

Portfolio Guide

CC @

So You Want to Go to Art School?

Need more help? We got you!
admissions@cca.edu
(415) 610-7004 Call/Text

California College of the Arts



MIRAE CHANG (she/her), →
BFA ILLUSTRATION
 The artist poses with her sculpture to show portfolio reviewers the scale of the piece.

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<p><i>Workbook</i> 24</p>	<p>📷 @CACollegeofArts 🐦 @CACollegeofArts 🎧 @CCAOfficial</p>

EVERY ARTWORK IN
THIS GUIDE IS PULLED
FROM THE CCA APPLICATION
PORTFOLIO
OF SOMEONE
LIKE YOU.
**THEY ALL
GOT IN.**

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**ITZÉL RIOS-ELLIS (she/her), →
BFA PAINTING & DRAWING**

In this intimate work, Itzél reflects on her identity as a white-passing Mexican American and the Mayan origins of her name. The piece highlights the artist's technical skills, and her strong understanding of color, composition, and the use of symbolic imagery.



WHAT IS A PORTFOLIO?

As part of an art & design school application, you'll provide examples of your creative work. This grouping is called an application portfolio.

That's it! You probably feel vulnerable sharing your art, writing, designs, dreams—especially when the stakes seem so high. But don't be nervous...



IN'YONI (they/them), BFA PHOTOGRAPHY

This portrait has a strong sense of color and composition. The set-up is straightforward and accessible to anyone with a camera *or a phone*. In'Yoni's work uses imagery that reflects on growing up as a person of color in a white community. →



EVERY ART & DESIGN SCHOOL YOU APPLY TO IS LOOKING FOR

POTENTIAL,
NOT PERFECTION.

← OLIVER GRANT (he/him), BFA INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

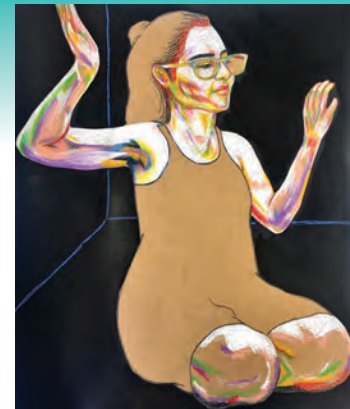
Using household materials (tin foil) and shooting in black and white created a striking experimental photograph. Using accessible methods, Oliver demonstrated a strong perspective and vision.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

ALIA MOUSSA

(she/her), BFA GRAPHIC DESIGN

You don't have to know your focus when you apply to CCA. Alia submitted a variety of mediums—graphic design, collage, drawing—in her portfolio. The variety was unified through what it revealed about Alia's life. This gave counselors the chance to get to know her through her work and see the potential she could develop at CCA.



- ↑ **Blocked.** Mixed media
- ← **Self Reflection.** Digital illustration and zine
- ↓ **WWW.** Digital collage & zine



WHY DO ART & DESIGN COLLEGES REQUIRE A PORTFOLIO?

**Portfolios help colleges
make admissions and
financial aid decisions.**

Colleges want to see if you're someone who'll both benefit from an art and design education and meaningfully contribute to the college community. Your portfolio helps us envision how you would make art at CCA.

If your portfolio dazzles, a college may offer you additional scholarship funding.

ALEX VONG (he/him), BFA INTERIOR DESIGN ↗

Alex's high-contrast self-portrait showcases his sharp eye for composition, detail, and texture, all of which are important not only in photography, but also in his chosen major of interior design.



**CCA'S MERIT
SCHOLARSHIPS
ARE AWARDED**

**BASED PARTLY ON
AN APPLICANT'S
PORTFOLIO**

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

MELISSA RODRIGUEZ

(she/her), BFA INDIVIDUALIZED STUDIES

Melissa's portfolio stood out because of her creative use of materials, clear concept, and vision. She included a variety of work, but the centerpiece was a series about the specific themes of mental illness and addiction.

These are the descriptions included in her actual CCA application portfolio.



Read more about Melissa's story on the CCA website!
cca.edu/melissa

←
Alcoholism Shoe

“ My artwork takes a critical view of sociological and cultural issues. I researched seven mental illnesses and compiled a list of their characteristics ... Each shoe is a unique entity with its own personal style while illustrating a specific mental disorder.



↑
Gambling Shoe

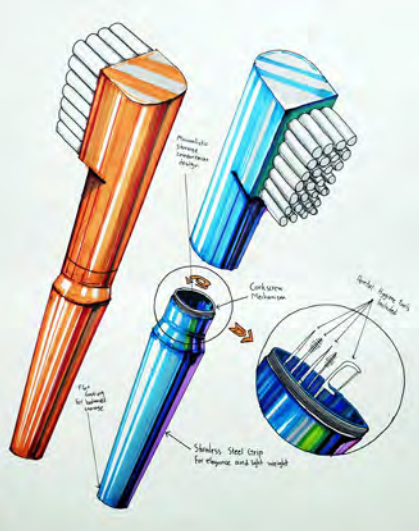
→
Manic Depression Shoes



“ The heel is colorful and high, which represents the elevated state of the condition. The flat represents the low state of this condition. I used a variety of materials and dark colors and ... shattered glass with a noose as an ankle strap.



MATTHEW SILVANO HALIM (he/him),
BFA INDUSTRIAL DESIGN



This is a stand-out example of industrial design: it represents the idea in a clear, stylized, and visually compelling way. The piece includes multiple sketches showing how the product looks and works. Detailed hand drawings bring Halim's design to life.

You can show off your designer chops without industry software and tech; it's not about the tools you use, it's about *how you think*.

WHO REVIEWS MY PORTFOLIO & HOW DO THEY ASSESS IT?

Professional admissions counselors from the college review your portfolio.

CCA loves to see a personal portfolio that feels like something only the applicant could make.

SHOW US WHO YOU ARE!

Admissions counselors use it to understand your abilities, experiences, and perspective. You can use the same portfolio to apply to multiple schools, just be sure to adjust as necessary to satisfy at least the minimum requirements of a college's application guidelines—because every counselor is also looking to make sure you can follow directions.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

TONY BERNARDO

(he/him), BFA INDIVIDUALIZED STUDIES

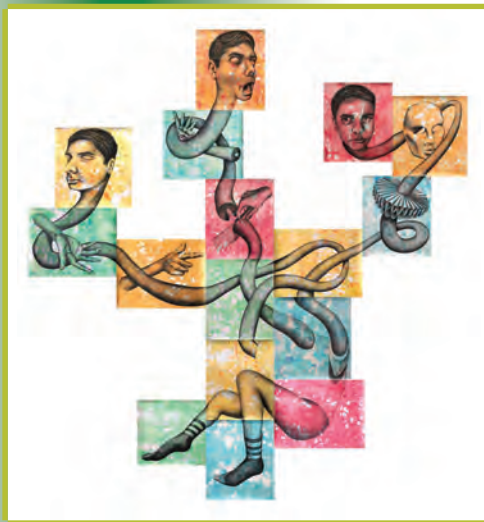
Tony submitted a surreal, stylistically cohesive collection of works about his experience of coming out in a strict Catholic family. Each artwork has a description that explains the piece's meanings and Tony's creative decisions to support them.

“ I am shown in bed, admiring the window which represents a sunrise, symbolizing the promise of a liberating future. Additionally, the gradient refers to the rainbow flag ... an indication of pride within the queer community.

Future. Oil on canvas



Feel Box Interactions. Grease crayon and watercolor on paper



Creature. Grease crayon, watercolor, and bleach

“ Three faces ... represent the different states of my being (from left to right): contemplating and accepting, afraid of cutting a part of myself out, and hiding behind a mask, disguised. I depicted my body in a monstrous nature to reference [how] my parents view my sexuality.

WHAT KIND OF WORK SHOULD MY PORTFOLIO INCLUDE?

Your portfolio should showcase a variety of ideas and processes.

Start by picking pieces that demonstrate your technical skills and experience. Next, select samples that show what you're interested in conceptually. By including work that showcases your skills and your interests, your portfolio will tell the "story of you" as a creative person. This helps colleges see that you have your own ideas and the courage to engage with them.

JOY KONG (she/her), BFA SCULPTURE →

This work sample shows a well-executed finished sculpture, as well as Joy's process from brainstorming to construction, which gave CCA a sense of her practice and perspective as well as her technical skills.





JIWON KIM (she/her),
BFA INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

FAYE VAVRA (she/they),
BFA FINE ART



Both of these pieces display advanced technical skill and an eye for composition. But aside from their subject matter, they have another key difference. Faye's is a digital painting, while Jiwon's is acrylic on wood.

Variety in media isn't only limited to sculpture vs. photography vs. painting. It can also be a blend of analog *and* digital, fine art *and* design, or technical *and* experimental.

PORTFOLIO IDEAS!

- + Photographs
- + Sketchbook entries
- + Paintings
- + Short stories & poems
- + Sculptures & ceramics
- + Garments
- + Video compilations
- + Illustrations
- + Comics
- + Research projects
- + Zines, posters & graphics
- + Animations & GIFs

IF YOU KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO STUDY ...

Include a variety of styles or approaches in that medium, as well as a few portfolio samples in a medium beyond your desired program. This helps show that you're well-rounded and provides an opportunity to tell a deeper story about yourself.

IF YOU DON'T ...

Maybe you only just realized you wanted to attend art school, or maybe you were focused on one major but now want to pursue a different one. Regardless, focus on *quality over quantity*. A portfolio with 11 high-quality pieces that are thoughtful and expressive is better than one with 15 where the work is uneven.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY PORTFOLIO BETTER?

Take clear photos.

No fancy camera? No worries. You can take photos of your artwork with a smartphone! Be sure your images are evenly lit, in focus, high-resolution, and cropped so that your art is the center of attention.

Spend time editing.

Don't submit work that's hard to evaluate (e.g., blurry photos, ginormous video file sizes, impossibly small short story fonts). Each item in your portfolio can make a bigger impact if it's presented in as polished a way as possible.

Prepare descriptions for each piece.

Add information about your creative process to distinguish your submission. Share your inspiration. Tell us how and why you chose your method or medium. Describe your experience making the work.

Get a critique.

Show your portfolio-in-progress to your school's art or writing teacher and ask if they have any tips for your organization or descriptions.

HANNAH KIM



Here's a clear and accessible example of brand design: Hannah applied a concept for a restaurant identity to appropriate items. The piece came together through documentation: a direct overhead shot and careful arrangement highlights the visual design.



CCA counselors offer free personalized portfolio reviews.



Schedule an appointment at cca.edu/contact
admissions@cca.edu
415-610-7004 (call or text)

OK, BUT HOW DO I ACTUALLY MAKE ONE?



Go to
cca.edu/portfolio
for tips on how to:

- + Stay organized
- + Choose your best samples
- + Document your work like a pro
- + Use free editing or cropping software
- + Write descriptions about your work
- + Submit experimental pieces

← MARCELLO JARAMILLO (he/him), BFA ILLUSTRATION
This mixed-media drawing uses accessible materials like old newspapers, pen, and charcoal to create a multilayered work. Marcello's portrait drawing shows control, personality, and emotion through his mark-making and composition.



WORKBOOK

Use these prompts as a jumping-off point to start planning your portfolio. Jot down your ideas in this workbook or use your own notebook.

What do you want your portfolio to say about where you come from and how you see the world?

Keep a list of portfolio-ready work you've finished:

IMPORTANT DATES Write them in ...

Keep track of priority and regular deadlines, campus tours, portfolio review days, etc.

For National Portfolio Day event dates and admissions deadlines go to cca.edu/portfolio



Descriptions are an important part of how CCA reviews your work. Not all schools emphasize this in the same way.

If you feel stuck writing your descriptions, use these prompts to get inspired. Start with one piece in your portfolio and answer these questions.

What motivated me to create this piece?

What was I trying to capture/portray?

What tools did I use? Why? How do my decisions connect to the piece's meaning?

**How did the piece evolve as I worked on it?
How would I develop the idea in the future?**

Now try bringing your ideas together into a description:

Is your piece ready to go?

- It communicates what I want it to.**
Does it feel complete? Does it say something different about you than other pieces in your portfolio?
- I have documented it in a clear, accurate way.**
I have scanned it, photographed it in natural lighting, collect-ed detail and process shots if necessary, created design mockups, etc. (This will be different for every piece!)
- I wrote *and proofread* my description.**
- It's uploaded and looks how I want it to.**
Things can look different in a submission portal than on your computer, so check over what you're submitting.

CREATE

MAKE WORK
continually and submit a well-rounded collection of pieces.

DOCUMENT YOUR PROCESS
Hold onto research, sketches, and plans.

WRITE DESCRIPTIONS
to contextualize your work.

RESEARCH

CONNECT
Tour schools, attend admission events, and talk to counselors.

MAKE YOUR LIST
of schools and programs that interest you.

ATTEND A NATIONAL PORTFOLIO DAY
to meet school reps and get feedback.

PLAN

GET ORGANIZED
Collect completed pieces and identify what needs work.

TELL YOUR STORY
and be true to who you are throughout the process.

SET SPECIFIC GOALS
with firm deadlines to minimize stress.

ASSEMBLE

GET FEEDBACK
from counselors, teachers, and people you trust.

REVISE
Incorporate feedback to strengthen your submission.

REVIEW & UPLOAD
Make sure to keep a copy of your portfolio for your personal records.

LOOK AHEAD

Making a portfolio can be overwhelming, but breaking it into smaller chunks can make it more manageable.

Here are four phases to get you started, but **everyone's process and timing are different: you might add, take away, or rearrange steps.**

APPLY