

“10 + EXTEND”: how can we teach painting to students who already think they know what painting is?

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Introduction

Paint is the medium of choice for many new art students, often through familiarity, especially as painting is a cheap and accessible form of teaching art in compulsory education. To first year students this is in contrast to the majority of ‘new’ subjects and media in other areas of fine art such as sculpture, print, digital media. The challenge for the first year BA tutor, therefore, is to construct a painting programme that questions existing preconceptions whilst not directly undermining students’ previous formative experiences with paint, nor their enthusiasm for this, their chosen area, when launching into their BA.

This paper outlines a series of workshops developed over a number of years introducing painting on the BA Fine Art course at Norwich University of the Arts (NUA). We are indebted to our colleague Simon Grangerⁱ who has worked on the first year programme for many years until recently moving to work with Year Two students. He created the general shape of the first year delivery in painting that is updated and amended on a year-to-year basis.

The Fine Art course at NUA has no defined pathways. However, it operates on the premise that technical and conceptual skills need to be taught in tandem. In the first term of Year One students rotate through four workshops entitled Image, Edit, Copy and Object (principally covering painting, new media, print and sculpture). Thus, the first encounter with paint that students have on the course is during the Image workshop that all first year students undertake.

NUA Students

Approximately 80 students enrol on the BA Fine Art course at NUA; within each cohort there will be a range of abilities and experience, from those with little painting knowledge and confidence to the overly confident or ‘knowing’ student who may have certain learnt methods. Therefore, we aim for variety within each brief, providing different, relevant types of learning experiences to engage each individual student throughout the project(s).

Team-teaching

All first year workshops in Painting are team-taught with the obvious benefit of offering varying perspectives from different members of staff resulting in students quickly associating the staff facilitating the Image workshop with painting. As all NUA Fine Art lecturers have an established art practice, staff can also introduce to students the idea that painting might be employed in different ways, exemplified in their own art practices. This is further reinforced as, independently of the four rotated workshops, students have a personal tutor for regular individual tutorials. Regardless of studio discipline, each member of staff is able to offer ideas, knowledge and strategies. Thus, the specialist skills or concerns around painting are augmented by an overall awareness of fine art practices. These are also strengthened through the student’s exposure to the other workshops in conjunction with Image during the first term rotations through Edit, Object and Copy.

TERM ONE

Image is a four-day assignment focusing on low-tech, handmade image-making using painting and collage. It begins with a slide presentation of constantly updated images, mostly by contemporary artists, emphasizing the appropriation and manipulation of photographic sources. Students are made aware of present-day art practices and concerns and, where possible, examples relate to current exhibitions students are encouraged to visit. Whilst we might include key historical examples, the intention is not to show a chronological development and it is crucial that these images are varied so that students are not led into a way of working or

one particular style. Using this approach allows students to filter and select a particular framework to support their developing ideas and concerns.

During the workshop students create a series of images using collage and acrylic paint on board, exploring the construction of illusion and depiction of space by the observation of tone, and the transformation of images by cropping and montage. The importance of uncertainty, speculation and metamorphosis opened up through process and the use of simple formal rules is deliberately emphasized. For the remainder of the week students develop these ideas and processes independently, through image-making in their studio.

Students bring to the workshop a set of black and white, and colour images chosen independently which can be very disparate: this is encouraged. From one of these printed images students select a detail that appeals to them using a grey card mask/cropping tool; an eye, a jacket collar etc. They enlarge this small detail using paint to fill the entire rectangle of their given board, painting loosely with a large brush, making a series of approximations. They are urged to be bold, to not worry about the 'quality' of their painting, and to be mechanical, almost like a camera, analysing shapes and amounts of black, white and grey. Early in the painting process they are asked to stand back from the painting: is it the recognisable image they envisaged, or has there been a transformation, a degree of abstraction?

Students then make a small number of collages joining together black and white, and colour photographs to create contrast, visual surprise and new forms. They can exchange photographic images or start to hybridize their collage working with pieces from other students.

Taking these finished collages, students use their masking tool to crop and isolate sections to yield the most exciting paintings, whether 'recognisable' or deliberately ambiguous. Choosing sections that feature both black and white, and colour photographic elements they paint onto a primed board, again using large brushes at first to work rapidly, filling the whole rectangle; then smaller brushes once the image has become 'established'.

Each of these paintings is made quickly - in less than an hour. This is useful for a number of reasons: it dispels the idea that the longer a piece takes the better it is; it allows students to push through more activities thereby sampling alternative methods or techniques for developing images; it prevents students from agonising over a piece at the expense of beginning another and, finally, helps to place all students at a similar level, regardless of their prior experience with paint.

Some students may already think of themselves as painters having developed techniques on previous courses. The experience of painting more quickly, of having to abstract images using a cropping tool, of working within very precise and didactic parameters – using only large brushes, using only black and white paint, and so on – means that these students are unable to revert to pre-established practices. Our principle is to expose them to alternative tactics for image-making: it is crucial that students know early in the course that there is always more to learn about paint.

Students now have opportunities to work independently for the remainder of this four-day activity making a series of images in colour or monochrome using painting or other two-dimensional media on paper, card, wood, canvas, or any other surface. They are asked to further explore the ideas, techniques and materials from the one-day task creating and manipulating images, cropping, enlarging, reversing and inverting, together with mixing, splicing and re-joining images in order to transform their source material; generating new form.

TERM TWO: "10 + EXTEND" Painting induction

"I have to destroy the painting I know to make the one I don't know yet." Jacqueline Humphriesⁱⁱ

After rotating through all four workshops in the first term students are asked to opt for in-depth inductions in one of the following: Painting, Sculpture, Print and Hybrid. In the Painting induction students complete the "10 + EXTEND" project which consists of four intensive workshops focused on painting processes and strategies: Paintings of Paintings, Newton's Tones, The Rules of Abstraction?! and Model Worlds. Students also complete the continuous project "10", plus two in-depth practical methods and materials demonstrations.

As with the Image sessions in the first term, each of the four Painting induction workshops is relatively didactic at the beginning, building incrementally so that students develop the confidence to take their painting further through this four week period allowing them to add to existing knowledge or to start afresh. Through one-to-one tutorials, group crits and individual reflection, students address a host of concerns.

“10”

Throughout this induction, when students are not in timetabled workshops, they are asked to make 10 paintings that must adhere to the ‘rules’, or characteristics, listed below.

1. A painting visibly including letters, words, numbers or instructions
2. A painting that is ephemeral
3. A painting made on a non-art surface (i.e. not canvas, fine art paper or new wood)
4. A painting featuring more than one visual language or style
5. A painting of an ending
6. A painting consisting of two or more separate components or surfaces
7. A painting with a glitch (interference, disruption, interruption)
8. A painting made using one or more non-art substance as paint or with at least one object attached to it
9. A painting made with pressure
10. A painting in which the frame or framing device plays an integral role and is non-rectangular

Students are encouraged to twist these rules to accommodate as much of their own content and interests as possible, avoiding any repetition. They are likely to gain most by departing radically from what they’ve done before. They can continue with previous themes and working methods or alternatively treat the task as a ‘holiday’ from their usual practice. All paintings are photographed, especially those that are ephemeral to get students used to documenting.

As with Image the “10” project is introduced using a wealth of slides that offer a stimulating glimpse into the breadth and type of paintings that might give a range of contexts to their work. This again signals to students a certain ‘permission’ to explore and test the parameters of painting.

Social scientist Donald Schön reinforced the value of practice by stressing the importance of understanding and knowledge from any given field being tested through reflective practice. Reflective practice or ‘reflection-in-action’ is a means of deconstructing the often-dichotomized relationship between academic and practice-based knowledge, to demonstrate problem-solving and how this can be augmented through reflection.ⁱⁱⁱ Throughout the course, students complete a Reflective Journal in which they question decisions made. For example, in the 10 paintings, why were some elements on the list easier to respond to? When did they take risks and surprise themselves? Do the paintings feel like their paintings even after following a list created by someone else? These questions allow them to evaluate the process and should start to inform the way they make new imagery. Paintings are photographed during their making as well as on completion.

Workshop One – Appropriation

Alongside the completion of the “10” project, students participate in four practical workshops. Paintings of Paintings introduces concerns relating to processes, themes and current issues or ways of working within contemporary painting. During this workshop students explore the possibilities of copying, appropriating and transforming other artists’ paintings.

For many of these students, the thought of ‘copying’ may be quickly dismissed when related to both ideas and creativity. We aim to re-inform this understanding by giving the additional framework of the use of appropriation where it is relevant or useful to a student’s overriding concepts and aims. Through the image-heavy slide presentation, which sets the tone and context throughout the day, we demonstrate the normality of appropriation through examples and discussion.

In the brief for this one-day workshop we state:

Renaissance artists such as Cranach would produce multiple copies of commercially successful paintings, operating like small factories. Artists have always learnt from the best by copying (Rubens copied Titian) or have appropriated (Bacon taking his Popes from Velazquez); and faking is an infamous form of copying – passing an image off with a false identity. From Dadaism onwards, artists appropriated famous paintings for satirical or oppositional reasons (Duchamp's Mona Lisa LHOQQ; Warhol's Mona Lisa; David Salle including Gericault in his multi-image mix; Glenn Brown talking of his immense relief on making a painting that openly declared its source, rather than struggling to escape influence – confronting the impossibility of originality by brazen appropriation; Ged Quinn inserting anachronistic elements (tacky 1960s caravans) into Claude Lorrain-style idyllic landscapes.^{iv}

Working only in acrylic, students are asked to bring at least six reproductions of paintings from any era, they want to copy and transform; paper, not digital. We stress the importance of being fully engaged or perplexed by the original imagery chosen so they are more invested and challenged by their decisions throughout the day. Students are told this is a chance to learn from their favourite artists by imitating them; to pay homage to their heroes or heroines, or alternatively of 'bringing them down a peg'. They can complicate things by selecting reproductions of paintings that are themselves paintings of paintings; for example, Lichtenstein's painting of Matisse's painting of his own paintings in his studio; they could have many layers of copying and distancing.

During the Paintings of Paintings day, students begin by making an exact or altered copy of one of their reproductions. They are encouraged to work quickly through this first painting preventing those who like to work in painstaking detail from doing so, forcing them to focus on the ideas rather than the final finish. Secondly, they make an exact or altered copy of a detail of one of the reproductions using extreme cropping. Then, they start to insert details from one painting into another so that, for example, an image of their pet cat appears in a Constable landscape or Botticelli's Venus appears alongside Gerhard Richter's nude descending a staircase.

At the end of each of the workshops time is set aside to discuss and analyse the day's work and compare student responses. Working within the workshop environment, on crits or collaborative tasks, it is hoped that these community-building days also counteract more nervous students' tendencies to work at home. These sessions can also aid problem solving and form discursive peer groups outside the formal structure of the unit.

Workshop Two – Colour

New Stones - Newton's Tones is the second of the one-day sessions, inspired by Tony Cragg's 1979 scavenged plastic sculpture of the same title. It introduces the use of oil paint, consolidates a working knowledge of colour-mixing and exploits the colour possibilities of everyday objects. Its success depends on students bringing in a rich, imaginative and contrasting spectrum of objects, substances and materials chosen exclusively for their integral colour. Collectively, these objects are assembled into single-colour installations or still-lives around the room, all the red objects and surfaces together and so on. Students then paint by direct observation from one or more of these separate colour 'worlds'. The purity of these arrangements is then 'interfered' with; putting purple objects into yellow worlds and so on.

Students, some unfamiliar with the colour wheel, are quickly shown how to mix from primary colours in order to create a working conceptual model of colour usage. Other references include *Chromophobia*^v, Joseph Albers and Johannes Itten. In an additional, separate workshop dedicated to a practical demonstration of the properties of oil paint, pigments, binders, opacity and transparency, students have direct experience of mixing their own oil paint from pigments.

Workshop Three – Abstraction

The Rules of Abstraction?!^{vi} workshop provides a brief introduction to ideas and approaches associated with contemporary abstract painting, informed by its historical precedents. The workshop takes its name from

Matthew Collings' BBC4 programme *Rules of Abstraction* (2014), with Collings himself as a practitioner referencing usefully between past and present abstract painting. The workshop aims to explore what, if any, rules are associated with abstraction forming the basis for discussion with students: if so-called 'rules' have existed how have these been formed and should they be broken? Another accessible reference is the book *Painting Abstraction: New elements in abstract painting*^{vii}.

Referring to historical and contemporary examples, students consider how form, shape, surface, mark-making and composition can work together to produce abstract paintings. Related to this, the workshop seeks to consider the painting as an object, as well as the relationship between abstraction, formalism and pattern.

Students are each given three unique cardboard shapes to use throughout the day's activities. Initially, the shapes are used to produce two paintings using a reduced colour palette of either black and white or colours close to each other on the colour wheel. The first painting is in acrylic, the second in oil paint. Students are encouraged to think about how to use their shapes to create harmony and/or contrast, considering the relationship between the different parts, negative and positive space, hard-edged and looser, more painterly brushstrokes and so on.

Their third painting is one that overtly employs patterning, repetition or other decoration. In this painting they work on a larger scale thinking about how this enlargement affects the work and the viewer's experience of it. Students are encouraged to bring in additional surfaces on which to paint, either to make a larger composite work or as separate alternatives.

Workshop Four - Still Life/Model World

By Workshop Four, students have gained in confidence and are able to refer back to the 10 paintings which they are developing for the overall brief. As team-teachers we are encouraging links and extending learning to reinforce what they have already done, been shown or discussed, whilst being able to make suggestions for individual development. The studio is set up with shelves of varied dimensions placed at different locations and heights on the walls. Tables are dotted or 'staged' around the space, providing flat surfaces on which individual students will arrange their brought-in still lives.

Students are asked to:

Construct individual or collective variations on the classic still life, re-interpreting the proposition that objects arranged against backdrops can tell moral or allegorical stories or no stories at all. You could tell moral or allegorical stories through objects, echoing the sixteenth century Dutch still life painters with their lobsters and lemons denoting luxury, their skulls and snuffed candles symbolizing mortality, or Goya's Spanish still lives, red in tooth and claw; or create a miniature stage set/scenario with toy soldiers, models, figurines (Malcolm Morley, or Jake and Dinos Chapman's Hell)....^{viii}

They are also told that the success of the workshop will depend on their inventiveness and commitment in each bringing at least five objects they consider significant and two 'backdrops' (flattish sheets or planar material of some kind - paper, clothing, fabric, textile, metal, leather, plastic - minimum size A3) with which to create a table or wall-based model world/still life.

This final session is a way of saying these are the possibilities, now go and explore. It is time for us to stand back a little. Students are clearly now keen to start taking responsibility for choosing their own objects, materials, paints and arrangements and, as a response to previous limitations, are putting increased thought into their decisions and the overriding concept of what they are aiming to communicate.

"+ EXTEND"

For each of the four workshops, students are expected to further the ideas explored during the remainder of the week by making additional paintings. These extensions of the tutor-led group activities are in place to give students the opportunity to concentrate on any aspects of the exercises that were particularly crucial to their interests and to develop an understanding of their emerging practice. The group crit and summative discussion

at the end of the one-day workshops, as well as the introductory slide presentations for each session, offer further strategies and ideas.

Student Preconceptions

We have observed a number of commonly-held preconceptions by many students over the past few years, one being that if you can 'see' or think that a large amount of time has gone into a painting that means it is better. Another is the idea that painting has to be 'realistic' or that photorealism is somehow preferable to other types of painting. Through lectures prior to the practical work, through Experiential Learning^{ix} as evidenced through the above tasks and through discussions and mini-crits we try to dispel or challenge the ideologies that some students cling to. More importantly, we aim to facilitate new ways of working and thinking about future investigations and emerging practices.

We have set up conditions where a combination of new information is put into practice in these practical workshops: using Experiential Learning as an underpinning theory, ideally demonstrating to students that they are learning through their own individual experiences in the work they are producing and the ideas they are experimenting with. It is thus only possible, we believe, to progress if learning through doing/experience is included as part of a student's learning style.

Student feedback

Below is a sample of feedback received from students completing the first year projects in 2013-2014:

Beginning the course straight from A levels I learnt most from the workshops in my first year. I found the small lectures about each of the workshops, including artists, important as they allowed me to contextualise and question my practice. The main thing I learnt from Term One is that people's art practice can be really different and that I didn't need to feel intimidated by not having a go at everything.

Term Two helped form the foundations of my practice to date. I learnt the importance of basic professional skills such as priming boards in order to produce high quality work. Processes such as cropping, enlarging, reversing and pasting explored in the workshops help me question every decision I make in my own practice today. I found the 10 paintings project an amazing opportunity to break out of my comfort zone and it also allowed me to see how much work could be produced in a short period of time. Overall I think that the units formed a great basis to develop skills and knowledge.

Conclusion

In their first year, students are exposed to a variety of activities and range of briefs, both direct and open-ended, used in the painting workshops, complimented by the wealth of non-hierarchical images. We aim to support individual learning styles, enabling students to reflect on their learning and assessing adjustments in approaches and the suitability of these approaches to their growing concerns and ideas. Through the workshops' entirety, we implicitly reveal painting as a discursive area rather than presenting any set position, avoiding any explicit mode of practice. This approach, we believe, enables students to filter and select a particular framework for their own development.

The teaching style develops from the beginning of Term One to the end of Term Two. In Image and Workshop One it is fast-paced and fairly prescriptive, for example, determining which size brush for 'loosening up'. By Workshop Four, in Term Two, we have substantially stepped back to allow students to make their own decisions within the workshop brief, promoting growing autonomy whilst still providing discussion and an appropriate level of support^x.

By the end of Term 2, we aim to have equipped students with: a knowledge of a diversity of approaches, techniques and methods; a consideration of how painting can exist and be challenging and what they might

want to pursue within painting, a contextual framework to underpin their concerns. This knowledge allows them to go into their third term with ideas for a considered body of work.

During the development of workshop structures, the team agree on the importance of setting the scene for students by offering an overwhelming visual context at the beginning of the briefs/sessions exposing them to a wide variety of approaches to Painting, to not fix them too rigidly to one way of working or thinking. Consequently, students gain the insight that any approach is viable now having the tools to prepare themselves for more autonomous work, working towards their in-house assessed exhibitions at the end of Year One.

A new approach to Year 1 painting was needed due to the changing nature of applicants...a significant proportion of these were direct from A level (2011). Students had a less developed sense of fine art generally: consequently, the course team elected to challenge and develop students' notions across all four specialisms by increasing structured group teaching... Painting's basic properties will have been known by each student from an early age; the concern was to recontextualise and enhance students' understanding of painting's possibilities...

..We believed the students were missing broad contextual knowledge of contemporary painting and a sense that painting had a long, glorious and deeply problematic history and infinitely expanding future, both of which they would inevitably have to engage with. Additionally, they were missing an understanding of painting as a material practice and of painting's materiality as an inescapable part of its content and meaning.^{xi}

To conclude, we feel that this approach allows a diverse range of students entering the course with very varied levels of experience in painting a 'way in' to the subject that encourages freedom to experiment and take risks within a supportive structure. Feeder courses in schools and FE colleges are, to some extent, tied by their own curriculum and resource constraints which mean that many (but by no means all) first year BA students have a very limited knowledge and experience of painting. Our introductory workshops, framed by an awareness of contemporary painting practices, gradually open up a number of approaches from which students feel empowered to make informed choices about their own approach to painting.

Additional Information:

Since writing and delivering this Paper at "Teaching Painting: A Conference" in October 2015, our university-wide structure has developed allowing students to rotate through painting twice (instead of once) before deciding on a further three week 'Advanced' workshop starting in week 22/30 (Academic year 2015/16). Therefore, further to the described workshops in this Paper, a project brief with two new workshops has been devised for the second term. The first, Start to Finish: Your World, in which Year One students assemble a stretcher from beginning to end, uses a range of source materials which they directly relate to, to make a 42 x 30 cm painting. During the second workshop, Expanded Painting, after the contextual framework has been introduced, students work in pairs, with a wealth of fabric, tapes, wood, boards, and so on, along with several spaces to make their interpretation of expanded painting. This new structure then progresses into the previously described Term Three group exhibitions.

The content of these workshops was determined by working with Years Two and Three, and further identifying areas which needed addressing. The benefit of this extra content is in providing more specific skills and potential approaches for students who have opted for further knowledge in painting.



Figure 1: Painting by first year student at NUA for Image workshop
21cm x 30cm
Acrylic on board



Figure 2: Painting by first year student at NUA for the Abstraction workshop

42cm a 59cm
Oil paint on paper

ⁱ <http://www.nua.ac.uk/about/staff/simongranger/>

ⁱⁱ Godfrey, Mark, "Statements of Intent - The art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman and Charline Von Heyl" *ART FORUM*. Vol. 52, No.9. May 2014 p298. Originally cited from "Cecily Brown, Jacqueline Humphries," *Bomb*, Spring 2009, <http://bomb-magazine.org/article/3262/jacqueline-humphries>

ⁱⁱⁱ Schon, Donald *Reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action* New York: Basic Books 1983

^{iv} Granger, Simon, Horton, Sarah, Longworth-West, Sarah, *First Year BA2 Unit Brief*, Norwich University of the Arts. BA Fine Art. 2014-2015

^vBatchelor, David *Chromophobia*, London: Reaktion Books, 2000

^{vi} Collings, Matthew, *The Rules of Abstraction*, BBC Four, 2014.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04gv5kl>

^{vii} Nickas, Bob, *Painting Abstraction: New elements in abstract painting*, UK: Phaidon 2009

^{viii} Granger, Simon, Horton, Sarah, Longworth-West, Sarah, *First Year BA2 Unit Brief*, Norwich University of the Arts. BA Fine Art. 2014-2015

^{ix} Founded by David A. Kolb. *Kolb experiential learning model*, c1970

^x Daloz, Laurent, *Effective Teaching and Mentoring*, California, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986

^{xi} Extract from an interview with colleague Simon Granger, Lecturer, BA Fine Art, Norwich University of the Arts, 2016