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The visual arts journal

What is the visual arts journal?

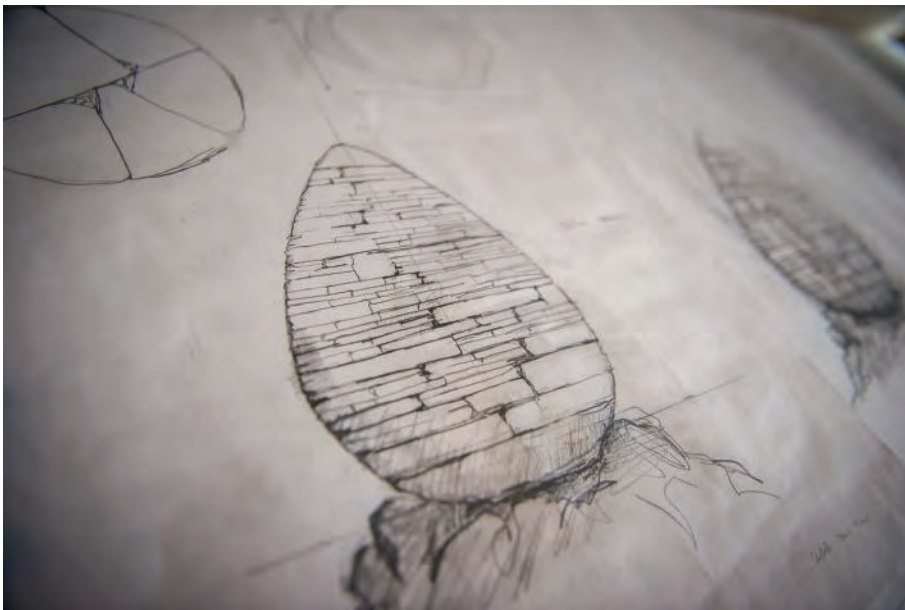
The visual arts journal is the most important learning tool for your course. In the following chapters there are plenty of suggestions of ways you can use your journal to support each component. Here you can find a more general introduction to the concept of the visual arts journal and the different forms it can take. You will use it throughout your visual arts course.

The visual arts course is studio-based. What this means is that during your time following the course, you will be adopting the work practices and habits of a working visual artist. The Diploma Programme is a university matriculation course, so you won't have all of the artistic freedoms that you might imagine artists to enjoy. After all, your work will be assessed against standardized assessment criteria, therefore, it will need to comply with a range of specific requirements and will need to be submitted in particular forms, but you will be expected to approach your art-making as a part of a discipline-based practice where you develop ideas, investigate concepts, develop skills and techniques with materials and media and, ultimately, complete a body of artworks.

Many artists, both in the past and today, use some form of visual arts journal as a part of their art-making practice. Sketchbooks, visual diaries, visual journals, notebooks, workbooks – a whole range of different terms are used to describe them, and probably even more varied is the different ways that each individual artist will use them, but what they have in common is how critical they become to the artist in their art-making practice.

ATL Thinking skills

“Visual” is a key word when thinking about the visual arts journal, and being visual is the key to keeping a successful journal. It is a way to make your thinking visible. Try using sketches, annotated images and diagrams, flow charts, concept webs and mind maps in different ways to communicate your processes and your art-making practice.



▲ Real artists use visual arts journals too. This shows a sketch of an art installation in progress by British artist Andy Goldsworthy at the Château de Chaumont-sur-Loire in central France. It is entitled “Egg-shaped cairn of slates”.

The journal is not formally assessed or moderated, but it is a fundamental activity in the course, and will feed into the three assessed components. It is the glue that sticks them together! For many students, the visual arts journal will be the source of most of the evidence that they will use to put together their process portfolio and all of the research for their comparative study. If used well, your visual arts journal will be a comprehensive visual and written record of your development as an artist throughout the course.

You will record:

- observations from real-life experiences through notes, drawings and photography
- your research from books and electronic media into other artists' works, visual stimuli and contextual ideas
- your interactions with your teachers and class critiques
- your references so that it is easy to add citations when you submit assessed work.

You will experiment:

- with new skills and technologies
- with new concepts and ways of working.

You will practise:

- refining your existing art-making
- writing text for your exhibition curatorial statement, for your process portfolio and for the comparative study.

You will reflect:

- on the development of your new ideas and evaluate plans for process portfolio projects and your exhibition
- on visits to museums and galleries and on artist visits and workshops
- on the challenges that you face and how to improve your art-making
- on your own development as an artist through your art-making practice.

Making the visual arts journal a habit

Keeping your visual arts journal by your side as you work on artworks will enable you to refer back to the original ideas, sketches and source images that have been used. You can record the names of colours that you are using as well as the combinations and the ratios that you are mixing to produce the particular hues. When you encounter a problem, you can sketch various alternatives in your visual arts journal until you find a workable solution. You can also make a note of any feedback or suggestions you value from your peers and teacher. As your scheduled class time comes to an end, you can make quick notes to remind you where you got up to, and what you were going to do next. These can become the goals for your next lesson and will allow you to refocus your attention to your other areas of study until next time.

Tip



Organize your electronic records carefully. As part of your journal you will take many photographs. Whether you use a camera or your phone, over two years it is very easy to accidentally delete or simply forget where you have stored the files. Similarly, if you upgrade your phone – or lose it – all those records are gone. So download your files to a safe folder and back everything up on one of the various cloud storage systems available. Your school will probably create a shared folder for you to put these in – if they don't do this you could suggest that they do.



The visual arts course doesn't typically generate the same level of conventional homework that some of your other subjects will, but allocate some of your home study time to review your visual arts journal and possibly follow up on some of the valuable suggestions given to you during studio time by your teacher or peers. You could undertake and record some critical investigation into an artist or artwork that your teacher suggested your work was beginning to remind them of, reflect on your progress with your current work, or start to think about ideas and images for that next piece of studio work.

Format

There is no prescribed format for your journal. The course gives you free choice in deciding what form it should take: a collection of sketchbooks and notebooks, a single hardbound book, electronic files on your computer, records of experiments, an artist's folio, or a combination of all of these. In fact, you might find that you switch between forms of visual arts journals as you explore different art-making forms and media. You might find that using a form of electronic journal might work better for you while you are working on a screen-based art-making form, for example. The journal could be a single sketchbook or dozens of notebooks. It can be long or short, small and private, or large and public. You can write in ink with a quill pen or dictate your thoughts directly onto your phone. It might include photographs, films and recordings. It will definitely include notes, annotations and reflection. Of course there will be drawings, scribbles and mess! In other words, the visual arts journal is a general term for what is likely to be a number of different ways you record visual creative work.

You will eventually be presenting both your process portfolio and comparative study to be viewed for assessment on a horizontal screen. The most time-efficient approach is to use a sketchbook of a similar proportion for your visual arts journal, allowing you to scan complete pages – some of the examples in this chapter do this. However, use whatever works best in your art-making practice. Choose the most appropriate ways of recording the development of a body of work, as well as your own development as an artist.

Before you start, look at the examples in this section of how your journal will connect to the assessed areas, as it is in these components that the learning from your journal will be presented to be assessed.

Using your visual arts journal as a learning tool

The core of the syllabus expects students to learn through engaging with three areas: visual arts in context (artists and why they make art), visual arts methods (ways of making art) and communicating visual arts (ways of presenting ideas). In practice this means that in your art classes your teacher will help you to engage in a wide range of different activities, all of which will feature in your visual arts journal. Below are ways in which you could use your journal as part of this learning.

Theoretical practice: Thinking and ideas

This will include looking at other artists and considering how we make judgments. You might evaluate ideas such as feminism, colonialism or gender-based issues in relation to contemporary art as well as using

Tip



You are likely to want to use a wide selection of pages or extracts from pages from your visual arts journal as part of your process portfolio. It will pay dividends if you take the approach of considering every page as a potential process portfolio screen. Always be mindful of your presentation and the legibility of your work. Journal pages will need to be scanned or photographed for inclusion in the process portfolio, so it is important that there is adequate contrast between any text and the background, and that the size of the text will be legible on screen.

ATL Creativity box

This is a Pandora's box of ideas for when you get stuck, or need to shake up your creative work, for when your art is becoming repetitive or boring. Find or make a container – it could be an envelope, a tin, a basket, a shoe box; you might want to give it extra value by decorating it or making your container from scratch.

Then prepare a stack of cards and on each one write a word – these are going to be your inspiration triggers. Think of qualities such as rough, hard, thick, silken and so on. Think of values such as refined, tiny, large, colourful. Think of materials and substances such as string, chalk, charcoal, sharpies, oil, sugar. Think of what is important to you such as sunshine, bagels, the sea, dogs. Think of feelings such as sad, reflective, instinctive, angry, impulsive.

If you work with a friend you can add words to each other's box. In spare moments add new words. Then when your work gets dull, pull out three words and use them to change your ideas. A rough and impulsive drawing of your dog, for example!

historical frameworks for traditional art. Much of this material will be included in your comparative study. Consider how processes and techniques are used to express ideas; this will become part of your process portfolio. You can explore different ways of communicating these concepts by making notes and perhaps audio recordings for your journal, but also reflect on the most successful ways of presenting ideas in preparation for your final exhibition.

Art-making practice: Doing stuff

You will create with new media and evaluate which materials best suit your intentions. Experiment in a meaningful way, refine your choices and select which art activity expresses your ideas – the journal will be an essential element in this process. This will develop into a body of artwork for your exhibition and it is in the journal that you will organize the connections and prepare the text to support your presentation. Most of this material will become part of your process portfolio.

Curatorial practice: Presenting stuff

Respond to the interactions you have with other art through exhibitions, artist visits and workshops. Then evaluate what is most relevant to your own artwork. This is when you will consider the impact you would like your exhibition to have on the audience by synthesizing all your recordings in the journal into the assessed exhibition.

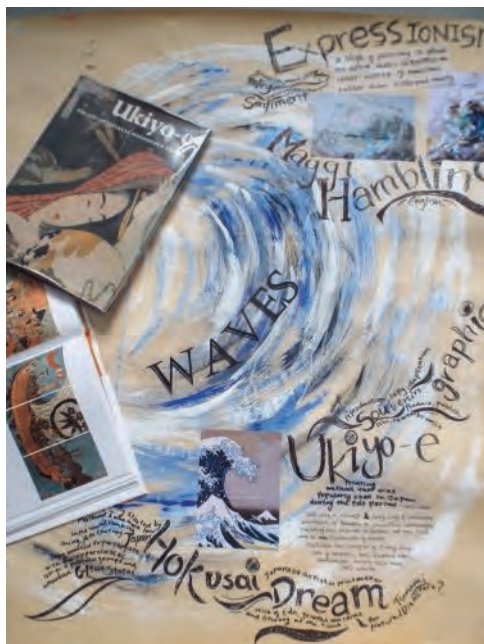
Linking with the assessed components

How will material from your journal be transferred to the assessed components? You might complete your journal as clear, organized sketchbook pages that can be directly scanned into the process portfolio. If you do this, you might choose an A3 landscape format that readily matches a screenshot. Some students take this approach even for their comparative study. However, most students use the journal as a developmental step that they then reorganize for presentation. So sketches made in your journal may stay there as first trials or end up photographed or scanned in as process portfolio screens where they are combined with a photo record of studio experimentations and the development of exhibition pieces, making a coherent record of your art journey.

If you choose to keep an electronic journal, then word processed text can easily be pasted into final presentations. If you prefer to keep the personal touch of handwritten notes, then you will probably need to type them up unless you have really clear handwriting.

Linking the journal with the comparative study

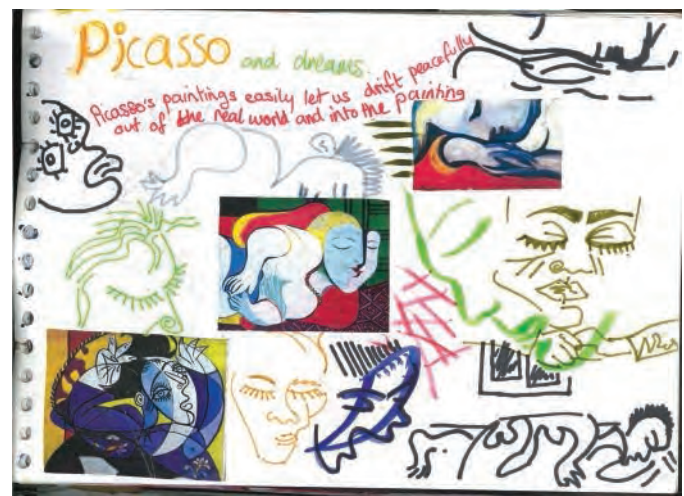
You will be keeping research notes and writing draft paragraphs just as you do when you prepare for an essay, but journal work for your comparative study should also be visual so that you are equipped to make exciting juxtapositions and graphics in the screens you submit for assessment.



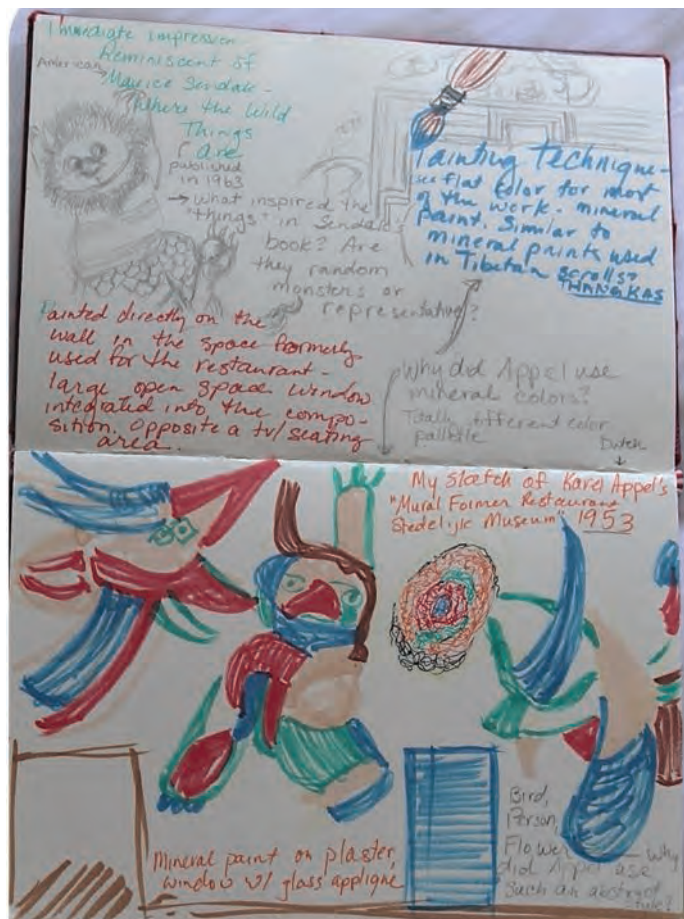
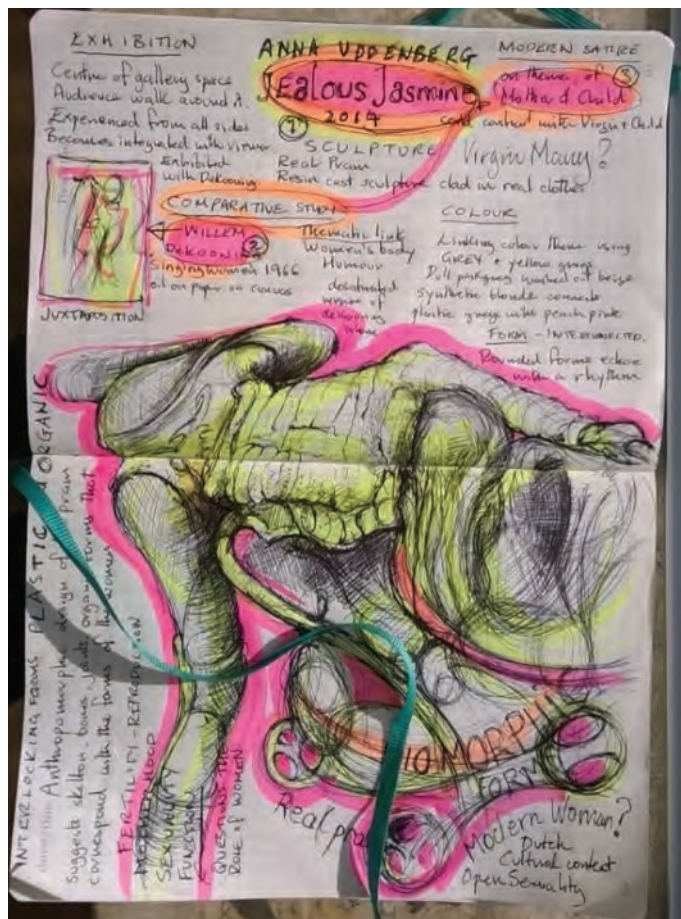
▶ Meg and Meghan are preparing topics for their comparative study. This is an example of how working on a large scale — they have spread big sheets of paper on the floor — has helped them to explore ideas in a free manner. Meg has taken books on Ukiyo-e prints and then used paint to make a visual link with Maggie Hambling's paintings of waves. Meghan knew that she wanted to write about Alexander McQueen, but was unsure how to develop connections. Her teacher has suggested themes and she is beginning to trace links by adding images and using her fashion books as inspiration. Work such as this is easily photographed on a phone to refer to later when the detailed comparative study research starts



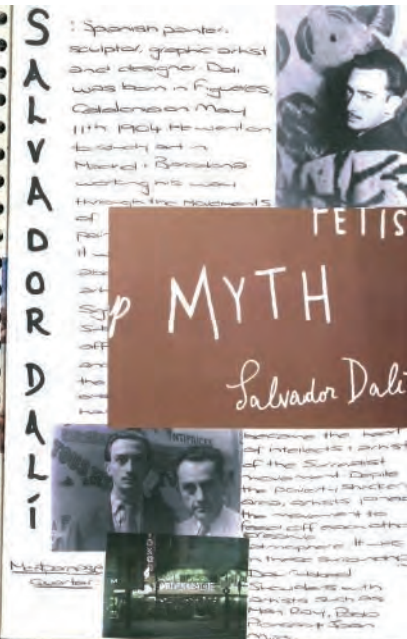
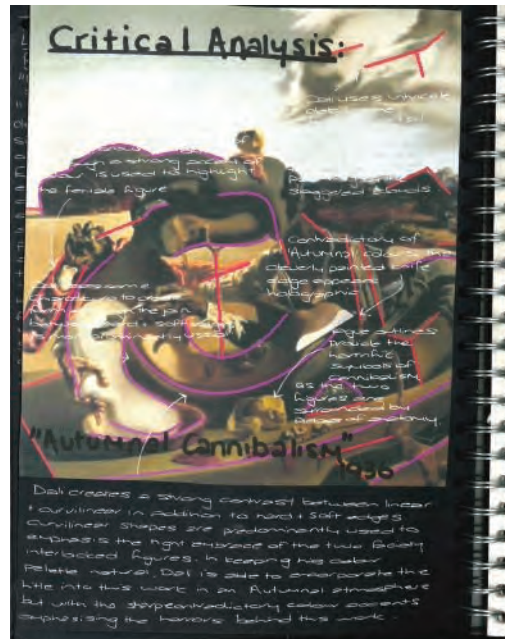
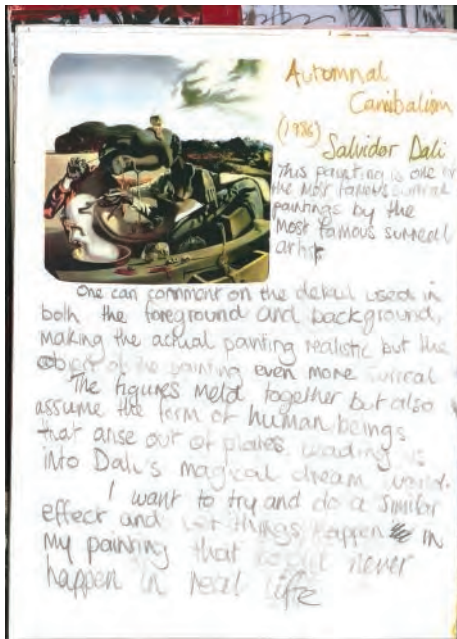
▲ This could be seen as stage two of the work that Meg and Meghan were engaged in. Anson is using collage and juxtaposition to make meaningful links with his comparative study on iconoclasm.



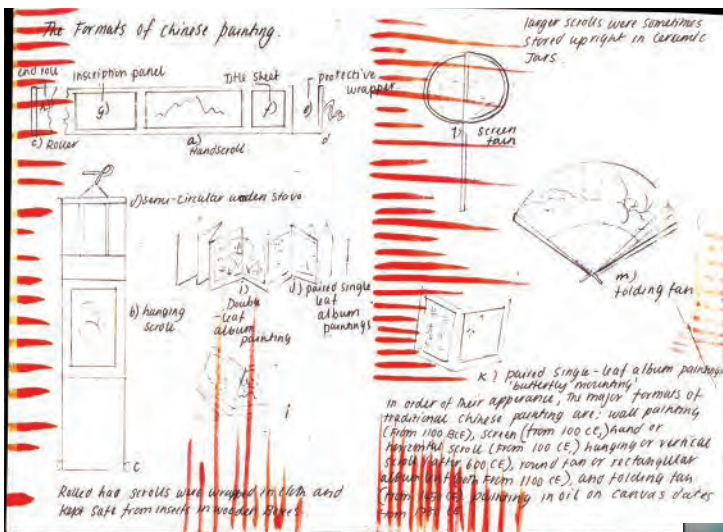
▲ On a museum visit Anthony is using his journal to record his interest in Picasso and Matisse. This is the first stage of his research on Matisse's use of colour for his comparative study. Alongside his notes he used sticky coloured paper and sharpies to respond directly to the paintings in the gallery.



▲ Carl and Becky are sketching in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. The point of these drawings is to slow down and look carefully. The notes can be prompted by the museum labels (remember to cite these if you use this text later) and observations of formal qualities and function. Spending time sketching also allows you to consider the relationship to the gallery audience – to observe how others respond to the artworks and to think about the way the works are presented.



▲ Kierlan's work on Dalí forms one of the case studies in the comparative study chapter. Here are three early pages from her journals. In the first she makes rough notes in front of the painting, in the second she develops a focused analysis of formal qualities and the third is part of her research into Dalí himself.

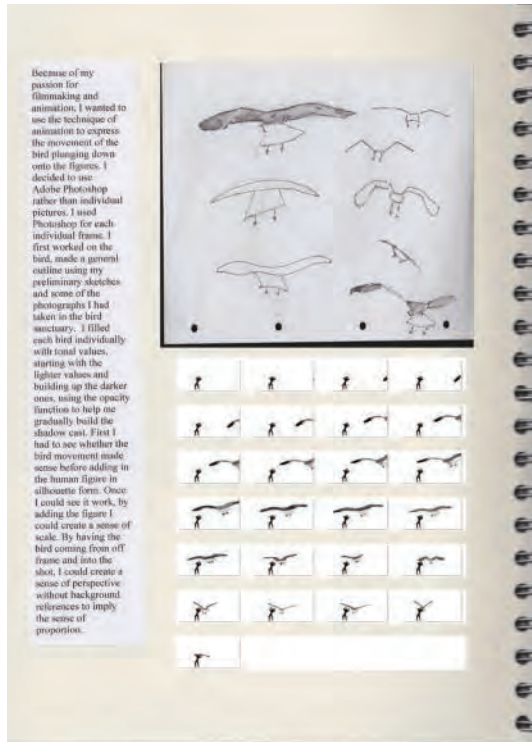


◀ Emma and Carolyn visited an exhibition of Chinese painting. Back in the studio they are experimenting with brush and ink in the Chinese fan fold sketchbooks they bought at the gallery. These practical experiments are nicely combined with research in materials and function. Some of these pages are clear enough to be directly included in either their process portfolio or their comparative study.

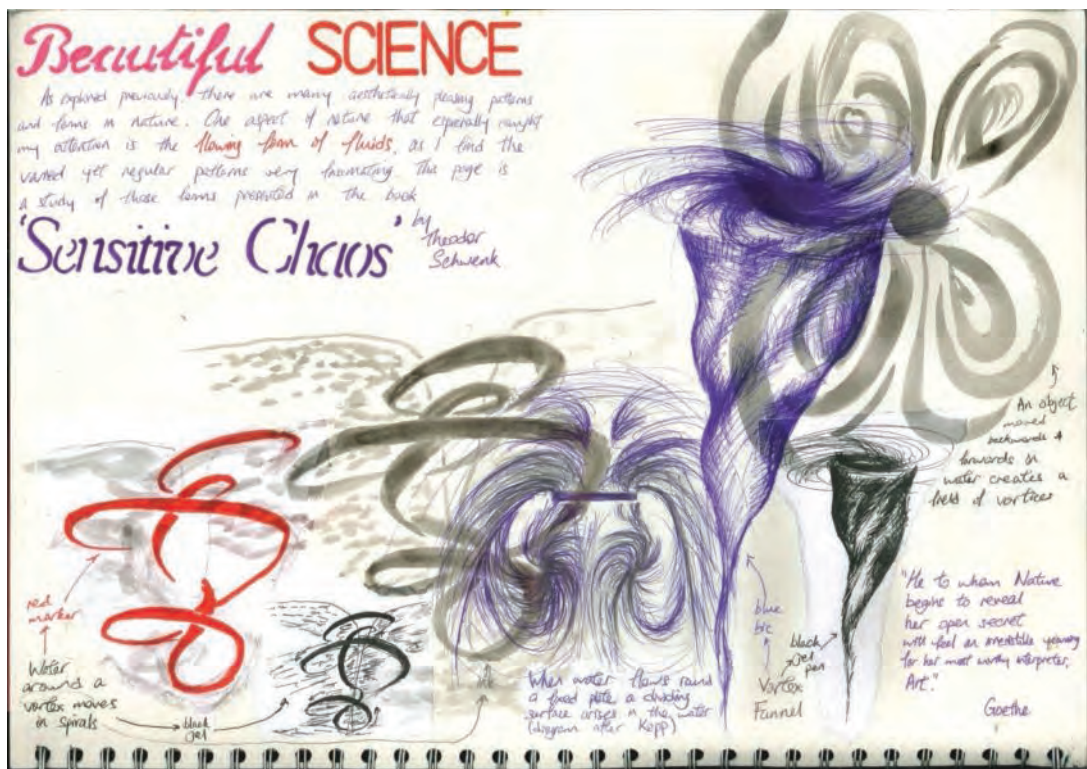


Linking the journal with the process portfolio

As has already been said, sometimes your journal and your process portfolio are the same thing! Notice how often this is the case in these examples.



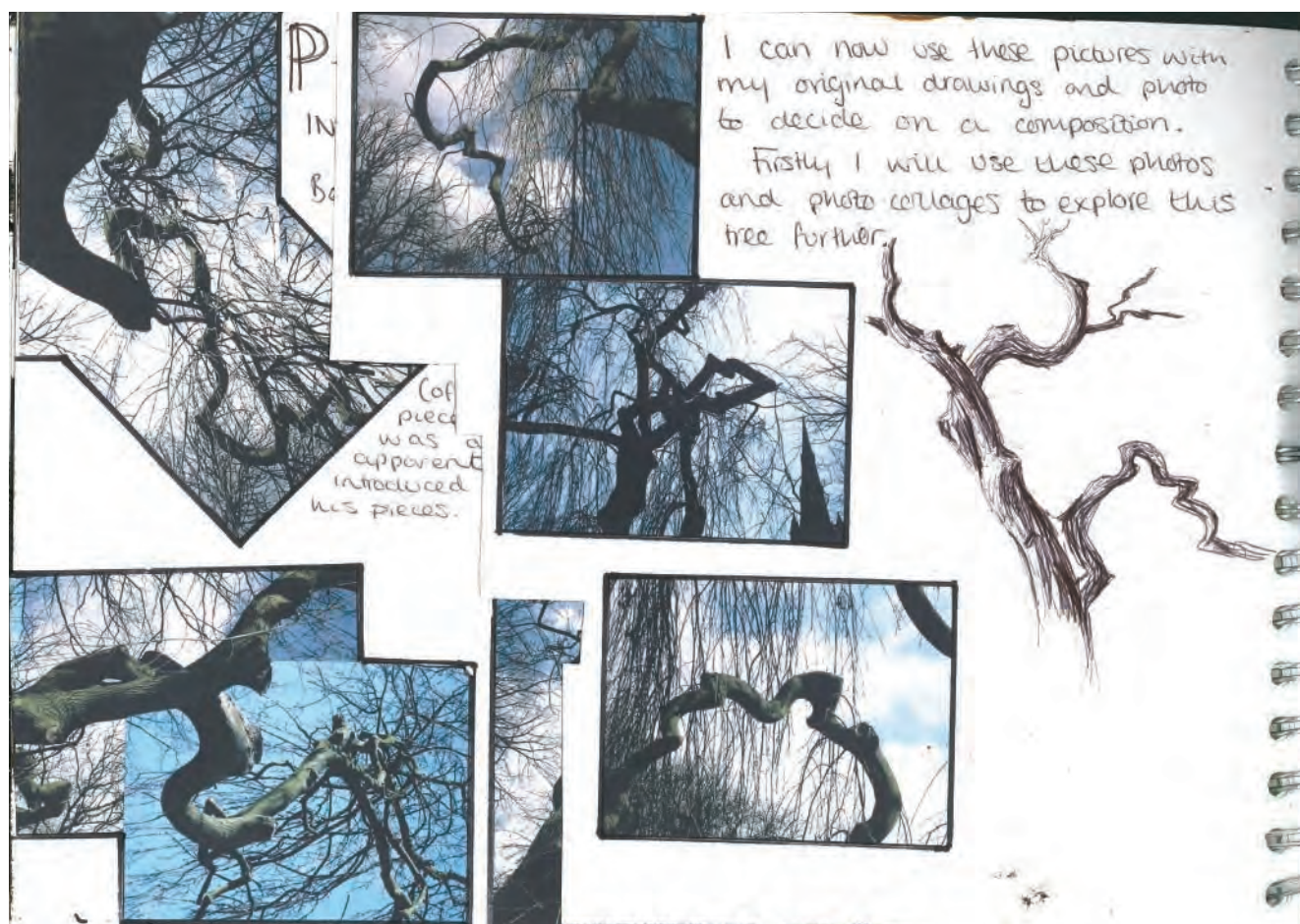
▲ This double page spread was presented for assessment as part of Jonathan's process portfolio, but it is in fact a collage from earlier journal work in several different formats: his photographs of owls, his preparatory sketches and stills from his stop animation.



▲ This investigative journal page could easily be scanned as a complete process portfolio screen.



- ▲ Taking photographs is an important part of all artists' work. Often we leave them in files without reflecting on how they will feed into studio ideas. Selecting and presenting photos in her journal has helped Sophia to think about how to compose her exhibition sculpture piece. On the next page she begins to reflect on these ideas and make preliminary sketches.

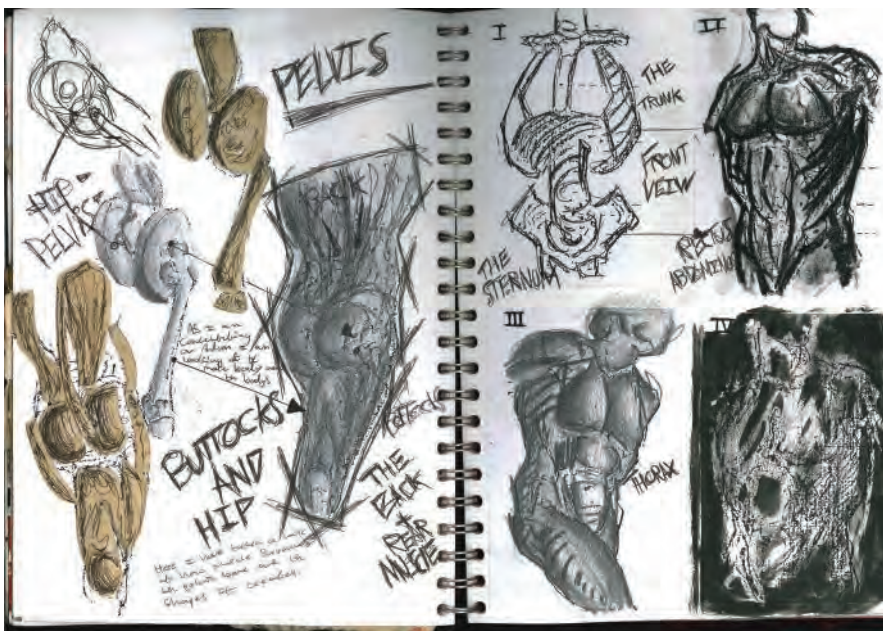
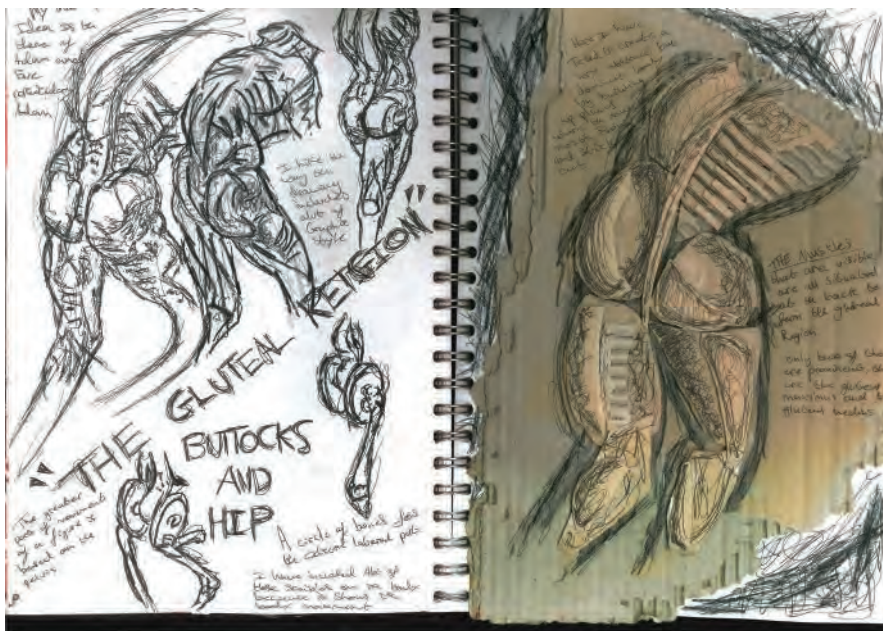


- ▲ Here is another example of evaluating photographs in a journal. Octavia had been looking at Mondrian's drawings of trees when she decided to see if she could develop abstract forms in a similar way. She has started to play with unexpected compositions. It is easy to see how with added captions this page can be scanned as part of the development of her exhibition pieces in the process portfolio.

- ▶ Carolyn is planning a textiles piece based on corsets for her exhibition so in her journal she has taken photos, chosen the ribbon colour and added reflections on corsets from a feminist perspective. Katie is preparing for a still-life painting that includes a glove, by drawing with different media. Both students can easily scan these pages for inclusion as assessed process portfolio screens. Free, creative approaches like this are the great advantage of the journal – it allows you to concentrate on the art ideas in any form you wish.

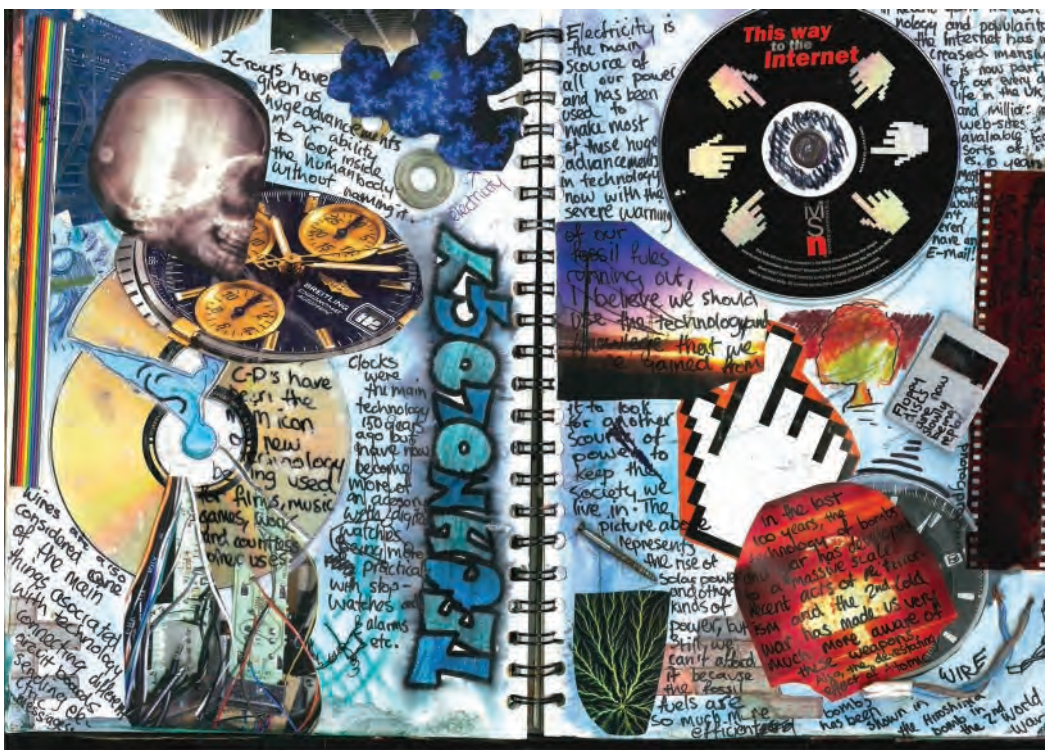


- ▶ These are focused experimental pages, mixing card collage with photocopies and researched vocabulary on human anatomy. These were produced in preparation for a sculpture, but Chris can now scan these pages for his process portfolio – he will just need to type some clearer explanatory notes and make links to the development of his exhibition piece.





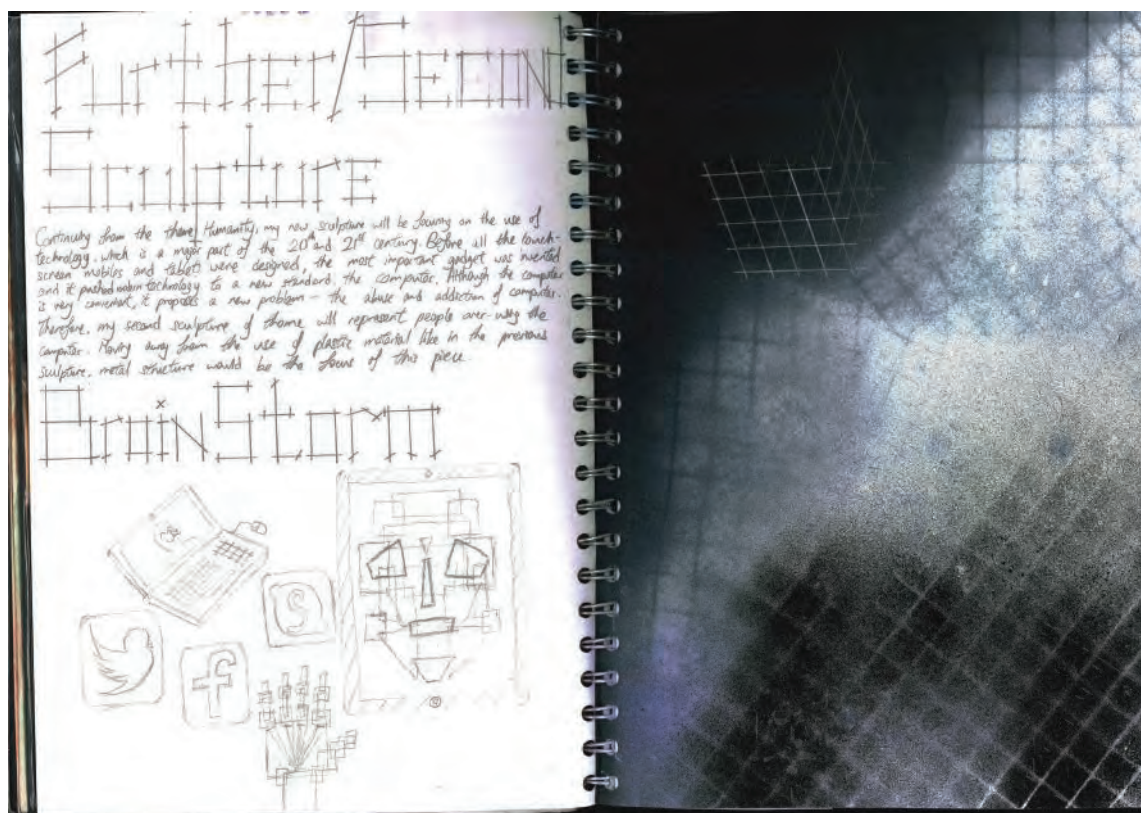
▶ Playing with materials is one of the most important activities for an artist. Not all of your pages will look as exciting as this one, but that is the point of the journal – it allows you to produce lots of material, then scan the best examples for the process portfolio. All that needs to be added is some text to contextualize this mixed media work with the development of studio ideas.



▶ Anthony's collage book is a studio tool, feeding his paintings and sculptures. The journal has allowed him to work free from concerns about presentation or assessment, although he has added notes so this is a resource for writing about his art later too.

Linking the journal with the exhibition

The most obvious link between the journal and your exhibition is that in the journal you will be preparing to write your curatorial statement for the exhibition and developing your connecting ideas. To do this well you will need to record every day in the studio as well as on museum visits. However, far more important than this is the learning that takes place through your journal which will be the foundation for resolved works.



▲ Anson is developing a second outcome from an earlier sculpture idea – his notes record this and will be useful when he explains the concepts in his curatorial statement. Below these he sketches some first ideas, while on the right he experiments with how he might use spray and stencil in this work. These journal pages are essentially exhibition preparation, but could well be part of his process portfolio.



Gallery Spaces and Interior Features...

Our World Through Art!
 "Our World Through Art" presents a changing selection from Leicester's permanent collection of artworks from the 15th to the 21st century. Originating in the 1880's the art collections have grown to encompass paintings, sculpture and works on paper by artists of local, national and international significance. Therefore this gallery features a wide selection of both old and new, classical and contemporary which is reflected in the interior style of the room. The style is both classical and modern: natural light from the glass roof creating an airy atmosphere but is also teamed with artificial spotlights. The ceilings are extremely high and the room large and rectangular which allows the viewer to stand in the centre of the space and look at the art of time line of artwork. The detailing is shown on the ceiling around the window with bright blue and gold gilding which reflects the classical detail of the gallery. At the end there is a large stage and a piano which suggests a leisurely purpose to the gallery.

Features...
 The spaces were temporary in 1910. The appreciation of art and developing public collections and collecting in the UK. The interior of the gallery is very much influenced by this collection, shown through the clear white wash walls and wooden floors reflecting a modern atmosphere. There is a very minimalist feel to the gallery with selective artworks featured, instead of huge ornate hung close together, with some walls either dedicated to one large painting. The light is artificial with spotlights hung from the ceiling which appear checked in a contemporary fashion. Furthermore the glass facades in the building reflect the contemporary nature of the exhibition and gallery space.

First Floor
Ground Floor

- ▲ Kitty has thought about the curation of an exhibition in Leicester City Art Gallery. Her photo of a group of paintings will help her to consider how she arranges the paintings in her own exhibition. The ground plan, the shots of the lighting and of the overall space are a purposeful consideration of how an audience experiences art in a public space, making this very good preparation for her curatorial statement.



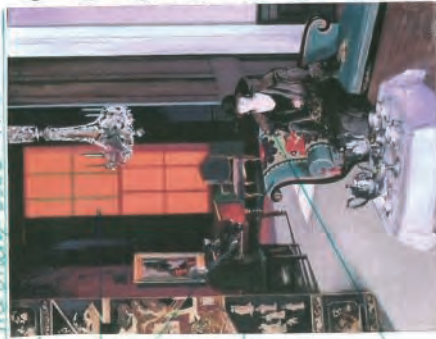
- ◀ Remember that sometimes your journal is just a sketchbook. Antonia is preparing for her exhibition paintings of the life model and here she uses contour lines to capture the dynamism of movement. Ella has used her small notebooks to doodle – it is easy to imagine these sketches as part of a process portfolio page.

Interiors in other artists' work

interesting visual contrasts.

↑
 dominance of vertical lines but more formal work in foreground and Chardin-like strong vertical lines inspired by Japanese prints? blocks of colour and screens.

'Interior, The Orange Blind' 1928
 Francis Bacon



Strong & vibrant use of red and green. ↳ jarring

elaborate interior environment

Woman appears to be waiting as the viewer to sit. She is depicted with no facial features

she sits alone, awkward as man in background playing piano. ↳ a normally welcoming scene, but her usual atmosphere - as if she has been waiting for us

critic can waiting for client? colour odd tension.

series of paintings also known as 'Camden Town murders' people suspect Sitter to be the famous 'Jack the Ripper' who committed a series of murders of prostitutes in Camden in 1888.

'Mornington Crescent nude, Centre, June' 1907
 Walter Sickert



dark colour palette. Still elements of red are given → skip with the two other works on facing page. no facial features. may be racial overtones. looks as if she were in a room → suggest at the time to be a client's welcome / welcome when initially missing that, much more relaxed or less formal. But viewpoint adds element of voyeur. we look down on her. she seems aware of our presence. become a voyeur sexual or intimate.



'Figure in an Interior' Mary Godwin (1817-1869)

painting technique - ultra saturated colour. Bold and vibrant, thick → up slightly confused about where to look → focus point = her white shirt

▶ Eleanor is developing her exhibition around her interest in interior spaces, which links to her comparative study. On these pages she has used subject-specific vocabulary prompted by the paintings of Vuillard and the Camden town group. This will be useful when she writes about her own art-making.