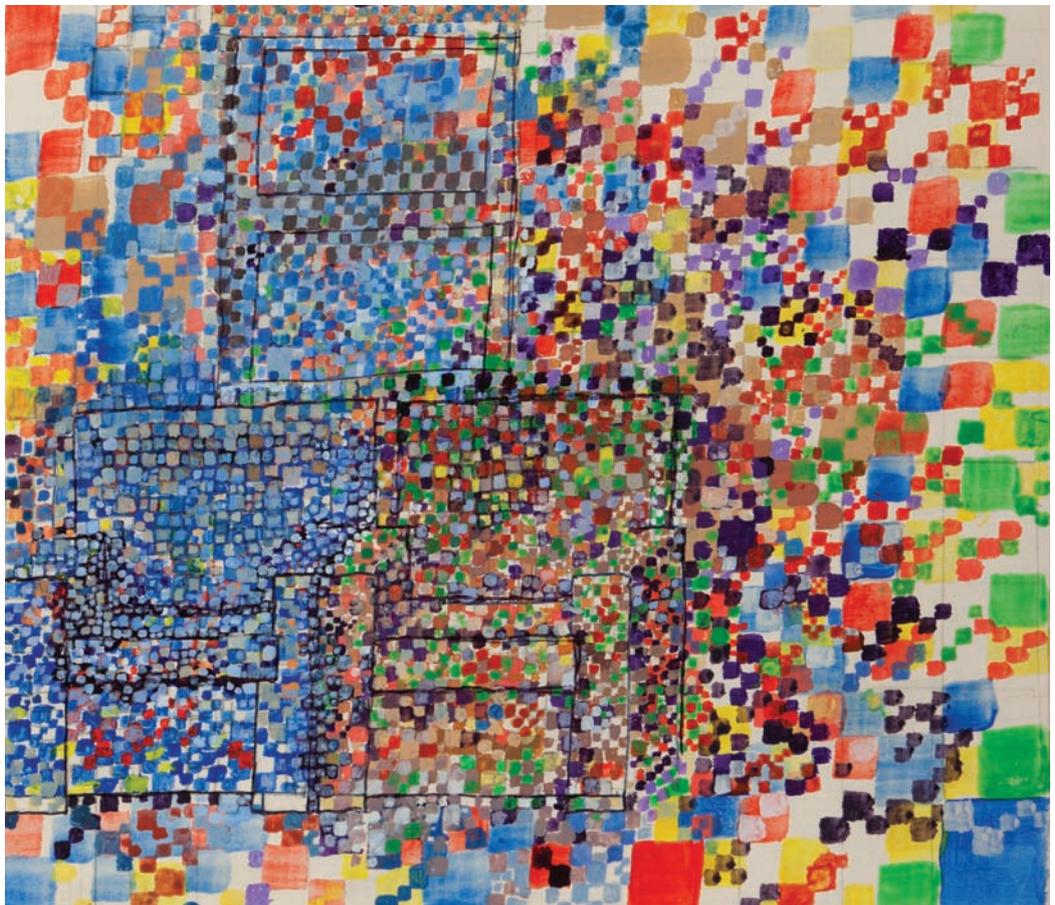


Painting 3

Contextual Studies



Level HE6 – 40 CATS

This course has been written by Linda Khatir

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Open College of the Arts
Redbrook Business Park
Wilthorpe Road
Barnsley S75 1JN

Telephone: 01226 730 495

Email: enquiries@oca-uk.com

www.oca-uk.com

Registered charity number: 327446

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Contents

Introduction

Part one **What is contemporary art?**

Assignment one

Part two **Beyond modernism**

Assignment two

Part three **Blurring boundaries**

Assignment three

Part four **Research**

Assignment four

Assignment five

Introduction

Welcome to Level 3 Painting *Contextual Studies*. This course works in parallel with the other two Level 3 Painting courses, *Major Project* and *Professional Practice*. Throughout the whole of Painting 3 you'll work to position your current art practice within appropriate settings, terrains, fields or contexts – just a few of the terms used to describe the 'places' where a work belongs or stems from. For the purposes of this course, then, 'contextual studies' means carrying out research that helps you understand and explain where, how and why your ideas fit in terms of contemporary painting and other practices past and present. Your research will culminate in an extended written project on an aspect of contemporary art that relates to your own practice in *Major Project*, work which you'll be taking forward to public exhibition in *Professional Practice*.

Today, following in the footsteps of the historic avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century, painting might be said to exist beyond its own frame. It may physically enter the viewer's space as expanded fragments within an installation, tableau or mural. Or it might appear temporarily, be less tangible materially, offer fleeting visual glimpses, or combine with other transitory media like film or sound.

We can also look at painting today in terms of its positioning, its relation to other things, the materials and methods that brought it about, its particular environment or time, and the things that are said or written about these aspects. All of this and more comes together as part of the work's context.

It might be interesting at this point to take a small step back and consider postmodernism, a contentious and hard-to-define movement which emerged from a left wing response to 'bourgeois' modernist rules. Roughly, we can say this began during the 1960s with American Pop, European Nouveau Réalisme and Arte Povera, but this reactionary wave continued through to the 1990s – and has certain commonalities with the contemporary scene. These were artists who engaged in critical enquiry into what art is and what it might be – using humour and irony, and appropriating lowbrow images and objects within a highbrow art world, to offer unexpected meanings beyond modernist aesthetics and formalism. Such artists set out to undo the rules that stifled their creativity through juxtapositions of art and non-art material, performance, graffiti, waste, advertising posters, etc., and offered a pluralist and often ironic viewpoint when placed within a fine art framework. In this way cultural politics entered the picture and issues surrounding gender, race, poverty, etc., became as much or more part of a work's meaning as its visual impact.

For many the 1980s is considered the heyday of postmodernism (think of the Saatchi Young British Artists (YBAs), Jeff Koons, Barbara Kruger, Jean-Michel Basquiat and others) and today this kind of work carries on alongside modernism and the other genres that come and go.

For interesting discussions on these aspects, see:

Butler, C. (2002) *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Foster, H. et al (2011) *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism* (2nd edition) Vols I and II. London: Thames & Hudson

"Indeed much of the significant artistic activity of the period since 1945 ... managed a compromise between modernist and postmodernist ideas (of course there is going to be just as much difficulty in defining post modernism itself and some artists are very difficult to categorise in this respect). For example ... Richard Diebenkorn, Eric Fischl, Howard Hodgkin, R.B. Kitaj ..."

(Butler, 2002, p.125)

The general view today is that all art (past, present and future) exists within – and is affected by – context. Context plays a role from a work's conception through to its reception, and is more interestingly understood within those multiple frames. When contemporary artists talk about their work they mention the many methods, materials, themes, genres and issues that prompted and affected the work and this is how we approach the term 'contextual studies'.

For example, watch this interview with artist Dexter Dalwood:

www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/meet-artist-dexter-dalwood

At the start of this course your ideas about painting should be elastic rather than rigid. Keep an open mind. Flexible thinking will help you find connections between your own work and some of the things that at first seem to exist outside of it. Looking into a work's context gives us a wider view and involves a lot more than simply looking at an art object. In simplistic terms it might mean investigating the way it was made, the processes and materials involved, as well as questions about the way it is shown, described and criticised by others. There might also be some discussion on who decides these things, who gives an artwork its status, value, meaning, etc. And all of these questions call on issues related to place, time, politics, culture, society, sexuality, power and a lot more, so you may want to explore specific theoretical areas, for example feminism, film, literature and post-colonialism. This is where the reading list, online research and your tutor play a major role.

Unlike some of your previous courses with OCA, this is not a 'taught' course. In between the five formal tutorials you're expected to use a range of resources, engage in written assignments, note-taking, annotating, sketching, etc., and eventually pull your findings together and make some kind of sense of them so that you can start a knowledgeable conversation with your tutor and other students. As you progress through the course, your tutor and your fellow students will offer advice and direct you towards further material offering ideas, methods and so on, but essentially it's up to you to forge your way through the mass of information and to ensure that any reading, writing, viewing and listening is relevant and useful to what you do in the *Major Project* and *Professional Practice* courses.

At this level, you should be demonstrating a progressive fluency in your textual and verbal expression and your research folder should evidence growing critical and conceptual understanding as you build your personal vocabulary, glossary of terms and bibliography.

As you work through this course, it is also important to engage with different forms of writing and to link these with your art practice (*Major Project*), with the aim of undoing fears and tackling assumptions of what 'research' and writing about art involves.

Course aims and outcomes

The aims of this course are to:

- consolidate your skills in evaluating a complex body of knowledge in the field
- help you identify and apply a range of research, analysis and critical evaluation of theories and practices in your writing
- develop your ability to apply a level of analysis and synthesis in theory and practice
- help you develop a personal visual language through research and synthesis of this through writing.

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

- demonstrate a coherent and detailed subject knowledge, informed by recent practical and textual research into contemporary fine art/painting disciplines
- use appropriate research methodologies to produce an illustrated text relating to concepts and contexts relevant to your chosen subject
- analyse, evaluate and synthesise ideas from appropriate primary and secondary research sources
- construct a coherent written argument, critical review or investigation that informs and is informed by your personal visual language.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria for *Contextual Studies* 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, 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 subject - based knowledge and understanding** – Broad and comparative understanding of subject content, knowledge of the appropriate historical, intellectual, cultural or institutional contexts (25%).
- **Demonstration of research skills** – Information retrieval and organisation, use of IT to assist research, ability to evaluate IT sources, the ability to design and carry out a research project, locate and evaluate evidence from a wide range of primary and secondary sources (visual, oral, aural or textual) (25%).
- **Demonstration of critical and evaluation skills** – Engagement with concepts, values and debates; evidence of analysis, reflection, critical thinking, synthesis, interpretation in relation to relevant issues and enquiries (25%).
- **Communication** – The ability to communicate ideas and knowledge in written and spoken form, including presentation skills (25%).

What to do now

In Part One of *Major Project*, you were asked to look back at your portfolio of work to date and assess what you did, what you know, and what you might want to do and know from now on. Do the same here. Take a good look at your current knowledge about contemporary art and make a list, chart, slideshow or any other method to show potential ideas or questions that you might pursue in more depth, then scan through some of the suggested sources of information here (and elsewhere) and select artists and images that may be relevant to your study.

Reading and other resources

During the course of your studies you'll need to select, read and view extracts from compulsory and suggested texts, videos and other online sources, and where possible link into lectures, workshops and other group sessions online, at art centres, galleries, museums, and elsewhere. Regular engagement with a range of resources will help build your knowledge of the many ways of making, testing, viewing, thinking, writing about, and showing art today.

You're not expected to suddenly become an expert in the field of art history, visual culture or art theory, or to read every book from start to finish. Think of them as starting points for your ideas, as a place to dip in and try to understand the changes that take place in art practice as different movements, theories, and 'ism's come and go.

Some of the language and ideas may seem difficult to grasp but in time and with practice you'll become more accustomed to the terminology and gradually find yourself becoming a more fluent reader and viewer.

Overleaf is a sheet that you can copy and use to keep track of your reading. Fill it in each time you use a book or other resource to build your personal bibliography. Adapt this or make one that fits your own needs. For example, you might decide to add a column for websites, links to your notes elsewhere, etc.

Some students find it useful to use an old-fashioned card index, others a folder with alphabetical dividers where they drop in photocopies of pages or the front cover of books with their notes. Use whichever method suits the way you work, and do this from the start of your studies.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Publisher</i>	<i>Page</i>
Notes				
<i>Author</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Publisher</i>	<i>Page</i>
Notes				
<i>Author</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Publisher</i>	<i>Page</i>
Notes				

We've selected a list of useful publications on contemporary art. One of these, already mentioned, is *Art Since 1900* (Foster *et al*, 2011) which offers a plethora of reference material on twentieth and twenty-first century art, with clear reference points that offer contextual information and starting points for further study. You'll find this book invaluable, always bearing in mind that the four authors each come with their own critical agenda.

See: www.thamesandhudson.com/media/images/ArtSince1900_contents_24672.pdf

From here you can download the contents pages of *Art Since 1900* showing a timeline of contextual information, from Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) through to Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds* installation in the turbine hall of the Tate Modern (2010).

Another valuable resource is Godfrey, T. (2009) *Painting Today*, London: Phaidon Press. This book takes a more experiential approach. The chapters are broken down into themes to enable you to compare similarities and differences, for example 'photographic', 'death and life', 'ambiguous abstraction' and 'painting space'. Woven throughout are texts that offer a range of historical and contemporary contexts and viewpoints.

In the introduction the author reveals his methodology:

“Throughout this book we have a three-way discussion going on: painter, writer, reader. (And of course, all three of us are viewers). To enhance the sense of such a discussion I regularly quote artists in this book. Their voices haunt this book as much as their images do. As a regular and spirited writer on her own work Marlene Dumas says 'I write about my own work because I want to speak for myself. I might not be the only authority nor the best authority but I want to participate in the writing of my own history'.”

(Godfrey, 2009, p.7)

A classic text for undergraduates in fine art is Harrison, C. and Wood, P. (eds.) (2003) *Art in Theory 1900–2000*, Oxford: Blackwell. This is a weighty book with extracts from a wide range of theoretical and critical texts by twentieth-century writers, critics, historians, artists, psychologists, philosophers and others. At the start of each of the eight sections, and throughout, the editors introduce useful contextual information to enable the reader to engage with the (at times) difficult texts. Here is an extract where Benjamin Buchloh is in discussion with Gerhard Richter:

BB What is it that you expect?

GR Just that something will emerge that is unknown to me, which I could not plan, which is better, cleverer, than I am, something which is also more universal. In fact I've already tried that in a more direct way with 1000 or 4000 colours, in the expectation that a picture would emerge there.

(Harrison & Wood, 2003, p.1152)

Other useful, affordable and easily accessible books include the 'very short introductions' (to contemporary art, modernism, postmodernism, art theory, feminism and so on) from Oxford University Press (OUP). You can dip into these as you begin to develop your ideas; their authors' intention is to 'provoke discussions and help you to question again why you think what you think'.

For the purposes of this course, the best way to approach your research is to find something that seems to relate to your own practice. For example if your current work examines the use of found objects and text in painting, you might skim through *Art Since 1900* until you reach p.619, noting a small blue painting with a squirrel skin and a plastic boat (Jimmie Durham, 1988). The work's contextual base (the world viewed from a native American heritage) may be very different from your own and this will certainly affect how you 'read' it.

See *Art Since 1900*, pp. 617-21, and YouTube video 'Jimmie Durham: A Matter of Life and Death and Singing':

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcoN3TAvH8E

Watch this alongside an interesting film about contemporary painting 'Submarine Wharf - XXXL Painting' featuring major international painters Jim Shaw, Klaas Kloosterboer and Chris Martin who discuss their ideas and influences including religion, costume and politics:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XECpOlha6hg

It may not be necessary to buy books – a good library should be able to order them in for you at a low fee. Even better, if you live near a university or art college, you should be able to use their library facilities free of charge – although you probably won't be able to take books away for home use. There is also the option of buying second-hand from Amazon, Abe Books and other outlets online.

You'll find a full list of books and online resources in the Level 3 Painting Handbook.

Your research folder

Your research folder is key to this course and will provide the evidence for all that you've achieved. Your research folder should comprise two interlinked sections:

1. Assignments and extended written project
2. Integrated studies

Section 1: Assignments and extended written project

At this level, you'll need to engage in ongoing study into contemporary art and artists and this means working independently of your tutor and far beyond the parameters of this course guide. You should be able to reflect, question and engage with the many ideas, materials and methods that you might encounter across all three courses in Painting 3, be able to recognise and explain what motivates you, be clear in what you want to communicate to others and have a confident and professional practice grounded in a good knowledge of relevant contexts.

Section 1 of your course folder will reflect the work you do for the five course assignments.

Each of the first three assignments comprises three main parts

1. An exhibition review or critique – with notes, sketches, photos and other information.
2. A discussion of contemporary artists, with references to relevant reading and personal study.
3. A proposal for your final extended written project (1,000 words), which you'll develop from an initial proposal in Assignment One to a final proposal in Assignment Three. Your proposal will count for 10% of your final mark if you decide to have your work on this course formally assessed.

The exhibition review and discussion of contemporary artist(s) are intended to broaden your horizons and help you fix on a topic for your final extended written project so you should approach them with this goal in mind.

The proposal you produce for Assignment Three should set out in some detail what you'll do for your extended written project (Assignments Four and Five). See the section 'Options for your extended written project' in the Level 3 Painting Handbook for further information.

You'll re-work your proposal as necessary until you and your tutor are convinced your ideas are both ambitious and achievable (i.e. the scope of your research is not too wide, too vague, too predictable, etc.). Your ideas may change as new openings reveal themselves. This is acceptable and encouraged provided the underlying ground remains relatively intact and your clear focus and genuine interest allows you to pick up underlying threads, weave them together and

continue on your path.

For Assignment Four you'll produce a first extended written project draft for review. Your exhibition reviews, study into contemporary artists, research proposals and other independent study will have brought you to this penultimate stage, and you should now have adequate material to complete a first draft of your extended written project.

Assignment Five is your completed extended written project. This will count for 90% of your final mark if you decide to have your work on this course formally assessed. Regardless of its form, this should be equivalent to 5,000 words and fully referenced using the Harvard referencing system. You'll find a guide to Harvard referencing on the OCA student website.

Tutor reports and self-evaluation

As with *Major Project*, you're expected to stray far beyond your comfort zone and take risks. Sometimes this will work well, at other times it may not; this is all part of the learning process. The important thing is to show evidence that you've taken on board and responded to your tutors' feedback. You'll be building your critical awareness and understanding of your subject and this means reflecting on and questioning what you've done, are doing and will do. Think of the tutor feedback process as an ongoing conversation between yourself and your tutors. Reflect carefully on your feedback and, if appropriate, go back to the assignment and adjust it accordingly. This will demonstrate responsiveness and learning and help to improve your final mark.

Section 2: Integrated studies

The integrated studies section of your research folder should contain the following:

Evidence of degree level study. Familiarise yourself with the OCA *Introduction to Studying at HE* (under 'Getting started' on the OCA student site www.oca-student.com) and work through all of the stages. If you've already worked through the guide during a previous course, revisit the contents and consider the tasks as they relate to this final stage. Evidence your work on this in a separate section of your research folder to enable your tutor and the assessors to see that you fully understand the requirements and have taken steps to ensure your work is of an appropriate standard.

At this stage you're expected to work fairly independently of your tutors. Their role is more that of artist/mentor than teacher and their task is to offer ideas, knowledge, support and critique where necessary. Make the most of the other study guides (*Academic Essay Writing*, for

example) in the OCA student site resources area so that you can devote your tutorial time to discussing your ideas and how you'll progress them.

Further material. This area of your folder should contain a well-considered collection of research-related documentation including notes, plans, images, links to personal website, blog, videos, etc. Your tutors (and perhaps other students) will offer suggestions regarding artists, exhibitions, online lectures, critical reviews of exhibitions and other information that relates to your practice and interests. Spend plenty of time looking at these, making notes of your thoughts and finding further information using reliable sources. Analyse your findings, documenting in written and visual form why and how the information is relevant to your particular enquiry, how it might help you answer some of the questions that have arisen in your practice and how it can help you understand the context (background, history, influences, issues) of a particular method, material, process, concept, etc. This section of your research folder will gradually evidence your ability to fine tune your research, and in so doing underpin your art practice with an understanding of its context. See Part Four for further information about research techniques.

Please don't put every note you take about every book or website you consult in your research folder. Your tutor and the assessors will want to see a considered and relevant overview of your research. They don't have time to read everything you've produced over a year or so of study, so be discriminating.

Evidence of interaction and dialogue with your peers. During your studies across all Painting 3 courses, you're expected to engage with other students and tutors online via the OCA website. This might involve setting up 'crit' groups, study visits, discussion groups, projects, workshops, exhibitions and so on. Peer engagement is a crucial part not only of being a student but also of being an artist; continual dialogue and interaction stimulate creative debate and activities beyond the confines of a course or individual art practice.

Glossary of terms. As you work your way through the assignments you'll gradually pick up specialist terminology that at first may seem incomprehensible. You'll find it useful to log these so you can refer back when necessary. Recording key terms in this way will help you become more familiar with the type of language used by specialists and academics within the field of contextual studies.

If you don't understand a word, look it up and make notes (examples below). Begin your personal glossary of terms now and keep this updated as you work your way through the course.

I

Iterative = repetitive, frequent.

Immanence means existing or remaining within (see Deleuze)

O

Ontology = philosophical study of being, existence, becoming (do further work on this in relation to ...)

There are plenty of printed and online dictionaries of art terms. A good one is Wilson, S. and Lack, J. (2008) *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms*. London: Tate Publishing.

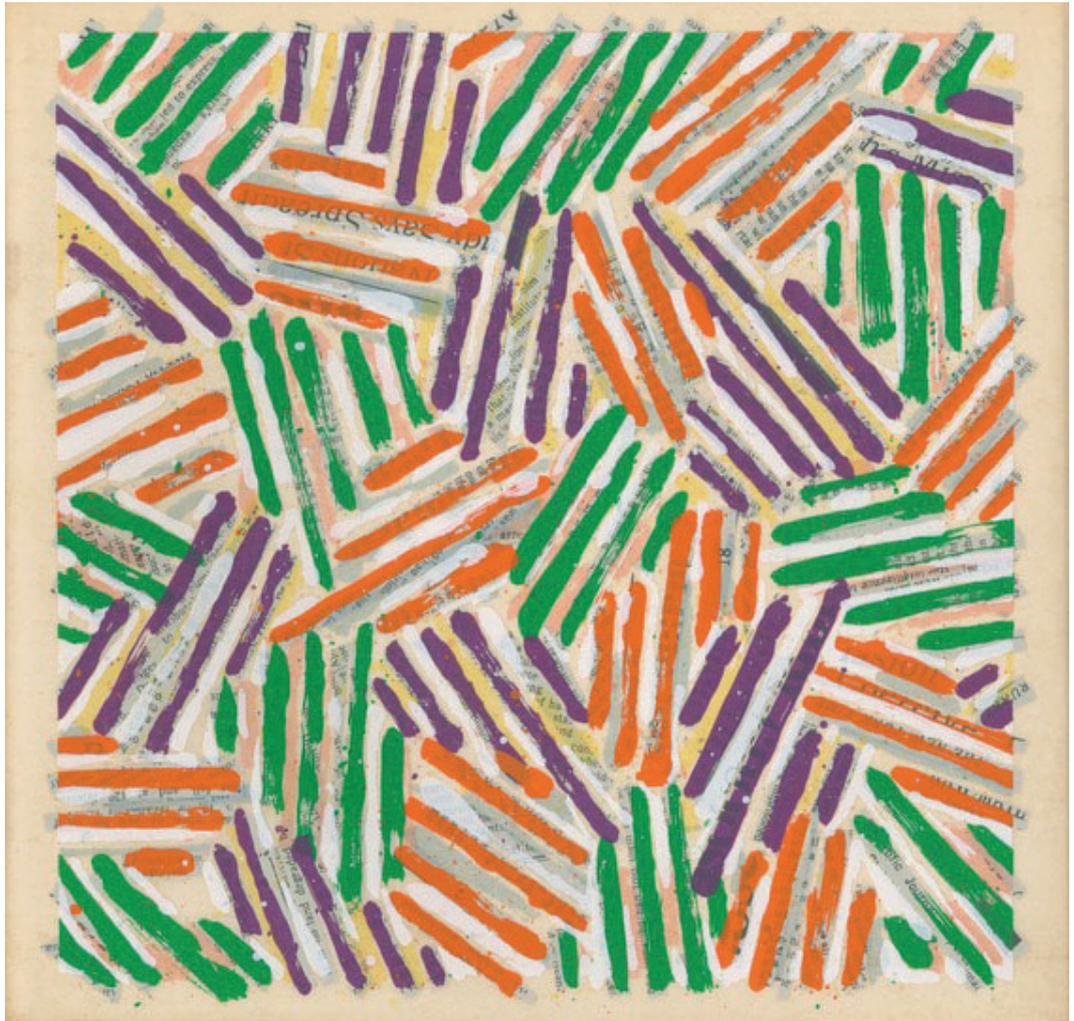
Or visit www.moma.org and click on 'the collection' then 'art terms' for useful definitions and background information.

You're now ready to begin work on the first assignment:

Painting 3

Part one

What is contemporary art?



Jasper Johns, *Screenprints*, 1977

Throughout Painting 3 you'll build on your previous experience of writing about exhibitions, this time attempting a more focused enquiry into contemporary art that firmly relates to your own practice, in particular to the work you're doing in *Major Project*.

This course concentrates on contemporary art and artists, and you should try to visit well-established art galleries or museums where you can experience the actual work in real space and time, allowing you to fully appreciate their size, material, relation to other works in the space, and so on. We appreciate that this may not always be possible, and in today's virtual environment you'll find a plethora of information online, in gallery websites, art journals, catalogues, blogs, etc. Try some of those in the reading list to get used to finding your way round. Also search for published reviews, critiques and catalogues. Looking at a range of sources on a single subject helps you gain a more balanced viewpoint.

Visiting small-scale 'amateur' or purely commercial venues is probably not the most productive use of your time. Ensure you choose exhibitions and artists that relate to what is happening today, even if the work was made long ago. For example, an artist might have worked at the beginning of the twentieth century but his or her ideas may still be strong enough to have a firm following amongst contemporary artists who revisit the work, put their own mark on it, and add to its original context.

An example of this is *Dancing around Duchamp* (London Barbican, 2013) where the curators positioned seminal works by Marcel Duchamp alongside others influenced by his ideas, for example the next generation of Neo-Dada, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Underlying the whole exhibition was a strong 'staging' by the French artist Philippe Parreno, whose performative and installational approach evoked the dance works of Merce Cunningham and the sound works of John Cage.

The show was preceded and accompanied by information and reviews in newspapers, magazines and online, which meant that those attending an OCA study visit had access to a range of sources prior to, during and after their visit.

See: www.weareoca.com/study_visits/energy-experiment-and-irreverence-at-the-barbican/

1 a Exhibition review

Search online for useful links to reviews.

Try www.a-n.co.uk, www.theguardian.com, www.telegraph.co.uk or find some of your own.

When you're looking for exhibitions, start by jotting down a list of possibilities. Look online for those in large towns and cities. Don't visit more than two big shows in a single day; you're unlikely to take in a great deal due to visual overload. If you're planning to visit blockbuster shows such as the Frieze art fair in October (www.friezelondon.com) you'll need to spend the whole day there and keep going back to stands that interest you. Try to talk to those manning the stands and listen in on conversations.

You may not decide on the subject of your review until you've visited a few exhibitions. Bear in mind that you may not always like what you experience, or fully understand it. Reviewing or critiquing means weighing up the whole and its parts, considering different aspects, and making well-informed and interesting comments that help others gain some understanding of the art, environment, theme, etc.

Consider the exhibitions in relation to the wider context of the art world (how it fits or contrasts with the art of yesterday and today). You don't need to discuss everything; hone in on something that really interests or intrigues you. Don't just quote facts, but offer your own thoughts as though in conversation with the reader. At all times consider whether someone else would find what you say interesting – if they don't, they'll stop reading.

Throughout this course, make sure you label everything you put into your research folder carefully so that you can find it easily later – and so that your tutor can find what they're looking for quickly and easily if they ask to see your folder. For example, you could label the work leading up to and following your first exhibition visit(s) as Assignment (1 a) Exhibition Review, your first piece of work on contemporary artists Assignment (1 b) Contemporary Artists, and so on.

Remember that your exhibition review(s) and studies of contemporary artists (see next section) are intended to broaden your horizons and help you decide on a topic for your final extended written project, so approach them with this in mind.

1b Contemporary artists

The term 'contemporary art' is certainly a disputed one. Critics and writers may disagree about what it is and what it's not, but in general artists aren't overly concerned with labels or being slotted into a particular category.



Watch the video 'What is Contemporary Art?' at www.weareoca.com/?s=sheila+mgregor

In this video, Sheila McGregor discusses contemporary artists on the Axis website (www.axisweb.org). Consider the language she uses to describe contemporary art and artists, their work and activities, then think about whether and how tastes, emotions, environment (and so on) might affect the viewer's judgment. Also look at the website www.art21.org (extract below) for further conversations.

"Contemporary art mirrors contemporary culture and society ... there is no simple or singular way to define contemporary art. Often recognised for the absence of a uniform organising principle, ideology, or label, contemporary art can often seem overwhelming, difficult, or so simple that the viewer might wonder if they are missing something. Perhaps the most helpful defining characteristic is the most obvious: contemporary art is the art of today."

www.art21.org/teach/on-contemporary-art/contemporary-art-in-context

One of the books suggested for this course is Gavin, F. (2011) *100 New Artists*, London: Laurence King. Here are a couple of extracts in which artists talk about contexts:

Anne Neukamp (Gavin, 2011, p.200)

FG: Are you interested in the idea of melancholy?

AN: I am interested in the feeling of constant incompleteness or limitation, which leads to melancholy, and in how it is possible to work with that. Most of my paintings remain in this somewhat unfinished, work in progress position that speaks of incessant transformation.

FG: Does your work aim to reinvent or comment on the history of modernism?

AN: The varying aesthetics and languages of form developed in modernism relate to its ideology, and in part to religious values. Modernism always claimed to produce truth. For example, thanks to the elapse of time since that 'truth', it is now possible to be inspired by both Magritte and El Lissitsky, even though they used such completely different vocabularies and world-views.

Misaki Kawai (Gavin, 2011, p.140)

FG: Are you influenced by the Japanese idea of *kawaii* (cuteness)?

*MK: *kawaii* stuff is easy to like - but I like to have a little punch with *kawaii*.*

FG: Is humour something important to you and the creation of your work?

MK: I'm from Osaka, which is a comedy town. Even when some sad or bad thing happens, we make it into a funny story, so it doesn't seem so heavy.

FG: Do you consider your work to be pop?

MK: Pop is usually fun, light and colourful - so yes, I think my work is kind of pop.

If you look through Gavin's book you may find other artists more relevant to your own work in terms of context, concept, material, form, etc. Consider the words they use to describe, reflect upon and analyse what they do. For example, in the above, you might pick out melancholy and comedy, seeming opposites yet in some ways very close.

As you make notes, highlight any key points to help you remember the thread of the conversation later.



Watch a YouTube video of Caitlin Cherry, artist in residence at the Brooklyn Museum (www.brooklynmuseum.org/rawcooked), as she describes her project for the museum's *Raw/Cooked* series, three painting installations based on Leonardo da Vinci's sketches of war machines. Note how she constructs the work and the reasons for placing them in particular parts of the museum. This is all part of the works' context.

See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gC7ThYvmDQ4

1c Initial proposal for a research project

If you haven't already done so, you should now read 'What is research?' in Part Four of this course guide and 'Options for your extended written project' in the Level 3 Painting Handbook.

Your ideas for your final extended written project are unlikely to be fully formulated at this early stage, so this first proposal is very much a work in progress – a flexible plan that engages in some way with aspects of contemporary art practice. It will be informed by the exhibition reviews and studies of contemporary artists that you carry out, as well as by your own practice.

In *Major Project* you're expected to engage in a knowledgeable art practice which means reflecting on and questioning what you do in the light of what has gone before and what is happening now. This means relating your methods, materials and ideas to the wider field of painting – questioning what, how, why, where, who? Here are two examples of possible research questions:

- Which contemporary artists are exemplars of narrative figuration and who were their precursors?
- How do contemporary painters engage with architecture and what form does their work take?

In your own work there may be questions that keep cropping up and this curiosity is the start of your research process. Attempting to answer questions that arise from your practice means you gradually develop a base for the work, positioning it within appropriate contexts. (In the examples above these may include storytelling, realism, installation, sculpture, performance, feminism, architectural theory, etc.) In this way you look not only at the artist and the artwork (style, composition, form, material, process, technique, etc.) but also at the thinking and writing that exists around them and adds to the works' meaning. Here we move a step forward, looking beyond the obvious or given, looking for evidence and questioning what you and others have said and done before trying to reach your own conclusions.



Watch an interview with Wendy White at www.vimeo.com/60583955

Here is an example of a painter who deals with her contemporary environment. Consider the artist's approaches, materials and cultural/social themes. As you do so, think about the different kinds of context (architecture, structures, signs, space, etc.). Look at how she plans, constructs and documents her work. How clear are her motivations, processes, difficulties, hopes?

Could you take a similar approach to discussing what you do? What would be your context(s)? Could you use an interview technique on yourself? Perhaps link up with another student/artist, plan your questions beforehand and set up a suitable environment for the recording.

The proposal you write now is the first of three, each one building on the last as you head towards Assignments Four and Five. Think of it as a flexible structure that will help you form a relationship between your practice and its context. Perhaps start by jotting down a few questions relating to your work in *Major Project* and a list of artists who interest you. Make some notes that you can refer to later. These will also help your tutor understand your thought processes.



Merce Cunningham, 1966 (choreographer)

Assignment one

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

Send to your tutor your research folder containing the following, carefully labelled:

1a Exhibition review

1b Contemporary artists

1c Your initial proposal for a research project

Aim for around 500 words for each of these parts. Your final proposal (Assignment Three) will need to be around 1,000 words but your tutor will appreciate that you may not be in a position to write anything like that much at this early stage.

Although these three pieces of writing are submitted separately, you should make it clear how they relate to one another. How will the exhibition(s) you've reviewed and the artists you've studied feed into your research project? (If you don't believe they will, then say why not.) To what extent does your initial proposal reflect the work you've done on Part One? How do all these pieces of work relate to your own practice?

Before you send your work to your tutor, remind yourself of the assessment criteria listed in the introduction to this course guide and review your assessment submission against the criteria. Make some notes and share these with your tutor.

Your tutor may take a while to get back to you so carry on with the course while you're waiting. Once you receive feedback from your tutor, reflect on any comments and advice, make further notes and if necessary adjust your texts. File your amended work, carefully labelled, in your research folder along with the rest of the assignment. File any additional research in the Integrated Studies section of your folder.

Congratulations on completing the first part of *Painting 3: Contextual Studies*.