

Course sample

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Painting 2:

Exploring Concepts



Level HE5 – 60 CATS

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Times are given here as a guideline: you may want to spend a lot more. All your research and learning log work is included in the timings.

Total time 600 hours
Approximate time in hours page

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Look at these projects at the start of the course. This series of projects should be approached concurrently with the other work you do on this course. You need to agree submission dates for these projects with your tutor.

Although Autumn comes first here, start with the project from the season that is present when you begin the course. If you live in a climate that doesn't have four clear seasons, decide with your tutor on an alternative approach: for example projects based on different light or weather conditions.

At least one of your projects should experiment with abstraction.

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Introduction

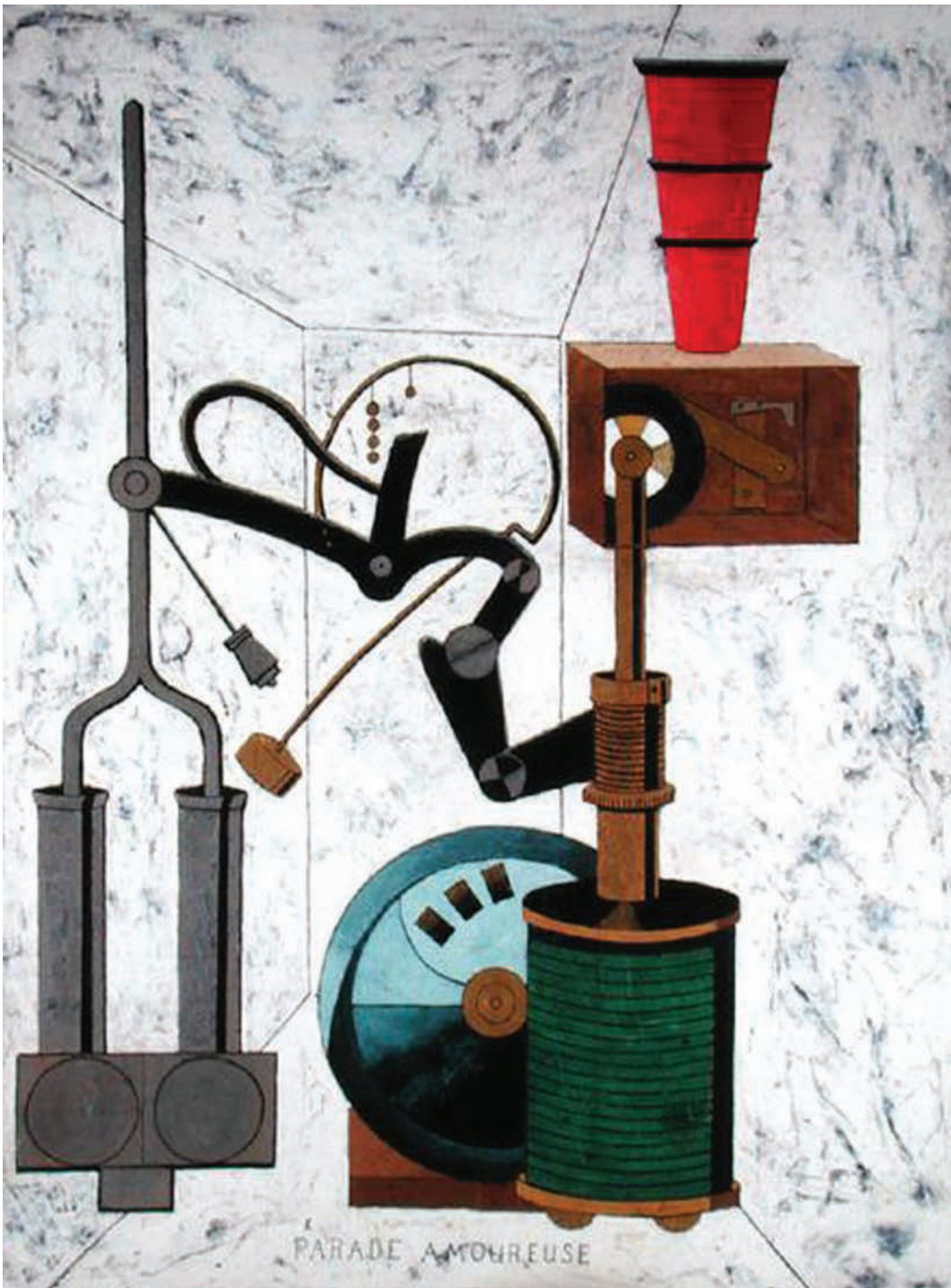
Welcome to this second level OCA course **Exploring Concepts**, which is the equivalent to participating at second year degree level of a Fine Art course and completing half a year of study. This course is recommended for those who take their artistic development seriously, and have a strong desire to improve their results. The course provides a framework that will challenge even an experienced artist. However, it also provides the flexibility for the less experienced to experiment and grow, and practice a breadth of techniques and approaches to painting. Make sure you look at Part six first. You need to work on this in parallel with the other sections of the course.

Throughout this course you will work through a range of projects and explore new approaches to artistic concepts. The course will push you to consider your artistic strengths and preferences, and requires you to trial a wide range of perspectives on art: from the very precise and detailed, through realistic figurative painting, and then the exploration of themes such as landscape and the figure and finally to exploring seminal 20th-century movements in art, that challenged the traditional conceptual basis of art from the Renaissance onwards. The course also presses you to look at the work of others and learn from it. All art is produced in a context, and so must yours be. This course delves into the whole of the history of art in order to provide references for you that will illuminate your artistic development. It is important that you see this course as a beginning, and that you go away and dig deeper to find out more about those artists and art movements that fire your own personal development as an artist. This is one reason why keeping a learning log is so important. Your ideas will inevitably develop as you look at the art of others and carry out the projects and exercises in this course. You must document this development in your log so that your tutor (and assessors if you wish to gain credits for the course) can see what your thinking process has been. It is also important that you demonstrate through your log what you learn from other contemporary artists, exhibitions that you see, and from looking at information about the art of the past.

You are encouraged to use the internet to carry out the research you are asked to do throughout this course, as well as make good use of books and libraries, and to keep your learning log as an online blog, not just for the convenience of your tutor to review your work, but also so that other students can see what you are doing and compare notes. However, this is not a requirement and you will not lose marks if you decide to keep a paper based log. Make use of the OCA forum to discuss work with others on this course or other painting courses. You may find useful hints and tips from others online. Don't forget to review the OCA guide to *Keeping Sketchbooks and Learning Logs* for extra tips.

The number of hours assigned to this course is 600. How you spread your time is really up to you. You may find your interest is much greater in one section than another. The guidelines for spending time on each section are just that: guidelines. The more time you put in the better.

Finally, do consider gaining credits for the work you have done on this course. Even if your aim is not to gain a degree, going for formal assessment will ensure you have a good focus on your course and you will notch up credits that are worth something wherever you go.



Parade Amoureuse Francis Picabia (1879-1953)

Exploring Concepts

Part one: Painting in detail



Still Life with Fish Platter Willem van Aelst (1627-83)

Introduction: Painting in detail

One of the issues you may be considering in your own art practice is the extent to which you should paint detail in your artworks. So far, your work may have taken a broad approach and focused on the major visual features of the subject. At times, however, you may want to include more detail, or the subject may suggest a more detailed approach. This does not have to mean painstaking detail made in a tight way. Often the merest indication of an object you are painting gives an idea of how it looks, whereas when you try to add more precision and detail you may end up with a work that looks less, not more, realistic.

In this project you will explore the stage in painting beyond 'indicating' an object: being able to translate the most detailed aspects of the subject into paint. Compare the landscape in Stanley Spencer's painting 'Noah's Field, Cookham' with Ivon Hitchens' painting 'autumn Trees'. Spencer paints twigs, leaves and blades of grass, while Hitchens sweeps in a tree with a couple of gestures with his brush.



Noah's Field, Cookham Stanley Spencer (1891-1959)



Autumn Trees Ivon Hitchens (1893-1979)

In this Part you will investigate three different stylistic approaches – still life, surrealism and photorealism – and you will see how some artists have tackled detail. These approaches may provide stimulus and ideas for your own painting.

Seasonal assignment

Whilst you are doing the work covered in this assignment, remember to work on the relevant seasonal painting at the same time. You should be spending about half your time on the seasonal work and half the time on each assignment.

“In painting, detail for the sake of itself is useless. It must have relevance to the whole.”

Ken Danby

Project: Still life

Still life paintings in the past were often 'virtuoso pieces' in which the artist demonstrated their skill in depicting objects which were particularly difficult to capture in paint – polished silver, reflections in glass, or flowers in close-up. For example, 17th-century Dutch still life paintings, which were much admired in their time, were certain to find buyers. However, they were more than artist's showpieces, they were experimental works in which the artists attempted to solve specific problems. (In addition, these artists were exploring new subject matter of a more domestic nature beyond traditional dramatic subjects.) In 'Still Life with the Drinking-Horn of the St. Sebastian Archers' Guild, Lobster and Glasses' by Willem Kalf, the artist studied the effects of light on reflecting surfaces. The highly detailed painting of a lobster, a lemon with a curl of peel spiralling from it and the gleam of glass, horn and polished metal, contrasting with the woven pattern of a folded Persian carpet, is extremely skilled. (Look at the original in the National Gallery, London, if you can.)



Still Life with the Drinking-Horn of the St. Sebastian Archers' Guild, Lobster and Glasses Willem Kalf (1622-93)



Still Life Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1699-1779)

The French artist Jean-Baptiste Chardin chose more modest subjects for his paintings such as kitchen utensils, fruit, vegetables, game and fish, which he depicted in a straightforward, down-to-earth way.

Research point

Look for still life paintings from the last 100 years to see how artists approach detail. Georgia O'Keefe's flower paintings are beautiful examples of this. Chaim Soutine often painted the less appealing side of life.

"Trivial words can provide the text for a beautiful song, so trivial objects can make a perfect picture."

Ernst Gombrich

Exercise: Small object in detail

What to do:

Put a small natural object such as a shell or a whole or part of a vegetable or a flower on a white surface. Look at it close up and carefully, as if through a microscope. Draw it in every detail using fine pens or brushes and with attention to line, tone and form. Use a restricted palette and try to fill the page with your detailed drawing.



Pear and Shells Tomar Levine (Contemporary Artist)

Exercise: Longer still life painting

What to do:

Arrange a group of shells, pebbles, vegetables or flowers, or other objects such as musical instruments or gardening tools, on a table or other surface where a close up view is possible. The background colour should be neutral and simple.

Try to paint directly from the group, though you will need to make some preliminary drawings to determine the best composition. Pay attention to detail and keep to a restricted palette. Focus on perspective, light source, viewpoint, line and texture and how the objects relate to each other in the compositional space.



Carafe with Apples, Grapes and Lace
Joan Thewsey (Contemporary Artist)

Still life check and log

- Was it possible to see as much detail in the group of objects as in the single object?
- How did you decide which object or parts of objects to bring into focus?
- How did the restricted palette and concentration on line, form and tone affect your work?
- Were you looking from the side, above or below? How did this effect what you painted?
- Were you aware of light source and the difference between natural light and artificial light?
- How did this affect the objects?