

Illustration Pre-BFA Portfolio Guidelines

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

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 mediums—watercolor, gouache, acrylic, oil, printmaking or digital. Include examples of your work that prominently feature your best *artistic skills*.

Ideas: Do you have original stories to tell? Interesting perspectives to share? How do you communicate your thoughts and beliefs in pictures? What themes, concepts, or narratives does your work seek to express? What does your work say about you, your experiences, or the way you think? While understanding and solving real-world visual problems are important aspects of illustration practice, the best ideas often start out as rough sketches, creative experiments, or simple doodles. 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 can be useful exercises for learning, but they have limited capacity to reveal your original thoughts. Include creative examples that showcase your interesting *ideas*.

Aesthetics: What are your visual tastes and preferences? Do you have a penchant for appealing shapes, compelling compositions, or pleasing color palettes? Does your work have a distinctive look, feel, or aesthetic voice? Successful illustrators understand and apply principles of design to attract, interest, inform and inspire viewers. Through research and practice, they create images that appeal to the visual senses. An important skill to develop is the ability to discern which of your pieces are more successful than others. As such, students are encouraged to make your own portfolio selections in consultation with trusted peers, with limited direction from faculty. Remember to include examples of your work that reveal your sense of *aesthetic design*.

Presentation: Another key to success as an illustrator is professional presentation. How do you photograph your artwork and edit the images to make them attractive, clear, and true to the original? Some free resources online can help. Capture images with a scanner or high-quality digital camera. Large format scanners and cameras are available for student use at the Media Center in the Harold B. Lee Library (HBLL). Try to light your work brightly and evenly, with your camera in focus. Consider shooting artwork outside on a cloudy day, or indoors near a large window. Watch out for shadows, glare, and hotspots in the lighting. Use a tripod to place the camera centered and perpendicular to the artwork to avoid distortion. If you must use a mobile phone, take care not to cast shadows on the artwork with your body. Adjust your images with appropriate levels of brightness, contrast, and clarity. Crop the artwork just slightly inside the border edge. Show that you care about your work and regard yourself as a respectable artist by preparing your portfolio with thoughtful consideration for *presentation*.

Sketchbook: An illustrator's sketchbook is a document of the creative process. It may include rough preliminary sketches, thumbnail sketches, observational drawings from life, visual experiments, notes, scraps and doodles. Sketchbooks are not meant 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—these are expected, even necessary parts of the process. Interesting ideas and beautiful drawings may be captured in the sketchbook, but it should mainly function as an incubator or proving ground for creative work. At least one of your sketchbooks should feature assignments and preliminary work from DESIL 101 Drawing & Composition. To give the faculty a sense of your creative exploration, experiments, and ideas in the process of development, include a *sketchbook*.

