



Cleveland Institute of Art
Creativity Matters

building a
**great
portfolio**

CIA



You're beginning to see yourself as an artist—and to see yourself in art school.

We're here to help you take the next steps by creating a portfolio that reflects your best work and your potential for growth.

Cleveland Institute of Art admissions counselors can review your portfolio before you submit, suggest ways to strengthen it, and discuss the application process.

Why do you need a portfolio?

A strong portfolio can position you for acceptance into an art and design school, and may qualify you for scholarships.

At CIA, our admissions committee will evaluate the work in your portfolio for:

- technical abilities
- conceptual problem-solving skills
- how you use your chosen mediums.

We want you to succeed. Consider scheduling an appointment with one of our admissions counselors for a preliminary portfolio review. You can visit our campus, get helpful feedback on your current work, and be inspired as you build your best possible portfolio.

Can't visit? Preliminary reviews can be done by Google Hangouts or Skype, too.

cia.edu/visit

cia.edu/portfoliodays



We'd love to
see you at one
of our portfolio
days across the
country.

Liane Engstrom's drawing conveys an understanding of color and demonstrates strong drawing skills.



Observational drawings, like this one by Kinsei Pouilot, can include still life, gesture, figure drawing, portraits, or projects involving perspective skills.

What to include in your portfolio

Your portfolio should be a selection of your best 12 to 20 pieces of art. Fewer than 12 doesn't allow you to show the breadth of your skills; more than 20 may dilute your overall portfolio submission.

At least four of those pieces should be observational drawings. Sketchbook pages are also encouraged.

Make an effort not to include work copied from photographs or other published work. We want to see how you think.



Organizing your portfolio

Approach your portfolio as a visual story about yourself.

Relationships in color, media, composition and concept can link one piece to another and help your portfolio flow cohesively.

Feature your strongest pieces created in your junior and senior year, either in or out of school. In addition to the drawings, you may include works in other media: paintings, prints, photographs, sculpture, animations, illustrations, video, clay, metal or glass.

Documenting your work

You don't need sophisticated equipment to photograph your work. A camera that can take clear, focused photographs at a high resolution (300 dpi or higher) will work.

If you are scanning your work:

If you plan to scan 2D images using a digital scanner, be sure you scan the image in at a high resolution (300 dpi), and that your art is lying completely flat against the scanner window so the captured image is sharp. Use photo editing software to correct brightness and color and to crop.

If you are photographing your work: Take your time and be sure your images are sharp and evenly lit. Avoid harsh highlights and shadows. And it's OK to crop your images.

Go to cia.edu/portfolio for helpful videos on photographing 2D and 3D work.



Combine two views of an object into a single image, like Will Johnson's image of his sculpture.



A group of students are working on a large-scale chalk drawing on a wall. The drawing depicts several figures, including a central figure with a long staff and a figure in the upper left. The students are using chalk to add details to the drawing. One student in a red shirt is at the top, another in a blue hoodie is in the middle, and others are visible in the background.

CIA's Pre-College program offers two-week residential courses for students in grades 9–11 that can help you build your portfolio, and earn college credit at the same time.

Pre-College
July–August 2019
cia.edu/precollege



Strengthening your portfolio

Drawing is an important component to your portfolio. No matter where your career interests lie, you will sharpen your perception and visual thinking skills with regular drawing practice.

There are many ways to work on your creative skills. Classes at your high school or community center can expose you to new techniques and fresh thinking. There are even online groups where you can share your work and exchange ideas.

Don't be afraid to share and request feedback with other artists. Be open to both compliments and suggestions for improvement.

Keeping a sketchbook is the best tool to build your portfolio.

Colleges want to see how your ideas evolve, and you'll appreciate seeing the growth in your work, too.



Drawings don't have to be tightly rendered. A gestural drawing, like Grace Bohlen's, quickly demonstrates her thinking.

Need some inspiration?

These prompts are simply a starting point for your creativity. Modify any of these ideas to fit your interests and curiosity:

- Select something from an old assignment or sketchbook page and remake it. Can you make it better? Create a painting from an old drawing? Change the scale? Render it in three dimensions? Focus in on a small part of it? Use your original idea to kick-start your imagination.
- Redesign the cover of your favorite book.
- Create an artwork that speaks to an issue that's important to you. Maybe it's a poster about an organization you care about. A painting about a social issue. Design a product to solve a problem you've experienced.
- Create something in response to your favorite poem or song lyric. It could be a typographic experiment, or you might represent it abstractly.

This observational drawing
by Elias Hatzandonis offers
a sense of visual style.





Alisha Potter '21

Portfolio checklist

Incoming Freshmen

- Include at least 12 pieces of artwork (no more than 20)
- At least four of those pieces should be observational drawings. Sketchbook pages are also encouraged.

How to submit your portfolio

You will upload your digital images as part of your application.

cia.edu/apply



Joshua Benjamin '21

Transfer Students

If possible, include these preferred elements to help us determine your transfer placement:

- 2–3 examples of 2D work
- 2–3 examples of 3D work
- 3–4 examples of digital work (using Freehand, Illustrator, InDesign, or Photoshop)
- 4–6 examples of work pertaining to the major you wish to enter
- 4 observational drawings are required.

A photograph showing several people from behind, looking up at a large, translucent white fabric structure that hangs from the ceiling like a tent or canopy. The fabric is draped and billows, creating a sense of depth and texture. In the background, through the fabric, a colorful mural or painting on a wall is visible. The people appear to be in a workshop or studio setting, possibly involved in the creation or installation of the fabric.

As you explore
pursuing a career in
art and design, don't
hesitate to call—our
admissions counselors
are here to help.

Next steps

1

Schedule a visit.

A picture can only show you so much. Schedule a personal visit, or attend one of our on-campus events, where you can get a tour of our campus, meet faculty and students, and have an admissions counselor answer your questions.

cia.edu/visit

2

Apply for admission.

Applying is easy! Start your online application today, and you can return later to upload your portfolio.

cia.edu/apply

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Cover

Sakyrako Reed '21



Animation
Biomedical Art
Ceramics
Drawing
Game Design
Glass
Graphic Design
Illustration
Industrial Design
Interior Architecture
Jewelry + Metals
Painting
Photography
Printmaking
Sculpture + Expanded Media
Transportation Design*
Video + Digital Cinema*

*Tracks within Industrial Design
and Photography Departments