

Portfolio Guidelines - Illustration BFA 2020

Students often ask what faculty reviewers look for in a portfolio. The faculty do not specify the particular contents of student portfolios; we believe students should make independent artistic and professional decisions. However, the following questions, principles, and ideas may help as you select examples of your work and prepare your portfolio for presentation.

Skills: What are your strongest abilities? How does your portfolio showcase the best of what you can do? Successful illustrators are recognized for the distinctive, individual qualities of their work. One of the primary assets of an illustrator is the ability to draw well. Good drawing is clear, perceptive, sensitive and aesthetically appealing. Draw from life and observation as well as your imagination. Class assignments can help you develop and refine your skills. Students are not expected to be masters of every artistic medium, but it can be valuable to show work that manifests good craftsmanship and emerging skill in one or more artistic mediums—watercolor, gouache, acrylic, oil, printmaking or digital. Include examples of your work that feature your most recognizable artistic skills.

Ideas: Do you have interesting perspectives to share? Original stories to tell? How do you communicate your thoughts and beliefs with pictures? What kinds of themes, concepts, or narratives does your work deal with? What does your artwork express about you, your experiences, ideals, and the way you think? While understanding and solving real-world visual problems are important parts of professional illustration practice, the best ideas often start out as rough sketches, creative experiments, or sketchbook doodles. Share your sketchbook so we can get a feel for your creative process and concepts that might still be in development. You may use photographs for reference or other artists' work for inspiration when you create, but your portfolio should give precedence to your own

original artwork instead of master copies, fan art, copies of photos or other artists' work. Derivative works such as these can be useful exercises for learning, but they have little capacity to reveal your unique ideas. Include examples that showcase your most interesting ideas.

Aesthetics: What are your visual tastes and preferences? Do you have a knack for appealing shapes, compelling compositions, or pleasing color harmonies? Does your work have a distinctive look, feel, or artistic voice? Successful illustrators understand and apply principles of design to interest, inform, and inspire viewers. Through research and practice, they develop ways of creating images that appeal to the senses of their audiences. An important part of the portfolio review is to exercise your ability to discern

and determine which of your pieces are better—more interesting or aesthetically appealing—than others. As such, students are encouraged to make portfolio selections on your own, in consultation with trusted peers, rather than asking the faculty to provide direction. Include examples of your work that reveal your sense of aesthetic design.

Presentation: Professional presentation is another key to success as a professional illustrator. How do you photograph your artwork and edit your images to make them attractive, appealing, and faithful to the original? There are some good, free resources online that can help. Capture images on a flatbed scanner or with a high-quality digital camera. Large format scanners and digital cameras are available for student use in the Media Center at the Harold B. Lee Library (HBLL). Make sure your work is fully and evenly lighted, and your camera is in focus. Consider shooting artwork outside on a cloudy

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day, or indoors near a large window for even distribution of light. Watch for hotspots, glare, or cast shadows falling across your images. Use a tripod and place the camera centered and perpendicular to the artwork to avoid distortion. If you must shoot your artwork with a mobile phone, take care not to cast a shadow with your body. Crop images to exclude everything beyond the border of the artwork. Adjust your images for presentation with appropriate levels of brightness, contrast, and clarity. Show that you care about your work and respect yourself as an artist by preparing your portfolio with thoughtful consideration for quality presentation.

Sketchbook: An illustrator's sketchbook is a record of the creative process. It may include very rough preliminary sketches, observational drawings from life, thumbnail sketches, creative experiments, notes, scraps and doodles. Sketchbooks are not expected to be carefully curated works of art in and of themselves. Rather, they function as creative laboratories where it is safe to make mistakes and messes because these are expected, even necessary parts of the process. Interesting ideas and even beautiful drawings may emerge from the chaos of an illustrator's sketchbook, but sketchbooks mainly function as a practice space and proving ground for developing creative work.

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