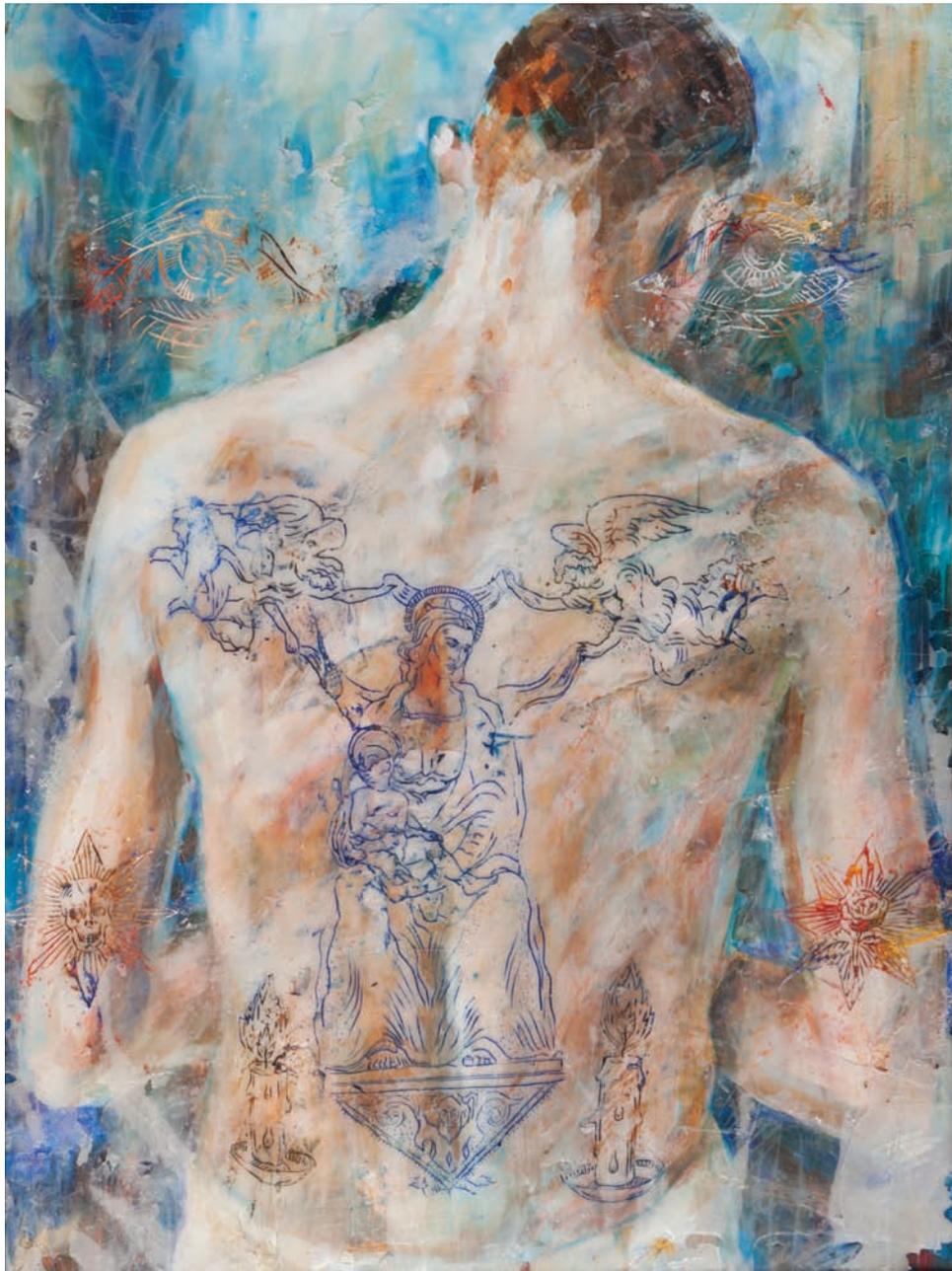


Painting 3

Major Project



Level HE6 – 40 CATS

This course has been written by Emma Drye

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Document control number: P3MP200913

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Cover image by OCA student Matthew Pearce

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Introduction

"A course book for this level is in some ways an oxymoron, unless perhaps it is a blank sheet. Having worked with distance learners for a number of years and been a distance learner myself, I decided to try to fill this book with the sound of artists' voices and the work of other students."

OCA tutor and course author

Welcome to your graduating year with the Open College of the Arts. This course may seem slight in terms of its weight and size, but it is waiting for you to imbue it with life and spirit. As well as producing the body of work that you will eventually exhibit, you'll develop your artist's statement and work to a course plan which you'll modify as you go through the course. In this way you'll contribute to writing your own course – with support from your tutors.

Our goal is to boost your understanding of your own artistic identity and ensure that you are working on a coherent body of work with depth and honesty. You need to be selfish and boost your own self-confidence as an artist. Think seriously about your emerging practice, what it's shaping up to look like and what you're going to do about it.

Your Level 2 courses should have given you plenty to think about and hopefully you're champing at the bit to get started. The initial projects on this course are about looking both back and forwards, giving you an opportunity to take stock and make sure you have all you need to make the best possible start.

The course has been designed to allow you as much freedom as possible, whilst still giving support and suggestions along the way. Because of this, it might be tempting to rush through or perhaps overlook what seems to be a fairly slight exercise every now and again. Please give each suggestion its full weight. Sometimes something which only takes a few words to say can unlock a lesson that lasts a lifetime. Everything in this course is here for a reason and you'll be assessed on what you do with what you've been given as well as what you find for yourself.

Course aims and outcomes

The aims of this course are to:

- support you in proposing and completing your own projects, building on the range of practical and academic skills developed at previous levels
- develop your ability to select and combine methods and materials to convert ideas into practice
- develop your visual language to express creative thought and individuality
- support you to create a new and ambitious body of work in response to research questions
- enable you to gain further detailed knowledge and understanding of approaches to painting and the contemporary cultural context.

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

- deploy, with minimal guidance, accomplished technical and practical skills in painting
- select and combine appropriate methods and materials to carry complex ideas through into practice
- demonstrate a clear visual language with a high level of individuality and inventiveness
- produce an ambitious and focused body of work at an accomplished standard
- demonstrate complex knowledge and a wide-ranging understanding of a range of painting and its contemporary cultural context.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria for *Major Project* are listed below. If you're going to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, make sure you take note of these criteria and consider how each of the assignments you complete demonstrates evidence of them. 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.

- **Demonstration of technical and visual skills** – Materials, techniques, observational skills, visual awareness, design and compositional skills (30%).
- **Quality of outcome** – Content, application of knowledge, presentation of work in a coherent manner, discernment, conceptualisation of thoughts, communication of ideas (20%).
- **Demonstration of creativity** – Imagination, experimentation, invention, development of a personal voice (30%).
- **Context** – Reflections, research, critical thinking (20%).

A final word...

In a 'terrestrial' art college you would be surrounded on a daily basis by your peers. The OCA has many excellent resources for both online and face-to-face meetings with students which you're strongly recommended to take up. This course guide, too, is filled with inspiring voices. Each quotation, video link or extract is a loose thread – pull it and see what you can learn. Also be sure to engage with some of the suggested resources in the Bibliography – listed in the Level 3 Painting Handbook.

Painting 3

Part one

Cosmology



OCA student Ilsa Brittain

Focus

Cosmology focuses on working out what is in orbit around your practice, what your interests are, what motivates you, what you like looking at, what your previous work has been about and what you aspire to. Part One is therefore the launch pad for the rest of your time on the course.

Aims

In this first part of the course you'll map out your journey. You need to give yourself enough information to plot a likely course, and build in enough flexibility to respond to what you learn along the way. Your first task is to set up a permanent studio space which you can use for the duration of this course. It may be small but it must be accessible. Next, reflect on your influences and your identity as an artist. Make a spider diagram, mind map or similar to plot your interests and inspirations. Take some time to collect ideas, references, imagery and objects which you feel are relevant to your ambitions for your practice in the broadest sense. Re-acquaint yourself with your work, but also your wider cultural and personal context: pieces of music, poetry, literature, essays, objects, substances, places, architecture, plants, movement, dance, conversations, people. Immerse yourself in your own cosmology and then use this understanding to inform your course plan.

Each part of *Major Project* showcases a Level 3 student's work from recent final year submissions. The work in Part One is by artist and OCA alumnus Ilsa Brittain. It is interesting to see her sketchbook head drawing and note the similarities and journey between that and her final work.

Setting the scene

Setting up a studio

An inadequate studio is an Achilles heel and, along with time, is potentially the biggest influencing factor on how well you'll get on with this course.

Designating a space in your home or renting a studio nearby can feel like a big step, possibly demanding resources of space or money that are hard to justify. However, this is your flagship year – the culmination of years of study. You need to give yourself the best possible chance of success. Don't underestimate the value of a studio, or of yourself as an artist.

See: www.thamesandhudson.com/Sanctuary/9780500977071



OCA student Ilsa Brittain

Research studio provision in your area. It might be possible to negotiate something with a local business that has a disused outbuilding, for example. Working in a group studio has the added value of bringing you into contact with other artists. If you know other people in a similar situation you could consider taking a short let on a workshop together.

For most students, though, the solution will be to take a long hard look at the house, garage, shed and stake a claim. No matter how small the space ends up being, try to avoid any arrangement that involves having to pack away at the end of a session.

"We found when we removed the paint from the floor that the old timber had rotted away underneath, and Frank was walking around on structural paint."

MJ Long talking about Frank Auerbach's studio (Long, 2009, p.95)



Watch videos of Elizabeth Blackadder and Grayson Perry at work in their studios:

<https://vimeo.com/25711526>

www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/tateshots-grayson-perry-studio-visit

In your learning log, make some notes about possible studio spaces at home or further afield.

Reviewing your work

Pull out your portfolio of work to date and take a long hard look. Which pieces still hold a spark for you? Are there any leads that you could follow up? At this stage you should only be influenced by your own interest and passions. Perhaps you've been awarded a high mark for a large body of work on a particular theme at Level 2, but now it's a small sketch in a forgotten sketchbook that draws your eye and makes you wonder 'what if?'



OCA student Ilsa Brittain



Select around half a dozen pieces of your work and give an impromptu artist's talk – either to the mirror or to a volunteer. Listen to what comes out as you start talking about your work honestly. Listen out for key phrases that pop up when faced with your work to date.

"I love colour."

"I prefer there to be a clash of languages."

"I am very materials-led."

"I like it when textile and paint combine."

"It's hard to quantify, but there is a balance between presence and absence."

"Looking at a person's face tells me so much."

"When the colours and tones start to sing together, I feel very excited."

"It's always about structure – whether strong or fragile."

"There is always sense of vulnerability or transience underlying my drawing."

Jot down a few notes, or record yourself speaking until you can put together a short summary of your findings. It can just be bullet points but it must be completely honest and full of substance. Don't write more than 300 words and illustrate it with 5-10 images from your previous work. If you prefer you can put your recording to a slideshow and use that instead.



OCA student Ilsa Brittain

Building your cosmos

In 2012, the German artist Rosemarie Trockel staged the exhibition *A Cosmos* in collaboration with the curator Lynn Cooke. The exhibition travelled to the Serpentine Gallery (in early 2013) from Madrid via New York. Trockel's own practice is so varied as to be virtually uncategorisable, working in a huge variety of media across disciplines. For this show she positioned herself as an artist amongst other artists and producers of visual culture, both contemporary and historical. She exhibited her own work alongside that of others (both artists and non-artists) and alongside other worked objects (both art and non-art) and found material. Her own and other people's work ranged from new to historical, collaborative or commissioned work. There was work by a botanical illustrator, work by an 'outsider artist' and work by a monkey. The exhibition was an essay in diverse possibilities and proved both explosive and disorienting.

At the Serpentine, the first room was full of dimly lit sheets of paper and notebooks arranged on shelving. The gallery recalled the creative ferment of the studio or sketchbook, mapping Trockel's own creative life and processes. Although the works were not all Trockel's, their inclusion seemed predicated on how far they were grist to her creative mill and there was something almost theatrical about the show at times, like the painstaking reassembling of Paolozzi or Bacon's studios.

This birthing canal gave way to a series of rooms cluttered with objects, video, painting, sculpture, etc. Many objects occluded others so that it was difficult or impossible to stand directly in front of a piece in the traditional way. There seemed to be two messages: the artist as genius author and the artist as nodal point in a web of cultural activity. The creative and curatorial processes were laid out like the splayed musculature of a dissected frog. At times the visitor might feel like a voyeur allowed 'behind the scenes' and at other times something akin to a visitor at Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum (a collection of ethnographic strangeness).

Now it's time to create something similar for yourself, albeit on paper rather than a gallery space. Setting up your studio and reviewing your past work will have set the scene to an extent and may have started to point you in a certain direction. This exercise will be harder for some than others, and of differing levels of usefulness, but it may throw up some interesting associations.

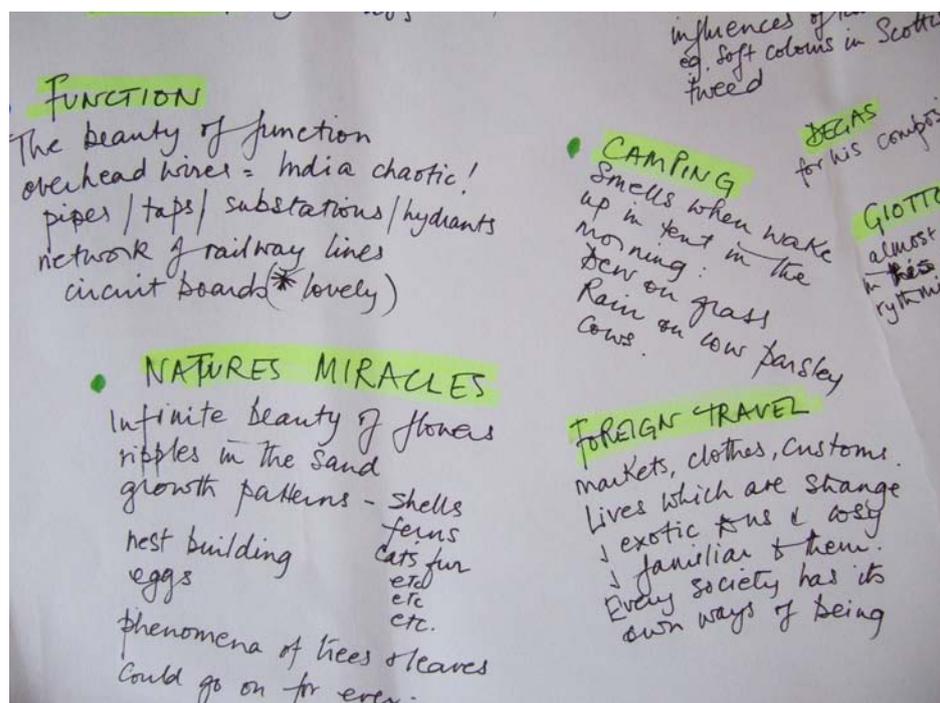


There are many ways to make a mind map – spider diagrams being perhaps the most common. The key is not to limit yourself in the first instance but to allow a kind of ‘brain storm’ or flow of thought to emerge. Prepare lots of bits of paper of different sizes. You can use post-it notes – or just some scrap paper. Have some different coloured pens and highlighters available too. This will allow you to do some impromptu colour coding if you find it works for you.

Now start thinking about your art practice and write anything that comes to you on slips of paper – one slip for each idea. If you have different sized paper and coloured pens you might like to use them to make associations or to highlight some words as more important or central than others. Don’t do too much of this though. The first job is to let the ideas flow as freely as possible. Don’t worry about repetition or relevance – just let it all out.

Once you’ve exhausted the flow, start arranging your scraps on a larger sheet, discarding duplicates. Reflect on what you’ve unearthed and push the scraps around until they are arranged in a way which makes sense to you. You might set up orbiting categories or clusters. Glue your scraps onto the larger sheet once you’re happy with it or transcribe the information onto a fresh sheet. The end result should be a mind map of where you are now as an artist. Hopefully it will throw up some new ideas or highlight imbalances or neglected areas.

Write a few sentences or key words about what you’ve discovered from the process and what you plan to do with your discoveries.



A student working on her mind map

Your artist's statement

"An artist's statement is a short piece of writing about your work, practice and wider intellectual concerns."

www.artquest.org.uk/articles/view/how-to-write-an-artist-statement

This is just the first stage in developing your artist's statement and to begin with it is better to work towards the meat of the content, rather than worrying too much about style or format. So don't spend ages looking at other artists' statements online at this point. Above is a link to a very general guide to statement writing and, as the author says, you'll develop a solution that suits your own practice. Use the output from your cosmos work to locate your practice within your area of interest. Why do you make what you make (or hope to make)?



Using your cosmos diagram and notes, try writing your first draft artist's statement. Keep it open-ended; don't pin yourself down too much in terms of actual output. Try to write something which frames your practice without actually describing the artworks themselves. You'll be producing more developed artist's statements as the course progresses, and during your work on *Professional Practice*. For now, just write naturally and concisely, communicating your key ideas.

Write around 150 words in your learning log or blog and label it clearly (e.g. 'Initial artist's statement') so that you can revisit it easily later on.

Your project plan

Your next task is to review everything you've done in this first part of the course, then write a plan of action. At this stage you're not expected to populate it with exact outcomes as you're at the beginning of a process of discovery. But you should by now be in a fairly strong position to describe your main areas of interest, both in terms of subject and method, and to cite areas for further research, including contextual study of relevant artists.

Remember that your practical work on your major project should go hand in hand with an exploration of its potential context, so ideally you should be working on *Contextual Studies* alongside this course. You'll then draw the two together in your work on *Professional Practice*.



In your learning log, produce an initial project plan of up to 300 words and including up to five images. Label this clearly so that you can revisit it easily as you work through the course.



OCA student Ilsa Brittain

Finally, take a peek inside Peter Blake's studio at night with film maker Mike Figgis:
<https://vimeo.com/32404969>

Summary of outcomes

Now that you've reached the end of Part One, you should have:

- set up a viable permanent studio space
- reviewed your work to date
- used mind mapping or a similar technique to build your cosmos
- written a provisional artist's statement
- written an initial project plan.

You're now ready to move on to the rest of *Major Project*.

Assignment one

This assignment is diagnostic and won't count towards your final grade.

Send to your tutor:

- a brief summary (up to 150 words) and photograph of your chosen studio space
- a short review (up to 300 words) of your previous work, accompanied by 5-10 images
- your cosmos mind map
- your provisional artist's statement (up to 150 words)
- your draft project plan (up to 300 words) accompanied by up to five images.

You may wish to send these as separate documents. Alternatively you could submit the relevant pages of your learning log, or your blog url. If you choose this option, make sure that everything is clearly labelled so that your tutor knows where to look.

Before you submit your work to your tutor, remember to look again at the assessment criteria listed in the introduction to this course guide. Do a self-assessment, checking your work against the criteria and making notes in your learning log.

Your tutor may take a while to get back to you so carry on with the course while you're waiting.

A word on tutor feedback:

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