



building a **great**
portfolio

CIA

**You're beginning
to see yourself
pursuing a career
in art and design.**

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

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

All work in this brochure is by first-year students at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

Why do you need a portfolio?

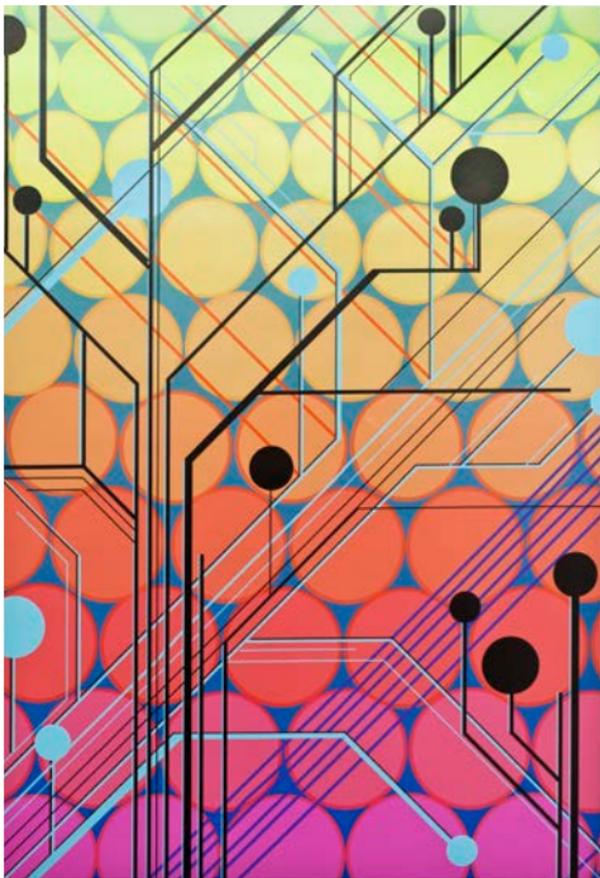
A strong portfolio can position you for acceptance into an art + design college, and may qualify you for scholarships.

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.



This painting by Paul Zagorsky hits on all three points; it demonstrates technical skill in painting and drawing, shows how Paul executed the idea he was trying to convey, and the use of media relates to the idea.



These two images do a great job at conveying technical skill. The drawing shows strong observational skill and drawing ability. The illustration demonstrates strong digital skills. Both works also convey a sense of composition and light.

Left: Jessica Howard

Above: Melissa Rockwerk

technical abilities

Show us what you're best at—we want to see your skills.

You may be a Photoshop pro, or throw a perfect pot. Maybe you love using painterly color or developing characters that come to life. Whatever you're best at, show work that is mature and thoughtful.

Observational drawing is simply drawing what you see, as opposed to creating from your imagination.

Observational drawing is an important skill for all artists, whether you're an animator, sculptor, or game designer. Drawing helps you think through and convey your ideas. It is strongly recommended to [include observational drawings](#) in your portfolio.

conceptual skills

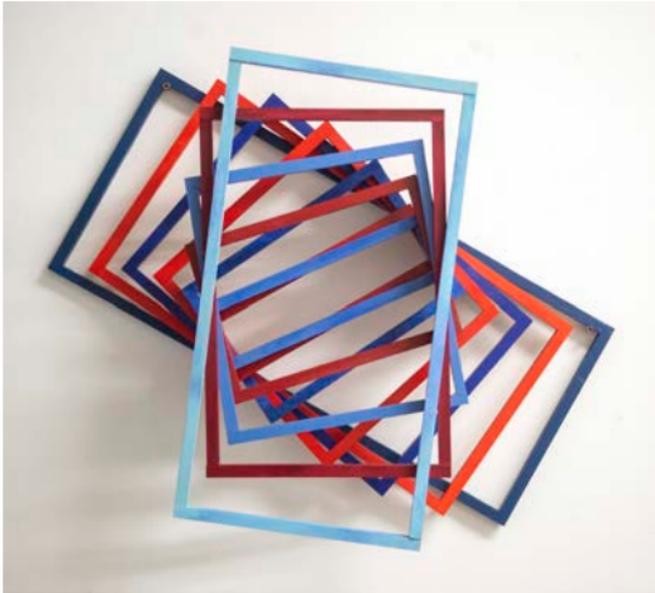
Artists and designers solve visual problems.

What are you trying to say, and how successfully does your work show that?

Painters explore an idea or convey a message; designers take on a creative assignment, like illustrating a story or designing a logo.

This is where originality comes in.

We want to see your inspiration as it relates to your ideas. Designers often create sketches and mood boards to help present their ideas. Storyboards are the equivalent for animators; painters explore color, form and composition in coming to their final solution.



Both of these works show us how the artists tell a visual story, whether they're using photography or paint/sculpture.



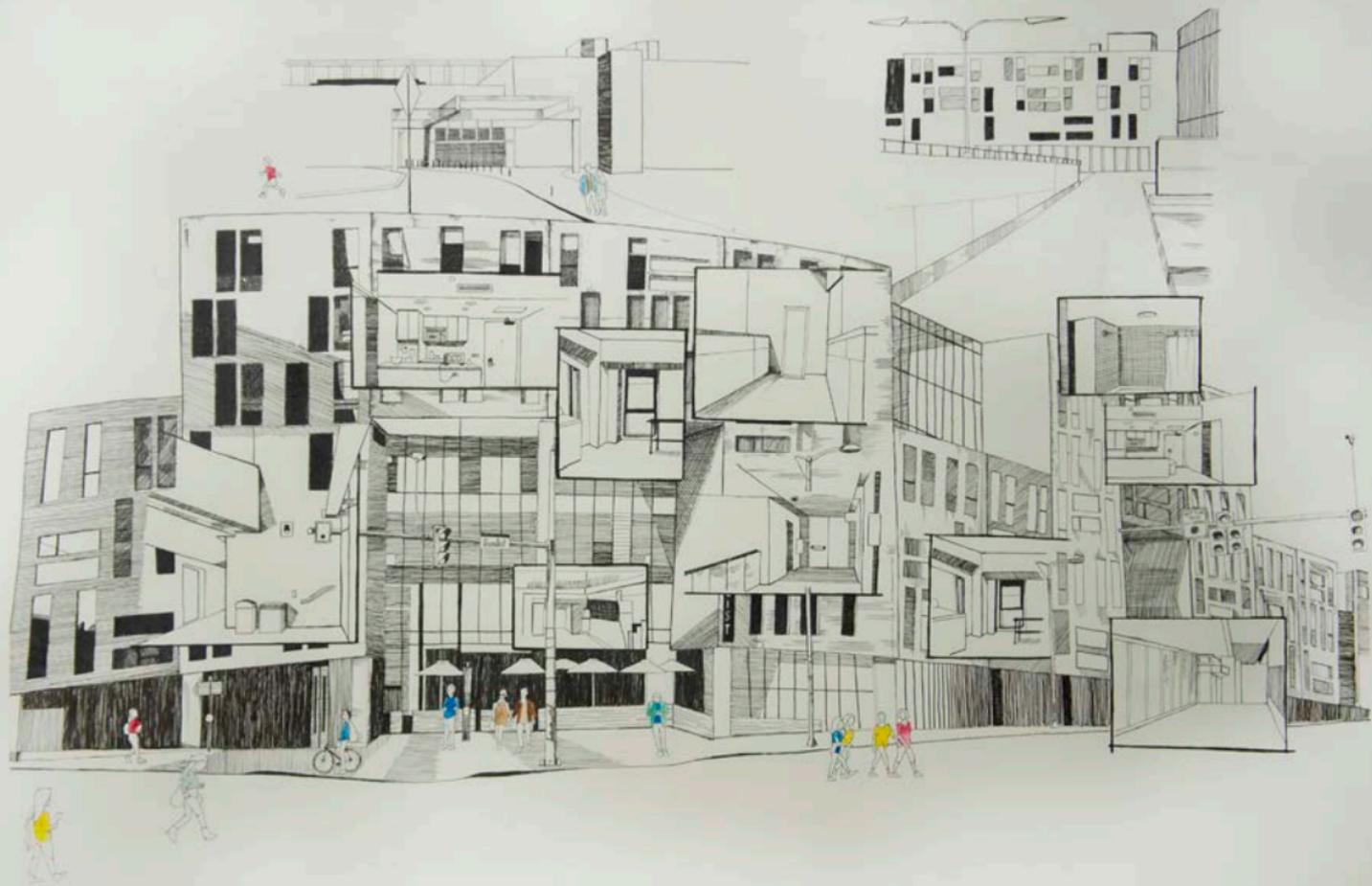
Carlin Andrew

how you use your medium

What drives you to create?

We believe that **creativity matters** to our lives; how does it matter to you? Do you want to tell stories through your work, or speak to important social issues? Do you want to change the world with your designs? Show work that **excites you** and **tells us about you**.

Alison Alsup's drawing of CIA's residence hall is ambitious in both scale and complexity.



How do I get there?

Review your current work

What work are you most proud of? Which pieces mean the most to you? Pull these aside as your starting point.

Need ideas for projects?

- Look at your favorite projects and think about how you could do it differently? Try it using another medium? A different style? Color palette?
- Explore creative communities on social media for prompts. #CIAcreates



Get feedback

Review your work with your art teachers, other artists, and our admissions counselors — we're here to help!



You never know when inspiration will hit

A sketchbook is the best tool to build your portfolio, so carry yours everywhere you go and fill its pages with ideas, notes, and drawings.

CIA encourages including sketchbook pages in your portfolio so we can see how your ideas evolve, which helps us better understand your potential as an artist or designer.

**keep and carry
a sketchbook**

How do you see the world

Observational drawings will be an important part of your portfolio, so practice drawing real people, places, and things as much as you can. Try experimenting with different techniques and media.

Drawings don't have to be complicated or tightly rendered; concentrate on drawing in a personal, sensitive way so you can capture the essence of a subject rather than an exact copy.

**draw from
real life**





Show us *your* thinking

Technical skill is important, but generating original and captivating ideas will make your portfolio stand out. Show who you are and what matters to you.

Think about the ideas behind your art, and subjects that hold special meaning for you. We want to see how you think, so avoid work copied from photographs or other published work.

Experiment with a range of styles, media, and techniques. Even if you work within one specific medium, you can show a great deal of variety within it in both technique and subject matter.

be original

Explore new techniques, ideas and thinking

Getting outside your comfort zone is a great way to enhance your skills and explore new ideas.

You might try art classes outside of school. You'll expose yourself to new techniques, fresh thinking, and other artists with whom you can exchange ideas.

CIA's **Pre-College program** offers two-week summer courses in which you can sharpen your skills, experiment with new media, and build your portfolio. Learn more at cia.edu/precollege.

enhance
your skills

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a white button-down shirt and a bright orange face mask, stands on the left side of the frame. She is holding a silver laptop and pointing at the screen with her right hand. To her right, a man with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a light blue t-shirt and a light blue face mask, is seated in a black office chair. He is looking at a laptop on his lap. In the background, there are blurred figures of other people and a modern interior setting with a large, stylized orange sculpture. The overall scene suggests a collaborative work or study environment.

“Pre-College helped me determine what I wanted to do with my life. It showed me a world of opportunities, and the multitude of paths I can take to get to any one destination.”

— Cullen
Life Sciences Illustration
CIA class of 2023

Cleveland Institute of Art

We're here to help.

Our admissions counselors would love to see what you're working on and are glad to offer preliminary portfolio reviews.

Other resources:

Learn more about portfolio requirements, how to photograph your work, and see examples of successful portfolios online:

cia.edu/portfolios

Attend a portfolio review event near you:

cia.edu/portfolioday

Learn more about Pre-College:

cia.edu/precollege

Schedule a portfolio review:

cia.edu/review

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Connect with us!

Schedule a visit with one of our admissions counselors. We can answer your questions, and review your portfolio and application.

admissions@cia.edu

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Apply for admission.

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

cia.edu/apply

Cleveland Institute of Art

Creativity
Matters

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Cover: Sakurako Reed

Animation
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Drawing
Game Design
Graphic Design
Illustration
Industrial Design
Interior Architecture
Life Sciences Illustration
Painting
Photography
Printmaking
Sculpture + Expanded Media
Transportation Design*
Video + Digital Cinema*

*Tracks within Industrial Design
and Photography Departments