

Painting 1

Understanding Painting Media



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Cover image: Mimei Thompson, *Bin Bag*, 2015 (oil on linen)

This course was written by Annabel Dover.

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Before you start

Welcome to *Painting 1: Understanding Painting Media*.

Artists today use a huge range of materials and techniques. Some refer to the traditions of oil painting and watercolour while others, like Turner Prize nominee George Shaw, explore the use of Humbrol enamels and other non-traditional materials.

Painting 1: Understanding Painting Media will provide you with a structured but experimental approach to a range of painting and drawing media. It will give you the confidence to develop and express your ideas creatively and to expand your understanding of the use of a variety of painting media in contemporary art practice.

You'll have the opportunity to:

- experiment freely with a range of drawing and painting media
- gain an understanding of the range of painting media and make informed choices of media appropriate to your ideas
- broaden your knowledge and understanding of the working methods and media of a range of contemporary and historical artists
- select and explore, in depth, a medium appropriate to your own ideas and practice.

You'll experiment with traditional media, surfaces and techniques: acrylics, oils, gouache, watercolour, inks, tempera, paper, canvas, linen and board. You'll also experiment with non-traditional media, surfaces and techniques: nail varnish, enamel, food colouring, household paint. You'll use found surfaces including envelopes, bags, photos and three-dimensional objects. You'll look at a broad range of contemporary artists who use painting and the context within which they place it.

If you haven't already done so, now is a good time to work through the free introductory course 'An Introduction to Studying in HE'. This is available on the OCA student website. Don't be tempted to skip this introductory course as it contains valuable advice on study skills (e.g. reading, note-taking), research methods and academic conventions which will stand you in good stead throughout your studies. ([Link 1](#))

(Links are listed separately at the end of this course guide for ease of updating.)

The OCA website will be a key resource for you during your studies with OCA, so take some time to familiarise yourself with it. Log onto the OCA student website and find the video guide to using the website. Watch the video and take some notes. ([Link 2](#))

Remember, there are other students following this course, so you are not on your own. Use the online forums to reflect on your findings and discuss issues with other students.

Course aims and outcomes

Painting 1: Understanding Painting Media aims to support you to:

- explore the different ways in which painting media can be used and the effects they can create
- develop your experimental capabilities and confidence using a range of painting media
- explore a chosen painting medium in greater depth
- increase your knowledge of the history and context of a range of painting media.

On successful completion of this course, you'll be able to:

- demonstrate through practical exercises experimentation with a range of painting media, techniques and surfaces
- demonstrate the ability to use a broad range of techniques and to offer highly experimental and personal responses in your work
- research visual ideas from a wide range of sources and develop these ideas through critical review and art practice into a concentrated personal project
- research and understand the role of history and context in relation to a personal project.

Your tutor

Your tutor is your main point of contact with OCA. Before you start work, make sure that you're clear about your tuition arrangements. The OCA tuition system is explained in some detail in your Student Handbook.

If you haven't already done so, please write a paragraph or two about your experience to date. Add background information about anything that you think may be relevant for your tutor to know about you (your profile) – for example, your experience of painting so far, your reasons for starting this course and what you hope or expect to achieve from it. Email or post your profile to your tutor as soon as possible. This will help him or her understand how best to support you during the course.

Arrange with your tutor how you'll deal with any queries that arise between assignments. This will usually be by email or phone.

Make sure you label any work you send to your tutor with your name, student number and the assignment number. Your tutor will get back to you as soon as possible after receiving your assignment but this may take a little time. Continue with the course while you're waiting.

Note that you're encouraged to reflect carefully on feedback and, if appropriate, to go back to the assignment you submitted and make adjustments to it based on your tutor's comments. If you submit for assessment, making such adjustments demonstrates responsiveness and learning and will help improve your mark.

Formal assessment

Read the section on assessment in your Student Handbook at an early stage in the course. See also the study guide on assessment and getting qualified for detailed information about assessment and accreditation. You'll find this on the OCA student website.

For assessment you'll need to submit a cross-section of the work you've done on the course:

- a portfolio of the work you've done on the course, including supporting studies and sketchbooks (this will account for 80% of your final grade)
- a short essay (500 words) on the historical and contemporary use of a specific painting medium (20% of your final grade) (part of Assignment Five)
- your learning log or blog url.

Your portfolio should include a selection of the work you've produced for the five course assignments. You'll be expected to include six to ten final pieces drawn from the course as a whole and the final assignment, so showing discernment will be key. Include your original assignment submission as well as the version amended in the light of tutor feedback. The first assignment is a diagnostic assignment and will not count towards your final grade. However the assessors will want to see the work you produce for this assignment to help them gauge your progress.

Only work done during the course should be submitted to your tutor or for formal assessment.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria are central to the assessment process for this course, so if you're going to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, please make sure you take note of these criteria and consider how each of the assignments you complete demonstrates evidence of each criterion. On completion of each assignment, and before you send your assignment to your tutor, test yourself against the criteria – in other words, do a self-assessment, and see how you think you would do. Note down your findings for each assignment you've completed in your learning log, noting all your perceived strengths and weaknesses, taking into account the criteria every step of the way. This will be helpful for your tutor to see, as well as helping you prepare for assessment. The five assessment criteria are listed below.

- **Demonstration of technical and visual skills** – Materials, techniques, observational skills, visual awareness, design and compositional skills.
- **Quality of outcome** – Content, application of knowledge, presentation of work in a coherent manner with discernment.
- **Demonstration of creativity** – Imagination, experimentation, invention, development of a personal voice.
- **Context** – Reflection, research (learning logs).

Your learning log

The learning log is an integral element of every OCA course. If this is your first course with OCA, you'll find guidance on what to include in a learning log and how to set up an online learning log/blog on the OCA student website. ([Links 3 and 4](#))

You're strongly recommended to use an online log or blog instead of (or in addition to) a physical learning log. A blog is a great way to consolidate and present your work, findings, observations and reflections for your tutor and peers to review. You can also include links to new research sources you've found so that these are available to your fellow students.

Setting up a blog is easy using the OCA Wordpress template which you'll find in the 'Resources' section of the OCA student site. ([Link 5](#))

Plan ahead

This OCA Level 1 course (HE level 4) represents 400 hours of learning time. Allow around 20% of this time for reflection and keeping your learning log. The course should take about a year to complete if you spend around eight hours each week on it.

As with all OCA courses, these course materials are intended to be used flexibly but keep your tutor fully informed about your progress. You'll need to allow extra time if you decide to have your work formally assessed.

Understanding Painting Media is divided into five parts, corresponding to the five course assignments. The first assignment will enable your tutor to get to know you, review your work so far and decide how best to help you in future.

Each part of the course addresses a different issue or topic and is separated into a series of exercises designed to tackle the topic in bite-sized chunks. As well as information and advice, each part offers research, reading and exercises to encourage experimentation. The exercises slowly build up into the assignments that you'll send to your tutor.

The assignments offer flexibility as to style and content and are designed to help you develop your own creative style and voice. Each assignment will ask you for:

- evidence of experimentation and a refinement of the techniques learnt in the exercises
- a consideration of appropriate media used in relation to both the subject matter and your personal aims for the work
- further experimentation – the assignments are developments, not conclusions
- evidence that you have reflected and made editorial decisions on the work you've made in the earlier exercises and assignments in the course.

Reading and resources

A reading list for the course is available at the end of this course guide and on the OCA website. The reading list recommends key texts and gives suggestions for further reading. Throughout the course you will also find lists of optional supplementary reading specifically connected to the content of each project. This material will give added depth and context to your study but is not required reading. Record your thoughts, reactions and critical reflections on your reading in your learning log; this will be helpful when you come to work on your essay towards the end of the course. The online reading list on the OCA website is updated regularly, so check this for recently published recommendations. As well as the reading list, you'll find a short glossary of artistic terms and a list of suppliers of artists' materials at the end of this course guide.

Referencing your reading

Whenever you read something that you might want to refer to in your projects and assignments, get into the habit of taking down the full reference to the book, article or website straight away. You must fully reference any other work you draw on if you plan to go for formal assessment. To do this you should use the Harvard system of referencing – see the guide to academic referencing on the OCA website. ([Link 6](#))

Getting down the full reference at the time will save you the frustration of having to hunt for the details of a half-remembered reference long after the event. Referencing other people's work accurately will also help you avoid unintentional plagiarism.

Introduction

Painting has a huge history, and by acknowledging this and referring to it in your research, you will give your own work more impact. It is often suggested that there is nothing original in art. Images, emblems and techniques are constantly being reworked and re-presented. Indeed, this is a key feature of postmodernism – understanding and quoting the past. As long as you are conscious of the images, materials and techniques that your work refers to, it can only enrich your practice.

Your choice of materials and techniques also has a huge effect on how the viewer will understand your work. For example, David Hockney's coloured pencil portraits of well-known people might have appeared irreverent in an earlier era as this is a medium associated with childhood. But in the late 60s/early 70s, when Hockney produced these works, it was perceived as a reflection of the fresh new spirit of an age where a working-class photographer (David Bailey) or artist (Hockney himself) could be as famous as royalty. All of this is alluded to in Hockney's choice of a simple material.

Before we turn to a consideration of materials, think briefly about the importance of drawing.

Drawing is often the basis of good painting. The photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson was a fantastic draughtsman and believed that drawing helped him train his eye to become the photographer he was. Even abstraction relies on the formal element of drawing. When you are confident at drawing you feel more confident about all of your practice. Most artists need to practise drawing constantly. If possible, draw every day; this will help alleviate any self-consciousness and make it a natural and instructive process. Drawing in front of the television or whilst on the phone will help you to reconnect your brain and train you to really look. Continuous line drawing or 'blind drawing' – where you look at the object you're drawing but not at the page and don't take your pen/pencil or brush off the page – is an excellent workout for your brain and an effective tool to help you see accurately and draw and paint with confidence.

Contemporary artists often project an image or use a lightbox. Argos sell good, cheap lightboxes. These do not replace the need to draw as they only provide vague outlines. See David Hockney talking about the camera obscura and the camera lucida in the video 'The Lost Secrets of the Old Masters'. ([Link 7](#))

Choosing your materials

When you see something you want to paint, what is it that really strikes you? Your choice of materials will help you convey this.

For example, if your subject is something monumental and sculptural you might want to depict it using tone. Leonardo da Vinci used tone to describe an object's form. He discovered that low lighting helps the eye to perceive tone more easily and he covered part of his sunny Italian garden with a black sheet to enable him to see and paint the tones of his model more easily. Squinting your eyes also helps you to see tones more easily and translate them into your work.

Is the thing you want to paint barely there, ghostly? You might want to use texture to convey this, perhaps a gloss colourless painting onto a matt surface, or use a pale very watered down watercolour or oil paint like Luc Tuymans. Is the image you want to paint visceral and sticky, like the food paintings of Archie Franks?



Archie Franks, *Roast Lamb* (oil on canvas)

Would it be suited to using thick chunky paint undiluted by medium, or thickened with beeswax or crystalline? Perhaps applied with a mixture of household paintbrushes and thicker hog-hair brushes.

Does the image you wish to convey look otherworldly? How would you show this? Through a dramatic contrast of colours (e.g. Maxfield Parrish) or through the use of intense detail (e.g. Victorian painter Richard Dadd or contemporary artist Jamie Clements)?



Jamie Clements, *Tiny Kline* (watercolour on paper)

Surfaces

Traditional surfaces such as board, canvas, linen, linen-covered boards or oil-prepared paper all have very different ways of absorbing or supporting paint and this will affect the final image. Some artists dislike the traditional 'bounce' that a canvas brings or find its 'tooth' distracting as it disrupts a smooth surface, particularly if they are painting fine detail. Trying these out, as you will in the different exercises, will help you decide what works well for you. For example, the rough or 'cold pressed' *Not* surface of the watercolour paper that usually comes in a pad can be challenging to work with as it doesn't absorb paint readily. You may find a HP watercolour paper surface easier to use to begin with. HP means 'hot pressed' and this usually means the paper has a smooth surface. Watercolour paper comes in different weights; the heavier the paper, the more resilient it is to rips and tears if you're going to stretch it.

There is a list of stockists of artists' materials at the end of this course guide.

For working with oils, you can use ready-made oil-friendly paper and board, which has a slight grain. If you find the grain frustrating, for example if you want to paint with a lot of detail, there are many alternatives.



This is the kind of paper artist Annie Kevans uses to paint in very thinly diluted oil paints. It is strong enough for lots of different types of media and doesn't buckle.



You can paint with oil paints onto unprimed paper. This gives unpredictable but often beautiful results, but the paper may start to rot after a few years. The paper instantly sucks up the pigment and so it can be hard to achieve a uniform image. You can coat the paper with acrylic primer for a smoother, longer-lasting and less 'blotting-paper' feel. You'll need to stretch the paper for this unless you use a watercolour block such as the one in the image above. The block holds the paper at the edges and you can release it with a palette knife after you've finished your painting.

Stretching paper

The kind of paper you use for stretching has to be fairly thick. Cartridge paper will be too thin for this. Watercolour paper is the best kind of paper to stretch.

This can take up a lot of space and make puddles so it is probably best to do in the kitchen, bathroom or outside on a nice day. Use a board or a book or a flat surface that isn't too precious. Wet the paper on both sides. If you have a bath and it is a large piece of paper then fill the bath with an inch or two of warm water. The warmth will help the paper and rag (if there is rag in the paper) open up and absorb the water. Lightly agitate the surface of the paper with your hand – or, even better, with a sponge as this lets the size on the surface of the paper dissolve and allows water to be absorbed. Make sure that both sides are covered and slip your board or surface beneath the paper whilst still in the water. If this isn't possible, carry your paper to the surface and make sure you smooth out any air bubbles caught under it with your sponge.

Rip off a length of gum tape and wet it completely, squeezing the water off the tape between thumb and forefinger as you remove it from the water. Lay it onto the board at least an inch on to the paper and try to smooth it down evenly along the edge. Repeat this on all sides of your paper. If you're creating a circle it is easier to stretch the paper as a square/rectangle or triangle and cut the circle shape out after it is dry. Allow the paper to dry completely. When it's dry, you can either use it on the board or cut it off with a knife.

Linen or canvas

Canvas and linen for painting on comes in many different forms. Very fine linen is useful for detailed work; canvas is usually used for larger paintings. You can buy both canvas and linen on a roll or in sections. You can stretch the linen over a stretcher or board. It is also possible to paint on unstretched canvas.

If you want something pre-prepared, Jacksons have a good value range of medium-weight linen boards.

Approaching your surface

Sometimes making the first mark on your canvas or paper can be the hardest part of painting. There are a few simple approaches that can help with this.

Starting with a coloured ground of a medium tone can be useful as it helps you to make tonal decisions more easily. Is the tone you're trying to depict lighter or darker than the medium tone and by how much? A coloured ground can also relieve the anxiety you may feel when faced with a blank, white sheet of paper or canvas. Many artists start work by 'dirtying' their surface with random marks or blots.

Trying an unusual or square format, as you will for Assignment One, pushes you to make unusual compositional choices, as does a circular or oval base, which you'll try in Assignment Four.

Using smoked-salmon packets, pizza boxes, cardboard and glass, or a mirror, can help you overcome feelings of self-consciousness as these sorts of ground are unpredictable and can make decisions for you. Cheap surfaces such as packaging or old envelopes can also be liberating to use as you don't have to feel anxious about making a mistake on an expensive or 'proper' surface.

Oil paint media

Liquin

Liquin is an oil paint medium that creates a very fluid surface, allows a lot of flow and speeds up drying time. It gives a satin surface once dried. Mix the oil paint really well with the Liquin to ensure that the pigment doesn't streak. Liquin is a substitute for linseed oil which also gives flow and shine but slows the drying process. You can use it alongside turpentine substitute or white spirit. Mimei Thompson uses a lot of Liquin in her paintings.



Mimei Thompson, *Cave* (oil on canvas)

Turpentine/turpentine substitute/white spirit/Zest-it/Sansodor

Like Liquin, these improve flow and speed drying time when used with oil paints. They are also perfect for rinsing your brush between colours. Always use turpentine substitute and white spirit in a well-ventilated room and never dispose of them down the sink, as they are toxic. Pour them out onto a newspaper or rag when you've finished with them and put them in a plastic bag in an outside bin, bearing in mind that this will be a highly flammable package. You can also tip them onto the ground (but they will kill any plants). The Russian painter Chaim Soutine thought that the fumes from turpentine made him depressed and this view is shared by some contemporary medical research. If you suffer from asthma or any other breathing condition, or if you're pregnant, then Sansodor, which is low odour, and Zest-it are better options.

Beeswax and crystalline wax

These can both be used to create thick chunky opaque paint, for mixing with paint to create impasto strokes, or to use with a palette knife.

You need to melt down the beeswax or crystalline wax before use in much the same way that you melt chocolate. You may need to break crystalline wax up with a hammer first. Place the wax and roughly the same amount of turpentine or white spirit into a bowl. Place this bowl in a pan of water and boil the water until the wax melts, then stir in the turpentine using a wooden spoon. Before it cools, pour this carefully into a paint kettle (if you're using it to paint something large and will use it all at once) or a non-plastic jar. Wait until it cools before putting the lid on.

Once cooled, you can scoop the wax out with a spoon to add to your oil paint on a palette. If the effect is too matt, add some linseed oil. Basil Beattie is an artist who uses wax in his paintings.



Paint

Michael Harding and Roberson oil paints are of very high quality and this is reflected in their price. High-quality paint brands often have a hand-painted swatch that you can buy, which shows the paint when it is painted both thick and thin. The amount of pigment in these paints is much higher than, for example, a Winsor & Newton oil paint. This can be useful when using with extending media, such as beeswax, as it will go further. High-quality brands have a greater range of colour too and often use a more traditional recipe. Until a recent EU ruling, burnt animal bones were used in the composition of one of Michael Harding's blacks, for example. This is why picture restorers often use these brands.

Sennelier Van Eyck are good mid-range oil paints with a wide range of hues, a high level of pigment and a less expensive price tag than Michael Harding or Roberson.

It's not necessary to use such high-quality paints to create a wonderful painting and many artists simply can't afford them. Howard Hodgkin uses Michael Harding paints and credits them for the rich hues of his paintings. Maggie Hambling uses Winsor & Newton, however. Winsor & Newton artist or student quality paints are very good and are the paints that the majority of artists use.

Acrylic paint

Commercially available since the 1950s, Pop artists used this paint to create large vibrant paintings that could be made quickly thanks to its fast-drying qualities. You can use many different media with acrylics and you can create virtually any surface and texture with them. However, some contemporary artists still prefer oil paints, saying they give a richer colour and greater ability to layer. Acrylic paint can be thick or more fluid depending on the kind you buy and the mediums you use with it. You mix acrylic paint with water and this can make it a good option if you're working in a small space or somewhere that isn't very well ventilated. High-pigment brands of acrylic paint include Lascaux and Spectrum.

Cleaning brushes used with acrylic paint is really only a problem if it dries on the brush. Boiling water can help with this, then use a knife to pull the plastic skin of the dried paint away.

Household paint

Gary Hume uses household paint as well as enamels and oil paints. Hume feels the paints communicate to everyone, as they are instantly recognisable. Phil Ilingworth uses household paint on board.



Phil Illingworth, *Triptych* (household paint on board)

Tempera

Tempera is a traditional paint that predates the invention of oil paint. Originally it was made by using freshly ground pigment with fresh egg yolk but you can get it ready-mixed in tubes now. The artist Andrew Wyeth uses tempera; if you look closely at his paintings you can see that they're composed of hundreds of small brush strokes of layered paint.

Painting shadows

Michel Eugène Chevreul (1786–1889) was a French chemist and colour theorist who profoundly influenced the Impressionists' use of colour, especially to depict shadows. They realised that shadows were made of a number of different colours and painted them without using black. Really consider the colour of the shadows you see and depict them as accurately as possible. Try to limit your use of black. Pierre Bonnard, Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans are fantastic painters to look at for visual advice on the depiction of shadows.

Making your own

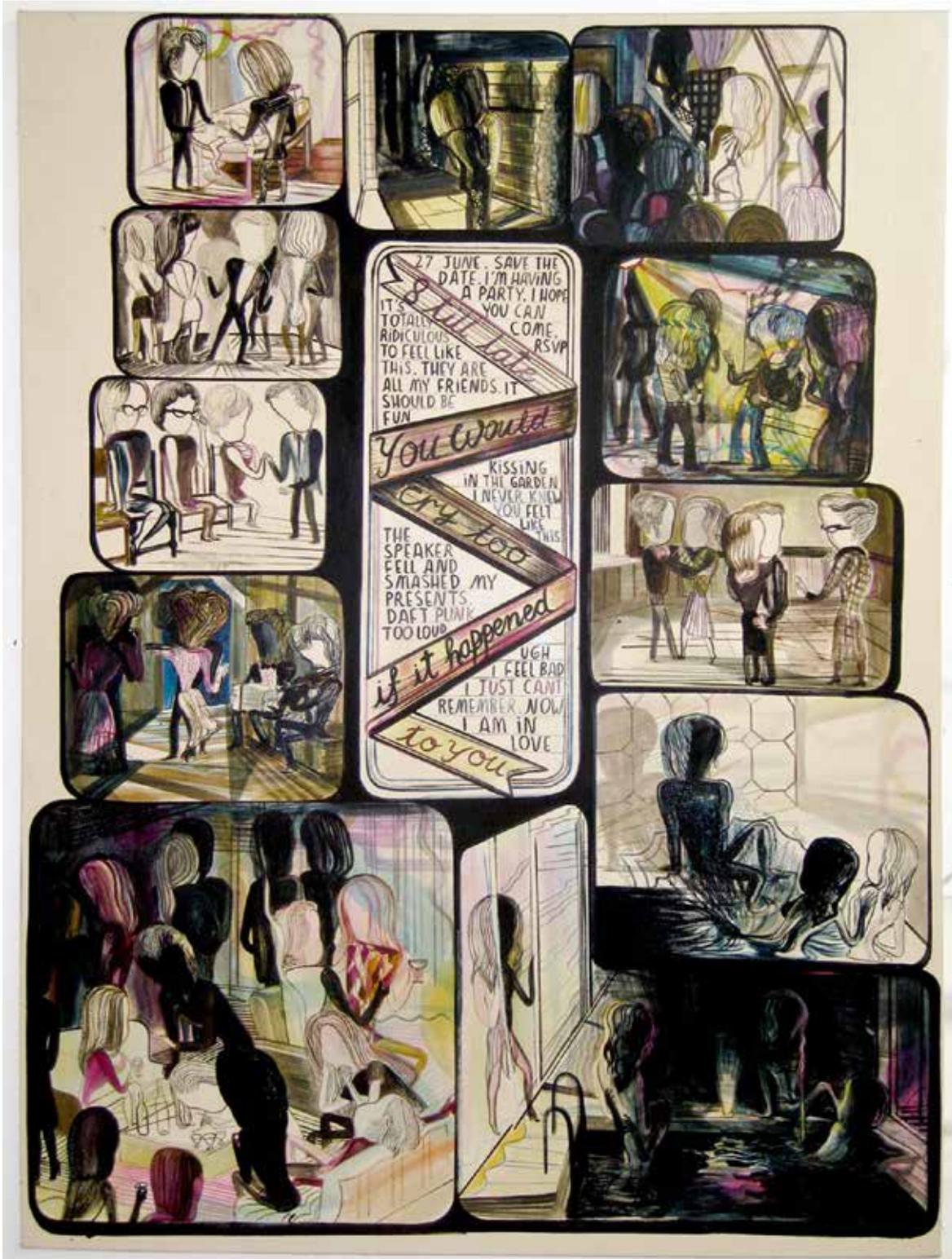
The artist Sigrid Holmwood grows plants to make her own pigments as part of her practice. Holmwood also wears traditional dress when she paints, making her practice a sort of historical re-enactment. If you're interested in making your own paints or in traditional recipes for rabbit-skin glue or other sizes, you'll find the step-by-step approach in Hilaire Hiler (1970) *The Painter's Pocket Book of Methods and Materials*, London: Faber & Faber very informative.

Watercolour

Watercolour works well when used in a way that highlights its strengths: fresh pale colours, layers and a lot of background left white. Watercolours are usually layered from light to dark. Contemporary artists who use watercolour include Emma Talbot, Zoe Mendelson and Elizabeth Peyton.



OCA student, Patricia Farrar



Emma Talbot, *Writers Block* (acrylic on canvas)

Gouache

Gouache is watercolour with 'body colour' or white pigment added. It is much more opaque than watercolour. It can create very smooth, matt areas of colour and was used in 1950s advertising for its vivid graphic colours and striking impact. Gouache can be combined with watercolour successfully to create layers.



Andrew Penketh, *War* (gouache on paper)

Roxy Walsh and Andrew Penketh are contemporary artists who use gouache. Walsh uses gouache in layers with watercolour on gesso-covered thin board. Penketh, who often has his work in the Jerwood Drawing Prize, uses gouache in flat opaque blocks of colour. Both make small-scale work, often no bigger than A4. Walsh also makes larger-scale work in oil paints. Gouache can create tide lines if each layer isn't painted in one go.

Ink

Andy Warhol used Dr. Martin's Watercolour Dyes. These are used like ink and can create highly-charged, striking images. Their powerful pigment created Warhol's luminous colourful illustrations. Marlene Dumas is a great artist to look at when using ink.

Enamel paint

Artist George Shaw uses enamel paint to depict the urban landscape of his childhood. Geraldine Swayne and Nadia Hebson use it on copper and steel plate.



Nadia Hebson, *White Tree*, 2003 (oil and glitter on copper)

Brushes

Winsor & Newton and Daler-Rowney produce packets containing a range of brushes and this is an economical way to acquire a number of different kinds of brush. Winsor & Newton 'Cotman' is a good range of synthetic brushes suitable for all kinds of paint.

Sable is very long-lasting and keeps the form of the brush if looked after well. Kolinsky sable is the best. Sable is made from a species of weasel and is very expensive. If you're uncomfortable using sable, or would prefer a cheaper alternative, then choose something like the 'Cotman' range.

Brushes described as being for oil painting are usually made of very stiff bristle or synthetic bristle and are generally not very useful unless you're going to be making very large or very thickly painted works.

This sounds very basic but, just as you would with your knife and fork, hold your brush so that it balances on your hand. Holding the brush too close to the bristles can actually give you less control.



Long thin brushes called 'Riggers' (see above) are good for quick drawing and writing in ink or any other water-based paint. They can be very good for drawing in oils too, but the oil paint weighs them down a bit more and this makes accuracy harder to achieve.



The fan brushes shown above are excellent for creating a smooth surface with oil, acrylic and gouache paints. The paint has to be pretty fluid to use these and create smooth seamless surfaces. This can be a useful brush for background or ground painting.



This brush holds a lot of water-based paint and is very good for using with watercolour ink. You have to be prepared for how much it can hold. If you're using it on a small painting, for example, don't put too much pressure on so as not to release the entire load. You can get these brushes in different sizes. You can use the larger ones for producing a wash, which might be useful when painting a background. The artist Marlene Dumas uses this type of brush to start her unpredictable blotted backgrounds. When dry, she works on top of the backgrounds with watercolours and inks. This kind of brush is used in elegant traditional Chinese brush painting, along with ink blocks: solid ink that is dissolved in water to create a density of pigment that is right for each artist. These are often called 'Petit Gris'.

This shape of brush (called a 'flat') provides good quick coverage with all kinds of paint. It doesn't work so well for following curves and contours, but this can be used to advantage, as in the example above, as it creates another layer. Picasso often used this shape of brush. If you're painting on a large scale, say a six-foot painting, you would probably find using house brushes easiest and cheapest. Gary Hume and David Hockney use these. Hockney used a house-painting roller to produce some of the flat smooth areas of paint on, for example, *A Bigger Splash* (1967).



You can get smaller rollers from DIY shops and these are good for priming canvas, wood, panel and paper as well as for painting a ground. A lot of contemporary artists use rollers in conjunction with masking tape. Rollers work best with acrylic paint, oil paint, household paint, primer and gesso.

To clean brushes used with oil paint, first wipe out as much of the oil paint as possible with a rag or kitchen roll. Then place the brush downwards in a jar of turpentine or white spirit and agitate occasionally. You can soak brushes overnight. Then use a household brush cleaner from a DIY store; you can mix this with very hot water to make it go further. It's best to do this in a well-ventilated room. Wipe the brushes when they come out and shampoo and condition them using hair products.



A number of contemporary artists use water-based oil paints. These are cleaner to use and you don't have to use solvents such as turpentine, white spirit or Zest-it to clean your brushes. This is useful if you're painting in a small place, are pregnant or suffer with asthma or breathing problems.

Gesso

This is a soft powdery surface that you can sand very smooth using fine-grade glass paper or wet and dry. Gesso creates a surface that you can use for any kind of paint. It absorbs paint well and gives the final image a soft, velvety appearance. You can use gesso to produce a surface that is as smooth as marble if this is an effect you'd like. Normally three layers of gesso painted onto the board, canvas or paper is enough; you can then sand these using glass paper. Adding clear (not coloured) washing-up liquid to your gesso can help create a very smooth surface when you sand it. You can get panels already gesso-covered from Jacksons Art Supplies.

Palettes

A traditional wooden palette, if cleaned meticulously and polished with linseed oil after each use, can last for years. Thick glass with smoothed edges or the edges covered in two layers of masking tape can be very good if you're careful and have a permanent 'studio'. Perspex is easier to move around if you have a studio space in your house and have to tidy things away. Disposable palettes are very useful; you can buy disposable palettes for use with acrylic paint that keep the paint wet and usable for longer. Alternatively, cover your acrylic palette with cling film and plastic bags. A white plate from a charity shop or a porcelain palette for watercolours are both good. The plate is especially useful if you're making large washes of paint. Limners or miniaturists used mussel shells for their palettes, so size and media is obviously a factor.





Your work space

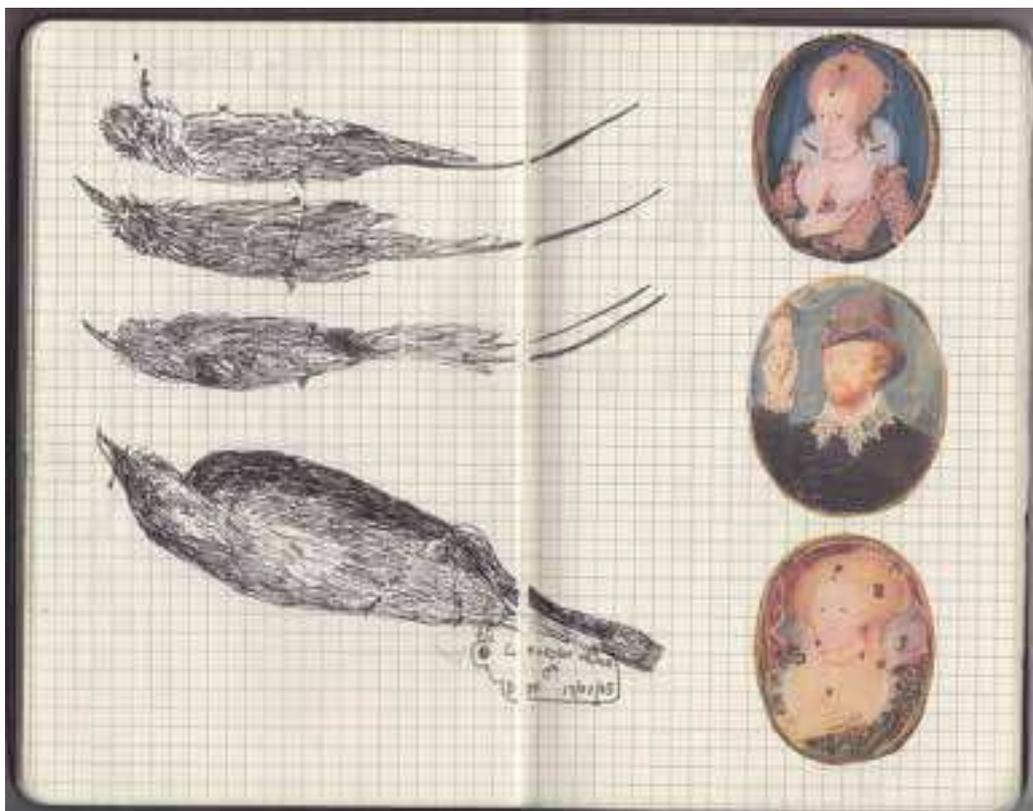
You may have a very small space to work in. The artist Nadia Hebson used to work on a small boat! Try to arrange it so that you have images that inspire you, whether they're in a portable scrapbook that you can refer to when you work, or, if you have a more permanent space, on the wall.



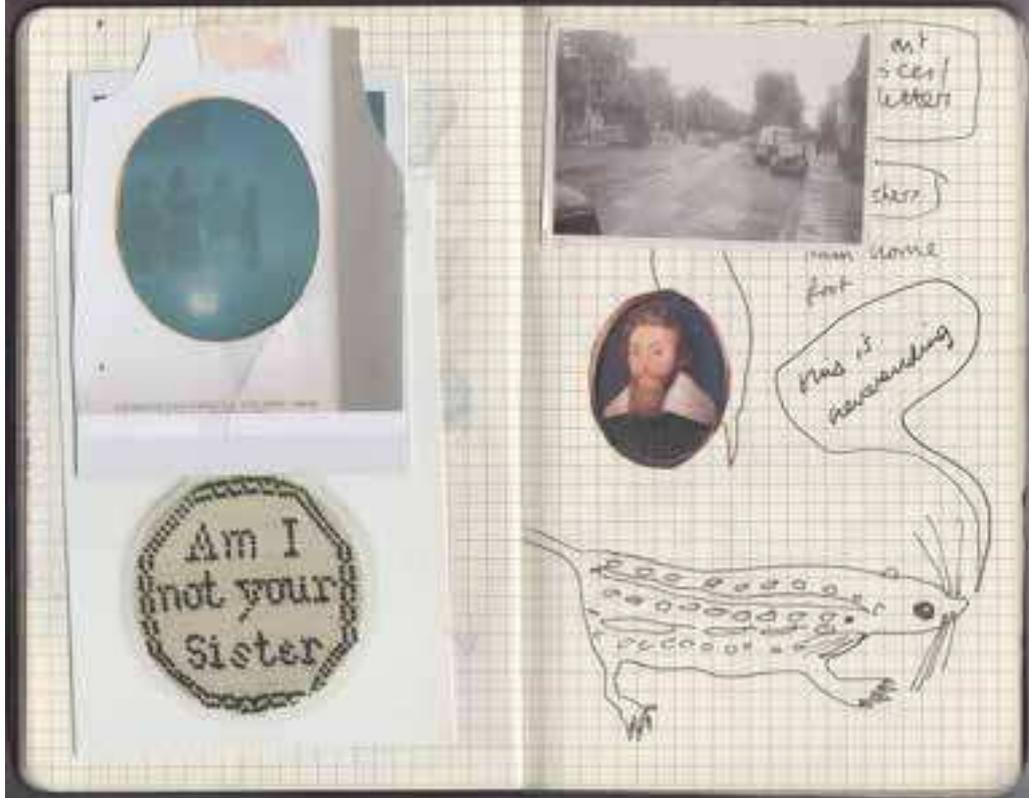
Christopher Mir's wall

Your sketchbook

Use your sketchbooks every day to accumulate images that appeal to you. If you have a digital camera or camera phone this is a fantastic resource. The more images you collect, the more you'll come to understand your inspirations as an artist. This in turn will make you more articulate about your practice and more focused when you make work. The colour of a jumper you see, the way a weed grows on the pavement, the pattern on the interior of a business envelope, all of these things can become a rich source of visual stimulus.



Annabel Dover's sketchbooks



Annabel Dover's sketchbooks

Analysing other artists' work

This introduction has focused on your choices of materials and methods. Finally, consider the all-important resource of other artists' work. Take every opportunity to view the work of other artists 'in the flesh', both historical and contemporary works in major galleries or blockbuster exhibitions and the work of contemporary artists in smaller venues or public spaces. Below are some questions to consider when you're looking at the work of other artists, not necessarily in this order.

How does it make you feel? Think about how the work makes you feel as this will be the biggest clue to the artist's intentions. Perhaps it makes you feel sad and sombre; is this because of the dark colours the artist uses? Is it shocking? Do you empathise with the person it depicts? Once you have thought about your initial response, you can think about *why* it makes you feel like this.

Do you like the work? You don't have to choose a piece of work that you like, but if you do it will probably make it easier to analyse. It is often the case that the more you like a piece of work the more you have understood it.

What does it remind you of? This can be another artist, nature, a dream, TV, anything. As long as you explain why it reminds you of this, it is justified.

What about the composition? 'Composition' simply means the pattern your eyes make when they look at the piece. Look at the work and consciously think about where your eyes go when you look at it. Is there something in the foreground (front) that draws your eye into the centre of the work? Is the composition symmetrical? The artist will have composed the piece to enhance the meaning of the work. Even an action painting by Jackson Pollock has a form of composition. The way a piece of work is composed often shows us the artist's hidden intentions.

What style is the work in? Is the work abstract, realistic, detailed, gestural, delicate, technical? What style does it have? Why might this be?

What colour palette has the artist used? Realistic, jarring, bright, lively, clashing, dark, pale, harmonious? Remember to ask why. The artist Luc Tuymans, for example, makes paintings that look as though they are sickly and ill, and this relates to his subject matter.

What is the subject? This is an important aspect, but not necessarily the most important. Has the artist painted the subject before? How have other artists treated the same subject?

What's the significance of the title? This could give you a big clue as to the artist's intentions and may contrast with the image itself. Again, ask why.

What's the date? This could be a big clue. Try and find out what was happening at this time (the context of the painting). If a piece of work was made in 1939 in Germany, for example, it was made just before the war. What was happening in the 1960s in America when Warhol made a lot of his work?

What medium has the artist used? This just means how the piece is made. Again this is a big indicator of the artist's intentions. The fact that Andy Warhol had people make his prints in his 'factory', for example, says a lot about his feelings on art.

What about the support? Is the canvas upside down like Georg Baselitz's? Or ripped like Lucio Fontana's? Why?

Where is the work exhibited? The painters Karen Kilimnik and Andrew Mania often create installations with their paintings, for example. Below is a painting by Mimei Thompson exhibited in a derelict church. You might consider the types of environment you imagine your own work in.



Mimei Thompson, *Cave* (panorama, oil on canvas)

Now that you've considered these important questions, you're ready to start work on Part One of *Painting 1: Understanding Paint Media*.

Painting 1: Understanding Painting Media

Part one Using found images



Cathy Lomax, *Film Diary* (oil on oil-prepared paper)

Use the grid below to keep track of your progress throughout Part One.

Exercise	Page	Complete
1.1 Painting thin and small	38	
1.2 Black and white	39	
1.3 Quick and focused	41	
1.4 Look at what you see - not what you imagine	41	

Introduction

In Part One you'll work quickly and experiment with a variety of painting media using found images. The exercises are designed to give you confidence with materials and processes. Your selection and interpretation of images that appeal to you will give you a greater understanding of where your visual inspiration lies and what you want to communicate as an artist. This is the start of the development of your personal artist's voice.

Artists have been using found images such as photographs since photography's invention. Edgar Degas' cropped compositions owe a lot to his use of photographs as resource material. Walter Sickert used newspaper clippings of contemporary news events as well as photographs that he took of everyday activities; these included images of popular culture such as music halls, the exterior of shops and domestic interiors. Contemporary artists Luc Tuymans and Gerhard Richter use images they find online and in newspapers to create paintings that are a cultural survey of our time.

Most artists, contemporary and historical, collect images that inspire them and have them on their studio wall (just as we recommended you to do in the introduction to this course guide). Lucian Freud's painting of his studio sink shows a postcard of sumo wrestlers tucked behind the pipe.



Kirsty Buchanan's studio wall



Paula MacArthur's studio wall



Research point

This list of contemporary and historical painters is in subsections of painting style. Have a look at these artists online, or even better, try and view their works in a gallery and record what you like and dislike about them and why. Try to research at least one artist from each section and pick at least two works that particularly appeal to you. Apply the questions you considered in the introduction to the work you choose. Make some visual responses to the work: make copies, re-create the colours used or make quick continuous line sketches in pencil or paint. Reflect on your own work in relation to theirs.

Slick, flat paint	Loose thin paint	Photo-realism
Gary Hume	Mimei Thompson	Chuck Close
Sarah Morris	Annie Kevans	Mark Fairington
Ian Davenport	Cathy Lomax	Robert Priseman
Inka Essenhigh	Eleanor Moreton	Tim Gardner
Jane Callister		
Brian Alfred		

Black and white	Colour and pattern	Messy
Raymond Pettibon	Peter Doig	Denis Castellas
José Toirac	Édouard Vuillard	Cecily Brown
Alli Sharma	Tal R	Carole Benzaken
Gia Edzgeradze	Daniel Richter	Elizabeth Peyton
		Chantal Joffe
		Jasper Joffe
		Harry Pye

Optional supplementary reading:

- *Gerhard Richter: Atlas* by Helmut Friedel (2007, London: Thames & Hudson) considers the impact of the found image on Richter's career and how the found image leads the development of his painting.
- *Walter Benjamin's The Archive*, by Walter Benjamin (2007, New York: Verso) reflects on the visual ephemera that surrounded Benjamin and the ways in which it informed his work.
- *The Artist and the Camera* by Dorothy Kosinski (1999, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press) considers the ways that artists have used photographs in their work.

Preparation for working with found images

Choose a mixture of black-and-white and colour images. Although you're going to be making paintings in black and white, you'll find it useful to interpret your coloured images into black-and-white tones to give you an appreciation of their tonal values.

Gather as many images as you can. The only criteria for selection are that you like the image and that you'd like to paint it. These images could be: film stills, images of your pets, scenes from *Hello* magazine, images from the newspaper, the internet or museum websites, photographs, books, postcards, timetables, receipts and other everyday ephemera.



Good artists to look at for this project are: Luc Tuymans, Gerhard Richter, Annie Kevans, Eleanor Moreton, Alli Sharma, Cathy Lomax, Walter Sickert, Andy Warhol, Edgar Degas, Keith Tyson, Kurt Schwitters.

For example, Keith Tyson has made a beautiful copy of a page of the Yellow Pages; Kurt Schwitters has made a 'Merzbau' out of sorted collected material; Alli Sharma uses found images and often uses black-and-white oil paints or black ink diluted to different tones.

As you work through Part One, you'll discover that found material can take on a new 'personality' when collected, grouped and documented with paint. Think about the images that most appealed to you and maybe consider returning to these in future projects. Keep them in your learning log and reflect on their appeal.

As you complete each exercise, record it in your log. Note the materials you used, which you liked or disliked using and why. Which combination of media would you like to return to? What would you do differently if you did this project again and how would you like to develop it further? Would you change the materials? The scale? The subject? And how might that change the outcome?

Exercise 1.1 Painting thin and small

Using your found images, make some small, quick painting experiments using thin paint on small surfaces.

Use HP (hot pressed) smooth watercolour paper of any weight. Remember, the thicker the stronger. You can use cartridge paper for this as they're only exercises but you'll find it rolls up because it's not thick enough to remain flat. Cut the paper into 20 rectangles of roughly A5 size (148x210 cm). These don't have to have perfectly straight edges.

Use watered down acrylic/gouache/poster/watercolour paint – at least one of each if you have them all – or just use the paints you have. These will be the backgrounds for your paintings and you will return to them when they are dry.

Backgrounds/grounds

Paint splodges on three pieces of paper. Paint them however you like. It's surprisingly hard to make a non-descriptive shape but have a go.

Then make two of each of the following surfaces, covered entirely in:

- black paint
- white paint (don't just use the white of the paper)
- grey
- varnish (spray/paint – you might have to wait a while to use this one so prepare it in advance).
- very pale watercolour watered down (load the brush heavily)
- thin black ink
- very thin acrylic or gouache paint.

Paint your image

When your backgrounds are dry, use the following materials in any order to make a painting of your found image. Try mixing materials creatively – for example, a matt acrylic or gouache paint onto a shiny background. Make 20 paintings.

- black paint
- white paint
- grey
- coloured paint
- very pale watercolour (water the paint down a lot but don't load the brush too much)
- thin black ink
- very thin acrylic or gouache paint
- varnish (i.e. used as a paint to depict your found image).

Alex Gene Morrison makes black-on-black painting using different textures of black paint to create the image and occasionally using highlights of other colours.



Alex Gene Morrison, *Skull* (oil on canvas)

Exercise 1.3 Quick and focused

Use A3 paper for this exercise; cartridge is fine but HP watercolour paper is even better. Select five of your found images. Now use your brush as you would a pencil. A long thin brush is useful for this. Get a plate or palette and have any combination of water-based paint and a large vessel of water at the ready.

Now, looking at the images and NOT the paper, paint what you see. Time yourself for one minute. Overlap the images as you go and work quickly.

Do this three times on three different pieces of paper. Make brief notes on the outcomes.

Exercise 1.4 Look at what you see – not what you imagine

Using A4 or A3 paper, lay an image upside down and, using ink, watercolour, gouache or acrylic, make a 10-minute copy of your image.



Do this again with another image. This time make a 20-minute copy.

Reviewing your work for Part One

For each assignment you'll be asked to assess your work against the criteria listed in the introduction to this course guide. Here are some ideas as to how you might do this.

- **Demonstration of visual skills:** Materials, techniques, observational skills, visual awareness, design and compositional skills.

Continuous line drawing is a fantastic way (as mentioned in the introduction) to develop your observational skills. Experimenting with composition will enable you to make informed decisions on a successful composition; document these experiments and decisions in your log. The painting-specific tips in the introduction to this course guide, and what you glean from your reading and research, will help you to consider the best way to use each painting medium. Trial and error will be the best way to develop these skills. Making a lot of quick work as well as more considered work will help you to develop all of your visual skills.

- **Quality of outcome:** Content, application of knowledge, presentation of work in a coherent manner, discernment, conceptualisation of thoughts, communication of ideas.

In effect this means: When looking at your work can the viewer grasp the essence of what you're trying to communicate? Are you interested in the sublime nature of the landscape around you? Are you interested in the unique identity of each person? How can you demonstrate this? Sometimes it is helpful to think about what interests you in your work and in your life and write this down as a list of words. For example, one list might be: trace of lives gone, the history of an object, lost stories. Your lists of words don't have to make sense yet; just note them down and return to them occasionally. Your thoughts may change and develop, so note these changes down too. Which materials would be best to demonstrate the ideas that concern you? Which techniques might work well? The artist Desmond Lawrence uses silverpoint drawing for its parallel to memory, for example, because it tarnishes and changes with age. How can you best present your work to communicate your ideas? In her 1994 show at the Freud Museum, Susan Hiller used archive boxes to present her work, an aesthetic that was in tune with a psychiatrist's office.

- **Demonstration of creativity:** Imagination, experimentation, invention, development of a personal voice.

This can often be demonstrated more clearly in learning logs and sketchbooks. Self-consciousness and self-editing sometimes curtail a creative, imaginative thought process or a series of experimentations. This is why your learning logs and sketchbooks are such an invaluable resource. Artists often return to an idea for work maybe a decade after they conceived it. Keep all your sketchbooks and logs and return to them. When you're collecting images, ideas and techniques that interest you, try not to be self-conscious or self-censor. Often a tutor can see the kernel of a fantastic idea in a quick sketch, a photograph or a magazine clipping stuck in your learning log. It is sometimes hard to know what your own work is about; by collecting and collating visual and theoretical records of things that inspire you, you and your tutor will gain a deeper insight into your unique creative voice.

Try not to worry about a 'final piece' or how a piece will look when it is finished; sometimes the initial idea or the experiments can become the work. The artist Wolfgang Tillmans at the British Art Show 7, for example, displayed an archive of drawings, internet printouts, magazine and newspaper clippings and this was the work.

- **Context:** Reflection, research, critical thinking (learning logs and essay).

Have you looked at a diverse range of artists from those suggested in the project brief? Have you digested these artists' work and is this evident in your work? If so, how? Write this down in your learning log. Could you have gone further? If so, how? How did looking at these artists' works help you identify what really motivates you as an artist and help you to develop your personal voice? Is there a way of working or a subject that intrigues you? If so, have you found an artist who works in this way or who looks at a similar subject? If not, have you asked your tutor? Could you borrow working methods from another area, for example archaeology as the artist Daniel Silver does, or anthropology as the artist Mark Dion does? How does the age you live in, your gender, where you're located geographically or socially, affect your work? For example if you live on a boat you'll probably find it easier to make small work, as the artist Nadia Hebson does. Her location affects how Hebson makes her work and relates to a feminist discourse on women and their entitlement to space. How you make your work and who you are may seem incidental or irrelevant, but these factors will inevitably influence your work, and consciously acknowledging this shows you have a critical understanding of your practice.

Assignment one

A series of paintings

This assignment is designed to help you integrate the techniques and observations you've made in the exercises.

In the work you produce now you must demonstrate:

- an understanding of different painting media
- an ability to choose the most appropriate painting media and ground for the image you're making
- evidence of visual editorial decision-making
- experimentation with media and materials
- consideration of the context in which you've made the work
- a growing understanding of what interests and motivates you as an artist.

Cut out 20 squares of HP watercolour paper (6x6" or 15x15cm each). Using the materials you enjoyed most during the exercises in Part One, make a painting of one found image on each piece of paper. Once you've made them, arrange them in a grid next to one another to form a large painting. Photograph the work. You can return to images you've already painted or paint new ones.

When you arrange your paintings you might want to photograph them in different sequences and consider the different effect this has. Placing a white sheet, piece of paper or wall behind the paintings will make them look more unified.

Reflect on your paintings in your learning log or blog. Which are the most successful and why? Which arrangement worked best and why? If you were to develop this work, how would you do it? Which artists have influenced you and how? Reflect on the ways you'd like to develop your work and the essence of what you hope to communicate.

Send to your tutor:

- a photograph of the final arrangement
- the 20 paintings and evidence of the found images you worked from
- your learning log, to include your chosen images from the research point
- a selection of work from the exercises as evidence of your development, particularly those that bear on your work for Assignment One.

Put your name, student number and the part/exercise number on the back of all your paintings and send them to your tutor together with relevant pages from your learning log or blog url. It may be more convenient to photograph some or all of the relevant material and email it to your tutor or send it on a USB, but discuss this with your tutor beforehand. Your tutor may take a while to get back to you so continue with the course while you're waiting.

As inspiration, look at the work of Charlotte Salomon and Roxy Walsh and also at the examples of series painting below.



Annie Kevans' painting of young dictators works well as a series.



Elizabeth Dismorr, *The Borderland I* (acrylic and gouache on paper)



Annabel Dover, *One a Day for a Year* series (oil on gesso)



Emi Avora's wall with black-and-white found images

Reflection

Revisit the assessment criteria listed at the start of this course guide and, using the notes at the end of Part One to help you, carefully consider how well you've done against the criteria and make some notes in your learning log.

Reworking your assignment

Following feedback from your tutor, you may wish to rework some of your assignment, especially if you are ultimately submitting your work for formal assessment. If you do this, make sure you reflect on what you have done, and why, in your learning log.