

OCAD U Guide to Building a Strong Portfolio



hello!

I'M MARY ANNE

(she/her)

LEAD,
NATIONAL STUDENT
RECRUITMENT
ADMISSIONS & RECRUITMENT
mgarcia@ocadu.ca



Acknowledging the Land

OCAD UNIVERSITY ACKNOWLEDGES THE ANCESTRAL AND TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES OF THE MISSISSAUGAS OF THE CREDIT FIRST NATION, THE HAUDENOSAUNEE AND THE HURON-WENDAT, WHO ARE THE ORIGINAL OWNERS AND CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND ON WHICH WE STAND, LEARN, AND CREATE.

What are we going to talk about?

Importance of the Portfolio

Selecting Works/Projects

Writing about Your Creative Work

ArtworksTO Portfolio Requirements

Sustaining an Everyday Practice

Questions?

PORTFOLIO

what is a portfolio?



A COLLECTION OF THE WORK YOU MAKE

A FORMAL EXPRESSION OF YOUR IDEAS, QUESTIONS
AND CURIOSITIES

YOUR INTERPRETATION OF THE WORLD AROUND YOU

A WAY TO INVITE THE VIEWER TO EXPERIENCE YOUR
CREATIVE CONCEPTS

YOUR PORTFOLIO IS AN EXTENSION OF YOUR CREATIVE
PROCESS AND HOW YOU VISUALLY PRESENT
YOURSELF

THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO MAKE AND PUT
TOGETHER A PORTFOLIO; RATHER, THERE ARE
DIFFERENT WAYS TO PUT TOGETHER A PORTFOLIO

why do you need a portfolio?



OFTEN ONE OF THE FIRST POINTS OF CONTACT WITH A CLIENT, INSTITUTION, OR POTENTIAL EMPLOYER THAT:

- SHOWCASES YOUR RANGE OF ARTISTIC SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES
- HIGHLIGHTS YOUR CREATIVE IDEAS, PASSION, AND COMMITMENT
- DEMONSTRATES YOUR TECHNICAL SKILL AND ABILITY TO PROBLEM-SOLVE
- IT TELLS A STORY OF WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU ARE INSPIRED BY
- IT IS MEANT TO LEAVE AN IMPRESSION ON THE VIEWER
- IT IS A GROWING ARCHIVE OF YOUR CREATIVE PRACTICE

PORTFOLIOS ARE NOT JUST ABOUT SKILL,
TALENT AND TECHNIQUE

THE MOST IMPACTFUL WORKS HAVE SOMETHING
TO SAY:

- TELL STORIES
- EXPLORE TOPICS, THEMES AND IDEAS
- ADDRESS A SOCIAL ISSUE THAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU

EXEMPLIFY YOUR MATERIAL EXPLORATION +
RISKTAKING

PASSION AND COMMITMENT

CURIOSITY TO LEARN AND EXPLORE OUTSIDE
YOUR COMFORT ZONE

**what does
your
portfolio
show?**

IMAGINE YOUR PORTFOLIO AS ONE LARGE VISUAL PROJECT CONTAINING VARIOUS ELEMENTS IN CONVERSATION WITH ONE ANOTHER

CONSIDER WHICH WORKS ARE COMPELLING WHEN PAIRED ALONGSIDE EACH OTHER. CAN YOU FIND A NARRATIVE?

- DO YOU WANT TO SHOW WORK CHRONOLOGICALLY?
- ARRANGE WORKS BY MATERIAL OR MEDIUM USED?
- CURATE WORKS BY THEMES OR CONCEPTS?
- INCLUDE WORKS FROM A SERIES?
- BE SELECTIVE AND COHERENT

**what does
your
portfolio
show?**

**How does
your
portfolio
change?**

*YOU WILL HAVE MANY
VERSIONS OF YOUR
PORTFOLIO SO CONSIDER:
WHAT YOU ARE SUBMITTING
IT FOR?*

**EMPLOYMENT VS EDUCATION
PHYSICAL VS DIGITAL
PERSONAL VS SOCIAL**

what to include?



RECENT WORK
FASHION & JEWELRY
DRAWING & PAINTING
SCULPTURE
MODELS
ANIMATION
VIDEO + FILM
AUDIO + SOUND
WEB DESIGN
LAYOUT DESIGN
FURNITURE
TEXTILES

COLLAGE
PHOTOGRAPHY
COSTUMES
MURALS CODING
DIGITAL ART
ROBOTICS
APP DESIGN
SCIENCE PROJECTS
LIFE DRAWING
PRINTMAKING
PACKAGING
DESIGN

process work



SKETCHES/DRAWINGS
IDEA DEVELOPMENT
RESEARCH REFERENCES
PROCESS DOCUMENTATION
FOUND PHOTOS
NOTES/LISTS/QUOTES
STORYBOARD/MINDMAPS
FREE THINKING
CREATIVE JOURNAL
SOCIAL MEDIA

LINK PROCESS WORK
TO FINISHED WORKS

why process work matters



ALLOWS YOU TO OBSERVE HOW YOU DEVELOP YOUR IDEAS

IT DEMONSTRATES THE WAY RESEARCH INFORMS YOUR PRACTICE

IT SHOWS HOW YOUR TECHNIQUE IS EVOLVING

ENCOURAGES A WILLINGNESS TO EXPERIMENT AND DISCOVER NEW THINGS

HIGHLIGHTS THE WAY THAT YOU ARE CREATIVELY ENGAGING WITH THE WORLD AROUND YOU

THAT IT IS A LEARNING TOOL FOR YOURSELF

document your work

TAKE GOOD PHOTOS!

PROPER OR BRIGHT NATURAL
LIGHTING

MAKESHIFT BACKDROP

PLAIN BACKGROUND FREE
OF DISTRACTION

BALANCE OF WIDE SHOTS AND
DETAIL SHOTS THAT CONVEY
SCALE

HIGHLIGHT THE WORK

- SOMETIMES CALLED AN “ARTIST STATEMENT” OR “STATEMENT OF INTENT”
- CLARIFIES THE INTENTIONS BEHIND THE WORK YOU MAKE
- INTRODUCES WHO YOU ARE AS AN ARTIST/DESIGNER
- OFTEN A REQUIREMENT FOR APPLYING TO SCHOOL, CREATIVE INDUSTRY JOBS OR, FOR ART EXHIBITIONS/ARTIST GRANTS AND RESIDENCIES

**Writing
about your
creative
practice**

IT IS HELPFUL TO REFLECT ON YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS BEFORE WRITING ABOUT IT.

- CONSIDER WHAT YOU'VE MADE RECENTLY
- THINK ABOUT WHAT YOUR GOALS AND INTENTIONS WERE BEHIND IT
- SIMPLY DESCRIBE WHAT YOU HAVE MADE
- SPEND TIME MAKING NOTES IN YOUR SKETCHBOOK OR CREATIVE JOURNAL

**Writing
about your
creative
practice**



Writing about your creative practice

WRITING HELPS YOU TO:

UNDERSTAND WHY YOU CHOSE
CERTAIN MATERIALS, FORMAL
ELEMENTS, INFLUENCES, TECHNIQUES

UNDERSTAND WHO YOU ARE IN
RELATION TO YOUR WORK

COMMUNICATE IDEAS FOR YOURSELF
FIRST AND THEN TO A WIDER
AUDIENCE

GUIDES AN AUDIENCE THROUGH
PROCESS, RESEARCH AND OUTCOMES



Writing about your creative practice

...CONSIDER WHY YOU MADE THE
CHOICES YOU MADE IN YOUR WORK.

ASK YOURSELF:

*WHAT AM I TRYING TO SAY IN THIS
WORK?*

*WHO OR WHAT ARE MY INFLUENCES
WITH THIS WORK?*

*HOW DO MY METHODS OF WORKING
(TECHNIQUES, STYLE,
FORMAL DECISIONS) SUPPORT THE
CONTENT OF THIS WORK?*

*WHAT ARE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF
THIS IN MY WORK?*

Writing Your Artist Bio

WHERE DID/DO YOU GO TO SCHOOL?

WRITE ABOUT A PARTICULAR FOCUS IN YOUR STUDIES (ART, DANCE, SCIENCE, MUSIC, ROBOTICS, SPORTS, ETC.)

WRITE A SENTENCE OR TWO ABOUT ANY VOLUNTEER/INTERNSHIP WORK OR EMPLOYMENT RELATED TO YOUR INTEREST IN ART/DESIGN

HAVE YOU SHOWN YOUR ARTWORK? IF SO, WHERE? NOTE DATES.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS LIVED WHERE YOU ARE NOW? IF NOT, WRITE A SENTENCE ABOUT WHERE YOU'VE LIVED AND/OR STUDIED BEFORE

WHEN PREPPING YOUR PORTFOLIO FOR...

Education vs Employment vs Grants

- BE AWARE THAT SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND EXPECTATIONS WILL VARY DEPENDING ON THE CLIENT/INSTITUTION – TAKE YOUR TIME TO PREP ACCORDINGLY
- DO YOUR RESEARCH: CURATE AND SELECT YOUR WORK TO APPEAL TO THE COMPANY/ORGANIZATION/INSTITUTION'S CULTURE
- OPTIMIZE WORK FOR THE PREFERRED PLATFORM OF SUBMISSION
- ADJUST LANGUAGE AND TONE =WHERE APPROPRIATE
- EDIT, EDIT, EDIT!

2025 ARTWORKSTO NEWCOMER STREAM



Newcomer Program - Media Arts (Stream 1) - ArtWorksTO - Participant Application Form - 2025

DEADLINE: JULY 24, 2025 @ 11:59 PM

All fields marked with * are required and must be filled.

ArtWorksTO Newcomer Program offers newcomer artists training, mentorship, and paid work opportunities in media arts and arts education. It supports 25 Canadians in developing sustainable careers by providing credentialed education, industry connections, and practical experience.

- Please read the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#) section in the [ArtWorksTO Newcomer Program site](#) and *make sure you're eligible to apply* before you complete your application.
- Complete the checklist at the end of the form to ensure your submission is complete. Incomplete applications will not be assessed.
- We strongly encourage your participation in the OCAD U Portfolio Development Workshop: [Register Here](#). For more information about this offering, and/or for information about the program, and application process please email ximena@torontoarts.org.
- In the context of this program, we use the term 'artist' interchangeably and with openness. The program includes practitioners in Media Arts such as graphic designers, digital media creators and other related disciplines, as well as Art Educators who are also practicing artists. Our definition embraces a broad range of creative practices.



Newcomer Program - Arts Education (Stream 2) - ArtWorksTO - Participant Application Form - 2025

DEADLINE: JULY 24, 2025 @ 11:59 PM

All fields marked with * are required and must be filled.

ArtWorksTO Newcomer Program offers newcomer artists training, mentorship, and paid work opportunities in media arts and arts education. It supports 25 Canadians in developing sustainable careers by providing credentialed education, industry connections, and practical experience.

- Please read the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#) section in the [ArtWorksTO Newcomer Program site](#) and *make sure you're eligible to apply* before you complete your application.
- Complete the checklist at the end of the form to ensure your submission is complete. Incomplete applications will not be assessed.
- We strongly encourage your participation in the OCAD U Portfolio Development Workshop: [Register Here](#). For more information about this offering, and/or for information about the program, and application process please email ximena@torontoarts.org.
- In the context of this program, we use the term 'artist' interchangeably and with openness. The program includes practitioners in Media Arts such as graphic designers, digital media creators and other related disciplines, as well as Art Educators who are also practicing artists. Our definition embraces a broad range of creative practices.

WHAT TO INCLUDE:

SHORT BIO (300 WORDS MAX)

- What's your story?

ARTIST STATEMENT (300 WORDS MAX)

- Your artist statement should explain your specific interests and passions as well as who or what inspires and influences the work you do. This is your opportunity to introduce yourself as an artist and provide context so we can better understand your work.

CREATIVE PROCESS

- Include examples/pdf/images/ drafts of your sketchbook, process and concept development skills as part of your portfolio submission. You can document your creative process as:

COMPLETED WORK

- Include up to 5 examples of your original finalized work that demonstrates creativity, technical skills, range and expression of ideas

Portfolio: Media Arts (stream 1)

WHAT TO INCLUDE:

SHORT BIO (300 WORDS MAX)

- What's your story?

ARTIST STATEMENT (300 WORDS MAX)

- Your artist statement should explain your specific interests and passions as well as who or what inspires and influences the work you do. This is your opportunity to introduce yourself as an artist and provide context so we can better understand your work.

CREATIVE PROCESS

- Include examples/pdf/images/ drafts of your sketchbook, process and concept development skills as part of your portfolio submission. You can document your creative process as:

COMPLETED WORK

- Include up to 2 examples of your original finalized work that demonstrate creativity, technical skills, and range of expression of ideas, and up to 3 examples that demonstrate your work as an arts educator (e.g. lesson plans, a video of you leading a workshop, a syllabus, or sample activities)

Portfolio: Arts Education (stream 2)

ARTWORKSTO: NEWCOMER PROGRAM – MEDIA ARTS (STREAM 1)

1. APPLICANT INFORMATION
2. ACCESS & EQUITY
3. TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF
4. YOUR MEDIA ARTS EXPERIENCE
5. ABOUT YOUR EDUCATION IN MEDIA ARTS
6. PORTFOLIO
UPLOAD YOUR DIGITAL PORTFOLIO AS A SINGLE PDF

DEADLINE TO APPLY: JULY 24, 2025 @ 11:59 PM

ARTWORKSTO: NEWCOMER PROGRAM – ARTS EDUCATION (STREAM 2)

1. APPLICANT INFORMATION
2. ACCESS & EQUITY
3. TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF
4. YOUR ARTS EDUCATION EXPERIENCE
5. ARTISTIC PRACTICE
6. PORTFOLIO
UPLOAD YOUR DIGITAL PORTFOLIO AS A SINGLE PDF

DEADLINE TO APPLY: JULY 24, 2025 @ 11:59 PM

online portfolio



- STRONG PHOTO DOCUMENTATION – *DOCUMENT EVERYTHING!*
- ARTIST STATEMENTS AND CONTEXTS – *IS THIS CLIENT WORK? FROM AN EXHIBITION? DID YOU WORK WITH COLLABORATORS?*
- DESCRIBE YOUR WORK – *CONCISE CAPTIONS SUCH AS TITLE, MEDIUM, DIMENSIONS, IMAGE CREDIT*
- FEATURED WORK SHOULD RELATE BACK TO THE NATURE OF YOUR PRACTICE
- BE COMPELLING: YOUR VOICE SHOULD BE DEFINITIVE AND CONFIDENT

online portfolio



- CONSIDER REPRESENTING DIFFERENT MEDIUMS OR BODIES OF WORK AS INDIVIDUAL GALLERIES AND SITE PAGES
- WORKS IN A SERIES OFFER COHERENT INSIGHT INTO YOUR PROCESS AND PRACTICE
- KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE AND ENGAGE WITH THEM IN A MEANINGFUL WAY
- ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH: CONTACT DETAILS AND/OR LINK TO YOUR CV

sustaining an everyday practice

GET CURIOUS: RESEARCH,
OBSERVE, DOCUMENT

EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT TOOLS
OR MATERIALS TO CAPTURE IDEAS

EXPLORE DIY APPROACHES

MOVE YOUR BODY

VISIT MUSEUMS + GALLERIES:
MANY HAVE VIRTUAL TOURS

REVISIT THEMnES + IDEAS: ASK
QUESTIONS

NOTE INSPIRATION THAT CATCHES YOUR
ATTENTION

TRUST THE PROCESS; TRY NOT TO BE TOO HARD
ON YOURSELF!

REACH OUT: COLLABORATE

CELEBRATE! TAKE INVENTORY OF HOW FAR YOU
HAVE COME

TAKE BREAKS! DO OTHER THINGS, THEY CAN BE
A SOURCE OF CREATIVE OUTPUT



Q&A



ximena@torontoarts.org

mgarcia@ocadu.ca