

HECA Conference 2010
Creative Counseling: Visual Artists in the Application Process

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Visual Artists in the Application Process

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Brief Biography:
[How I Got Into this Mess]

- BFA Rhode Island School of Design
- Regularly Exhibiting Artist
- Former Director of Admissions,
Oregon College of Art & Craft
- Former Freshman Application Reader,
UC Berkeley
- MFA San Francisco Art Institute
- Part-time High School Art Instructor
- Independent Counselor since 2008

**Qualifying Whether Clients
are Good Candidates for
Degree Programs in Visual Art**

4 Questions to Ask Clients:

1. How many hours per week do you currently devote to making art?
2. How are you performing academically in non-art courses?
3. Can you communicate the artistic direction and ideas associated with your art making?
4. Do you have a portfolio of your artwork (or several completed works of art)?

**1) How Many Hours Per Week
Do You Currently Devote to Art?**

Clients considering studying art should realize the professional & demanding nature of college level arts education:

- 15-20 hours minimum of artistic work per week outside of the studio or classroom in BFA programs [**RISD= Reason I'm Sleep Deprived**]
- Students spend at least twice the amount of time outside of each art class as the length of class each week, per NASAD credit requirements (National Assoc of Schools of Art & Design)
- Potential art students should increase the time spent on making art after classes and during weekends to better prepare for the demands of arts college. If they already do this, a BFA program may fit well.

**2) How Are You Performing Academically
in Your Courses Other than Art?**

Many artists wrongly believe only art classes, not academic ones, are reviewed by art programs.

- College level, professionally focused visual arts programs are not an alternative style of education.
- The standard art degree, Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), is 35% liberal arts; English, math, science & history.
- College do not want to accept applicants who may not be able to successfully complete their program. GPA matters regardless of what an admissions officer states.

**3) Can you Communicate the Artistic Direction
& Ideas Associated with Your Art-Making?**

Students will learn the specific vocabulary for their art form, but should already have the confidence within their existing vocabulary to talk about it.

- Students without the ability or interest in doing so may not be a good fit to study art in college as an academic discipline.
- The critique process (French for critical) is an intense debate-style discussion at the core of contemporary art education. Students must be able to & interested in discussing their ideas verbally.

4) Do You Have a Portfolio of Your Artwork
(or Several Completed Works of Art)?

Most quality college art programs require a portfolio for admission, at both colleges of art and liberal arts colleges & universities

(more on this later)

What Type of Art Program
is Best for Your Client?

College of Art vs. Liberal Arts College
or University?

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| • little to no campus | • campus |
| • all art/design students | • multiple majors |
| • small student body | • medium-large student body |
| • few or no sports | • sports teams |
| • limited library collections | • broad library collections |
| • student live centered
around studio work | • active student life |

BA vs. BFA Art Degrees:
Narrow Colleges by Degrees

- BA, Bachelor of Art - 20-30% art courses - averages 1 studio art course per semester
- BFA, Bachelor of Fine Art - up to 65% art courses - averages 2-3 studio art courses per semester
- BFA requires thesis (usually written) and art exhibition during last year to complete degree
- Some colleges offer students the option of a BFA instead of BA by adding one additional year of art courses. Portfolio review is usually required for entrance (usually sophomore year)

BA vs. BFA Art Degrees:
Narrow Colleges by Degrees

- BA programs generally are more fine arts based
- BFA programs generally offer more specialized training for
 - Design- graphic, apparel, industrial, furniture, jewelry, illustration, etc.
 - Digital - computer graphics, digital arts, animation, video, etc.
- MFA (Master's of Fine Arts) programs no longer look down upon BA degrees. Quality of portfolio and artist statement more important than degree.

BA vs. BFA Art Degrees:
Narrow Colleges by Degrees

- Joint Degree Programs
 - RISD & Brown - BFA/BA (very small)
 - SMFA with Tufts & Northeastern - BFA/BA or BFA/BS
 - MICA & Corcoran - 5-year BFA/MAT combo
 - SFAI has MA/MFA (art history/studio art)

Criteria for Deciding Between
College Art Programs

- **Faculty Reputation [very important]**
 - Do they exhibit and lecture regularly?
 - Are they connected to their professions?
 - Internet search individual faculty names
- **Faculty Tenure**
 - What % of art faculty is tenured?
 - What % of art faculty is part-time vs fulltime?
 - How long have art faculty been instructing?
- **Is there an MFA program?**
 - Are MFA students accessible?
 - Do MFA students teach BA/BFA students?

Criteria for Deciding Between College Art Programs

- **Visiting Artist Program?**
 - How well-known are the artists? Regional or national?
 - How many artists visit annually?
- **Are Visiting Artists/Critics Available for Students?**
 - Do they review undergraduate work or only lecture?
- **Career Services / Development**
 - Are Internships & Postings Specifically for Artists?
 - Networking Opportunities with Alumni?
- **Alumni Reputation / Any Well-known Alumni?**
 - Art world connections are extremely valuable for emerging artists

Criteria for Deciding Between College Art Programs

- **Curriculum Flexibility**
 - How easy is it to take courses outside your major?
 - Are double-majors or minors possible? If so, how much longer?
- **Availability of Campus Exhibition Opportunities**
 - Number of galleries compared to art students
 - Can students exhibit? If so, how often?
 - What is the student exhibition selection process?
- **What colleges did art faculty attend?**
 - Yale, RISD, Columbia & Cooper Union are generally viewed as top colleges for artists interested in instructing

Criteria for Deciding Between College Art Programs

- **Ease of attending for 1st-time students**
 - Housing & laundry on-campus
 - Café/cafeteria
 - All needs met near campus, or transportation required?
 - Art supplies sold on campus?
 - Residential or commuter campus?
- **Student Support Services**
 - Counseling Services On-Campus
 - Residential Assistants/Housing Staff
 - Academic Support Services
 - Learning Support Services for LD students

Web Resources for Finding Strong Art Programs

- www.aicad.org
Assoc. of Independent Colleges of Art & Design
 Search by major, size, city or state at colleges of art in US and Canada
- nasad.arts-accredit.org
National Assoc. of Schools of Art & Design
 302 college art programs accredited by NASAD at colleges, universities & colleges of art

Two Main Differences Between Colleges of Art (besides size & location):

1. **Emphases, including major offerings:**
Some are only fine arts, others offer numerous majors
 - Fine Arts**- painting, printmaking, sculpture, glass, photography, performance
 - Design**- fashion, industrial, graphic, textile illustration
 - New Media**- film, video, animation & digital programs
 - Architecture** -including interior & landscape architecture

(Art history, writing & business are new program additions)

Two Main Differences Between Colleges of Art (besides size & location):

2. **Pedagogy & Instructional Philosophy**
 - Most colleges require first year foundation programs usually including drawing, art history, 2D design & 3D design
 - Most programs with foundations don't require students to select their major until spring semester freshman year UNLESS they want to study fashion design or architecture*
 - Two colleges of art have few course/major requirements - SMFA & SAIC
 - Best for mature independent students

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Why A Portfolio is Usually Required (And Should Be)

Portfolio Review As Admissions Requirement Determines:

- Skill level
- Conceptual development
- Placement and fit to the college

Portfolio Review Ensures:

- Peer group of similar skill sets
- 1st year courses (freshmen foundations) don't repeat what students already know.
- Commitment to study art for 4 years (Imagine science programs without science prerequisites)

Colleges of Art Without Portfolio Requirements

- Only 4 are nationally accredited by NASAD
- National Assoc of Schools of Art & Design, the national arts accreditation organization
- Most are for-profit - mission is not education
- *Alumni of for-profit institutions have higher debt per NACAC study*
- Some have poor reputations
 - In the art world
 - Poor faculty reputation with the College Art Association, an arts educational advocacy organization

Questions to Ask College Art Programs Without Portfolio Requirements

- How can students declare art as their major?
- Is an intro class required?
 - If so, how difficult is it to enroll in this class?
- Is there a portfolio requirement for declaring an art major after classes begin? (Hidden Hurdle)
- How are foundations classes taught so students with art experience are not bored?
- What is the acceptance rate for art students?
 - If greater than 75%, student quality is questionable

College of Art Standardized Test Requirements

- Most require standardized tests
- Top ranked programs have high median scores
- Few are test optional
- Some do not require SAT writing component

How To Create A Portfolio

Take Every Opportunity to Take Art Classes!

More art experience = better college major narrowing

- High School Art Classes
 - Advanced classes such as AP studio art & IB visual art
Great for portfolio, but don't expect college credit
 - Media-specific electives - photograph, ceramics, painting
- Evening/Weekend Courses in high school
 - Community colleges
 - Community art centers / art museums (figure model drawing)
 - Colleges of art/ college extension programs
- Pre-College Programs
 - Excellent opportunity for students to experience college
 - Excellent for portfolio preparation
 - Excellent for meeting future colleagues & sharing ideas
 - Some offer college credit for students that enroll there

How To Create A Portfolio

Basic Kinds of Artwork To Include:

- Observational drawings
- Works in a series - preferably self-designed
- Conceptual works/ from the imagination
- Self-portraits
- Sketchbook work - a few colleges of art require applicants submit 1-2 100 completed sketchbooks
- Multiple media besides drawing & painting

To Have Enough Artwork for A Portfolio:

Create a minimum of one finished work every other week (in addition to sketchbook work)

How To Create A Portfolio

Show Evidence of Self-Directed Work:

Self-directed work leads to students developing their own interests and content in creating future work

- Artwork created outside of class for AP & IB art
- Keep a sketchbook & keep it with you
- Experimental projects - non-assignment work

Portfolio Criteria Colleges Look for: Technical & Conceptual Development

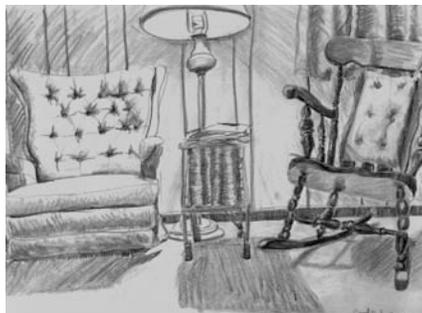
Potential to succeed in their courses, usually including drawing, 2D & 3D design:

- Observational drawing skills (technical)
- Design skills / sensibilities (technical)
- Ideas & concepts (conceptual)
- Unique artistic voice (conceptual & technical)
- Experimentation (conceptual & technical)
- Ability to learn (conceptual & technical)

An Example of Portfolio Requirements from Syracuse University website:

- Include at least 8 works from real-life observation such as still life, figure drawing, portraits/self-portraits, & landscapes.
- Works in other media such as sculpture, ceramics, photography, etc. are encouraged in addition to observational drawing.
- Works copied from photos, magazines, and masterworks are not considered strong portfolio material.
- Two-dimensional works should show consideration of background and composition. Avoid "floating" objects.
- Quality of work is more important than quantity.
- Do not include more than two gesture or technical/mechanical drawings. Fashion illustrations should not make up the bulk of the portfolio. Any cartoon work must be your original idea and should consider composition and concept.

Do Drawing from Observation



Do Still Life Drawings (Observational Drawing)



Do Self Portraits (Observational Drawing)



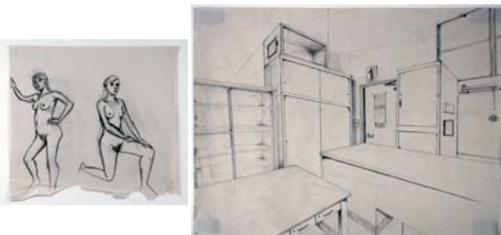
Avoid Drawing from Photographs



Avoid "Floating Object" Drawings:
Drawings With No Backgrounds



Limit Number of
Gesture & Technical Drawings



Portfolio Concentration Examples



Portrait Study in Acrylic Paint

Portfolio Concentration Examples



Ceramic Figure Study

Additional Portfolio Requirements:
Home Tests at Two Colleges of Art

- RISD requires 3 original drawings, which are folded and mailed with the application.
- Cooper Union requires 6 original works per annual specifications & mailing 5 original artworks for review

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Tips for Creating A Portfolio

•Attend a National Portfolio Day

www.portfolioday.net

- Free visual art college fairs offered Sept - Jan throughout US & Canada (& often a few in Europe)
- Colleges & colleges of art accredited by NASAD give students free portfolio advice and college information
- Reviews often given by art faculty, so can be good way to meet future instructors.
- Several colleges can accept portfolios for the application process on the spot. This can save considerable time for applicants as photographing and uploading images is prevented.

Tips for Creating A Portfolio

•Attend NACAC Visual & Performing Arts Fairs

Portfolio reviews rarely given, but lots of college info given

•Hire a Portfolio Preparation Coach

Look for coaches:

- with college admission and client success
- with first-hand experience with portfolios
- with experience photographing & digital imaging
- with experience in college of art admissions
- who are college-trained artists

Tips for Attending National Portfolio Days

- Students should begin attending sophomore year. Senior year too late for West Coast students as January is the month for most BC, WA, OR, & CA portfolio day events.
- Visit several colleges, even if you're not interested in them. More advice is better - compare advice from different programs for credibility.
- Bring a sheet of self-adhesive labels with your name, address, email & phone to leave with each college.
- Several colleges can accept portfolios reviews instead of sending with application. This saves considerable time as photographing and uploading images is prevented. HOWEVER, students applying for financial aid usually still need to submit a portfolio for on-site reviews.
- The RISD & Cooper Union lines are always long

Editing Portfolio Art: Before Photographing

- Do preliminary editing before photographing.
- Narrow best work down to perhaps 25 pieces. Allows for final editing to 12-20 photos for the portfolio, but prevents paying for photography of weak work.
- Quality not quantity – a portfolio is only as good as it's weakest work.
- *If in doubt, throw it out!*

Editing Portfolio Art: Before Photographing

- Multiple media demonstrates breadth [even though applicants apply to media-specific programs].
However, just because a student tried something does NOT mean it should be included.
- *Don't include novice work regardless of media.*
- Work should have been completed in the last year.
Best work should be most recent. For high school students, work created June through application time is best as learning curve is so fast.
- Get an educated opinion from art instructor/portfolio coach before sending application -*not from Aunt Betty*

Photographing Portfolio Art:

A Portfolio Is Only As Good As It's Photograph

- Admissions officers may not see original work, so quality is most important
- Hire a Professional Photographer
 - Unless you have experience photographing artwork, it is more difficult than it looks.
 - Good photographs should make the art look better
 - Have one photographer shoot all work so that images have same background and quality
 - Some art instructors will photograph student work but usually only artwork created in their class

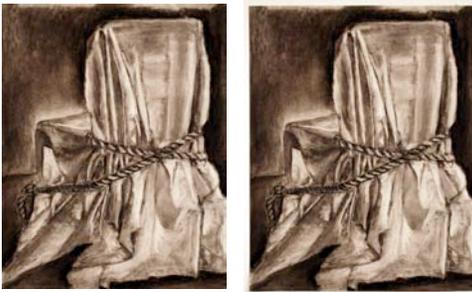
Rules for Photographing Portfolio:
1. Use Studio Lighting



Rules for Photographing Portfolio:
2. Use Neutral Backgrounds



Rules for Photographing Portfolio:
3. Don't Crop Edges on 2D Work



Rules for Photographing Portfolio:
4. 3D Work Usually Needs Details



Digital Image Editing:
Possibilities & Ethics

All Images Need Digital Editing

- Every image should be color corrected and have black/white levels balanced
- Editing makes or breaks whether images are used in the portfolio

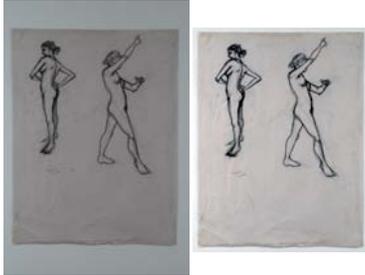
My Editing Ethical Rule:

- Edit only as much as can be done in a darkroom and/or by using an eraser

Digital Image Editing:
Possibilities Of



Digital Image Editing: Possibilities Of



Portfolio Assembly Process

- Image Sequencing - images should flow between each other, beginning to end
- Group series together by content and/or look.
- Put the strongest works at beginning & end. The last image is particularly important as reviewers often remember this image most.
- The best portfolios have a consistency in style and/or subject matter, which permits easier flow and grouping of series.
- *If in doubt, throw it out!*

Sending Portfolio Images

- Direct web image uploading is becoming more common. Fast, easy and immediate confirmation images have arrived.
- Several colleges use slideroom.com – site permits applicants to set up accounts and use same images to apply to numerous colleges.
- Burning CDs to send -. Some disks are defective & computers can be picky, so ensure CD opens in another both PCs & Macs before mailing.

Dealing With Rejection Letters

Rejection DOES NOT mean lack of talent.

-It only means that the college doesn't think applicant is yet ready to succeed at this time

•What to do if rejected?

- MAKE MORE ART & REAPPLY NEXT YEAR!
- If high school senior, take more classes at a local studio or community college
- Get tips on portfolio improvement from college admissions offices, portfolio coach &/or artist
- Attend more National Portfolio Days

Questions and/or Comments?

Feel free to contact me

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