with your initial ideas, through early experiments and towards the more resolved work at the end of the creative process.

### Narratives

Assessors are looking for work which shows original thinking as well as depth, personality and visual understanding. Look out into the world, slow down and examine your surroundings honestly and inquiringly.

A strong portfolio submission will show evidence of independent work beyond school/college projects.



## Appendix

### Further information

For specific information for Art and Design Applications, you can refer to the Edinburgh College of Art Handbook [\[Link to ECA Handbook\]](#)

For Design Portfolios you can find more information here: [Pebble+ Public \(pebblepad.co.uk\)](https://pebblepad.co.uk)

There are more of these Art and Design resources on the Centre for Open Learning Arts Hub:

[Pebble+ Public \(pebblepad.co.uk\)](https://pebblepad.co.uk)



## Glossary of commonly used Art and Design terms

### *Group Critique*

A 'group critique' refers to a structured evaluation and discussion session, organised by the teaching staff, where a group of students come together to provide feedback and analysis on each other's artwork. During a group critique, participants may share their thoughts, observations, and constructive criticism, discussing elements such as technique, approaches, ideas and concept. The aim is to foster a collaborative learning environment, encourage diverse perspectives, and help the student refine their work by gaining insights and suggestions from their peers.

### *Personal Language / Visual Vocabulary*

These terms refer to the unique and distinctive visual elements, symbols, motifs, or themes that the student incorporates into their artwork. It encompasses the individual artist's visual language, developed through their personal experiences, emotions, and artistic exploration. This vocabulary can include recurring colour palettes, mark-making techniques, subject matter preferences, or any other visual elements that become characteristic of their artistic style. The personal visual vocabulary allows artists to express their ideas, emotions, and perspectives in a distinct and recognizable manner, creating a cohesive body of work that reflects their artistic identity.

### *The Workshop*

A 'workshop' typically refers to a focused and interactive learning session whereby students engage in hands-on activities, demonstrations, and discussions to enhance their skills and knowledge in a specific area of art. Workshops are often led by the teaching colleague who provides guidance, instruction, and feedback to the participants.

During a workshop, participants have the opportunity to explore new techniques, experiment with different materials, and learn from the expertise of the teaching colleague and their peers. They are designed to be immersive and at times, collaborative, allowing participants to learn and grow in a supportive environment while actively engaging with the subject matter. Workshops can vary in duration, from a few hours to several days, depending on the depth and complexity of the topic being covered.

### *Studio Practice*

The phrase 'studio practice' refers to the regular and dedicated artistic activities, processes, and routines that artists engage in within their studio setting. It encompasses the full range of activities an artist undertakes to create, experiment, explore, and develop their artwork.

Studio practice involves various aspects, including generating ideas, researching, sketching, experimenting with different materials and techniques, creating artwork, and reflecting on the artistic process. It is a time for artists to delve into their creative process, allowing them to refine their technical skills, explore new concepts, and deepen their understanding of their chosen medium.

The studio serves as a dedicated space where artists can concentrate on their work, free from distractions, and fully immerse themselves in their artistic practice. It is a place for experimentation, problem-solving, and self-expression. Studio practice is crucial for the student as it provides them with the time and environment to develop their artistic voice, refine their style, and consistently create and evolve their body of work.

### *Visual Research*

The term 'visual research' refers to the process of gathering visual references, studying and analysing visual materials, and conducting investigations to inform and inspire artistic practice. It involves actively exploring and examining various visual sources, such as photographs, artworks, historical images, nature, objects, or any visual stimuli relevant to the artist's interests or creative goals.

Visual research serves multiple purposes in the artistic process. It can be used to gather information and inspiration, to study different artistic techniques, to explore diverse styles and aesthetics, or to deepen understanding of specific subject matters. Through visual research, artists can expand their visual vocabulary, develop new ideas.

The process of visual research often involves collecting reference materials, organizing and categorizing visual resources, creating mood boards or visual journals, and critically analysing and reflecting on the gathered information. Visual research serves as a foundation for artistic exploration, helping artists broaden their perspectives, develop their artistic concepts, and make informed decisions in their creative practice.

### *A Demonstration*

A 'demonstration' refers to a live presentation or performance conducted by the teaching colleague to illustrate and teach specific artistic techniques, processes, or approaches. During a demonstration, the artist showcases their skills and expertise by creating artwork in real-time, explaining and showcasing each step of the process.

Demonstrations are typically interactive and an educational experience where participants can observe and learn from the instructor's techniques, materials, and artistic decision-making. They can cover various aspects of art, such as drawing, painting, sculpting, printmaking, or any other medium or technique. Demonstrations may focus on fundamental skills like colour mixing or the use of collage, or delve into more advanced techniques and specialized topics.

The purpose of a demonstration is to provide visual learners with a hands-on learning experience. Participants can witness the artist's thought process, gain insights into their artistic choices, and acquire practical knowledge that they can apply to their own artwork. Demonstrations often include opportunities for participants to ask questions, seek clarification, and engage in discussions. They are valuable tools for sharing knowledge, inspiring creativity, and fostering a deeper understanding of artistic techniques and processes.

