

Statement of intent for Level 3 (HE6) study of Visual Communications degree

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I am aiming to be an artist and illustrator able to create compelling images, visual narratives and animations that encourage people - including myself - to think more deeply about life and the world. Comedy and positivity as well as tragedy and angst, and they these often crosscut and can switch one to the other.

Cross-cutting my practice are a number of thematic interests that relate to both my professional and artistic work:

- Firstly the degree to which gender identity affects perceptions and practice, and ways in which art and illustration can question and subvert stereotypes, and make women's as well as men's experience central to what is considered 'human'.
- Secondly the ways in which cultural diversities and artistic traditions can enrich innovation and lead to new global styles and techniques.
- Art and illustration as a political project that promotes human rights and environmental sustainability in an effective way - promoting critical thinking rather than preaching.

It is my underlying vision and my creative process to adapt media and style to content and message that I would like my work to be characterised by, rather than any single recognisable 'look'. I want to continue to develop skills in different media: drawing, painting, printmaking, photography, digital and ways combining these for different outputs and establish my credentials as an illustrator who can work in a range of relevant media and styles if commissioned.

Background and what I expect from the degree

I am planning to take the maximum 4 years to finish level 3 - I have no reason to rush.

I currently work as a senior independent consultant on gender and participatory methods with international development agencies. I have two BAs, MA and PhD in my professional field. A degree *per se* is therefore not urgent.

I am not looking for full-time employment as an illustrator or designer. I am 64 and coming to the point where for both personal and health reasons I do not want to continue to travel so intensively for consultancy work. I will soon have a measure of financial independence to be able to undertake self-directed projects that do not need to be immediately marketable. That said, I will still need to earn some income through my art and illustration to cover software, materials etc as well as any travel and so am also looking for possible outlets that can be saleable.

My main motivation is to develop my creative skills, learning and experience. The degree is an assessed means to develop my visual work to the professional standard necessary for the type of impact I want.

I am not aiming to accomplish all my aims at level 3 of this one degree. I also see myself as a 'perpetual student' to keep my work relevant, fresh and continually moving forward. After Viscom I am planning to do a further OCA Creative Arts degree (visual studies and photography taking forward my interest in documentary) and Fine Art MA (including printmaking to take further my interest in landscape, portraits, abstraction and fine art).

Current work and skills

My work so far has been very exploratory and experimental. With encouragement from my tutors I have been opened up to possibilities and skills I never thought of when I started the degree. As part of my work on previous printmaking, illustration and book design courses for OCA - for VisCom, an earlier Certificate in Painting and leisure courses in Photography - I have developed skills in a range of media including:

- **Drawing:** mostly from life or TV in graphite, crayon, charcoal and pastel
- **Painting:** particularly ink, expressive/experimental watercolour and have experimented with gouache
- **Printmaking:** collagraph, drypoint, monoprint, linocut, woodcut and lithography
- **Photography**
- **Collage**
- **Digital media:** iPad art (illustration 2 critical review), Photoshop, InDesign, Lightroom. I have RSI and so digital media are part of my workflow and extended periods with eg Illustrator or Corel Painter are not good for me.

Many of my best images so far have been different combinations of the above, sometimes as in my iPad Illustration (see folder) based on found textures that suggest narrative.

As part of Assignment 1 of Viscom 3.1 Advanced Practice I will update all my web portfolios:

- overview Wordpress blog www.zemniimages.info and OCA course sub-blogs www.design.zemniimages.info, www.print.zemniimages.info and www.illustration.zemniimages.info
- professional SMUGMUG website www.zemniimages.com that contains also my photography and art).

Only selected images relevant to Viscom 3.1 are uploaded to the Google Drive.

In addition to the above, as part of my professional work and/or OCA and/or non-OCA courses I have some other skills relevant to my plans for level 3:

- **Video:** as part of my professional work I have developed some knowledge of video and video editing (including Premiere and After Effects), completed an ICS course in video and studied a level 1 OCA course on video though did not formally start it because of RSI.
- **Animation and interactivity:** as part of my professional work I have produced animated and interactive versions of some of my participatory materials using Flash or After Effects.
- **e-publishing:** part of my work for Book Design 1, Illustration 2 and my photography courses I started to look at from InDesign, Acrobat and Lightroom and use of Wordpress and Smugmug websites for blogging and interactive experience.
- **Web design and social networking:** as part of my professional work I have web design (including html/Dreamweaver). I have designed and manage a number of

websites, wordpress blogs and facebook pages for my work. And have done some research into social networking and e-learning options. I am also a member of an increasing number of illustration-related facebook and other social network groups.

- **Creative writing:** I have an Open BA degree from the Open University majoring in Creative Writing (poetry, short stories and scriptwriting). I have taken a number of other on-line and residential creative writing courses in travel writing and general creative writing. These will help me to move forward with narrative.
- **Music and audio:** I have some knowledge of music theory (including Indian, Japanese) and digital music/audio software like Garage Band and Audition that are useful for on-line animation.

Main gaps

None of the above skills are yet to fully professional standard. I need to work hard to improve my skills in all the above, and continue to develop different combination workflows. I obviously cannot work on everything at once, and need to identify concrete projects and focus on the specific skills needed for that. In some areas I do not need to develop fully professional skills myself (eg music and animation), just enough to develop concepts and prototypes good enough to attract other people to work with me - as I have no personal means of funding them otherwise.

The big weaknesses in my current work I need to address in relation to where I am trying to get to in the short term are:

- **Graphic Design:** I need to improve my understanding of typography, simplification of images to clarify meaning and more engaging layouts
- **Narrative Context:** I need to start and develop narratives that drive the development and refinement of my images. My tendency has been to follow the aesthetics of found images and textures as a necessary way of exploring possibilities of different media (eg treacle, grease, chipboard etc). I now need to look at ways of replicating and editing my initial images in relation to a narrative: including clearer single image narratives and without as well as with text.

By the end of this degree I want to have developed some projects to professional standard - and will need advice on what those might be. Alongside and supporting the VisCom degree I shall continue to take relevant selected short on-line and local practical courses eg typography, infographics, creative writing, photography and printmaking.

Current Plans for VisCom level 3 Module 1 Advanced Practice, and further development in Modules 2 and 3

My Visual Communications practice is currently somewhat split between work related to my professional consultancy and things I do for pleasure/relaxation/creative outlet. I have separate websites, on-line identities and networks for each, and this separation will continue. A key issue being my need to diversify my physical activity away from computers and even iPad to avoid/manage RSI. I want to continue this diversity of activity and subject matter into level 3, but bring my skills and approach together more, and increase linkages.

In the VisCom degree, as outlined below for Module 3.3, I am aiming to focus on print and on-line animation of a selection of about 5 self-written feminist adaptations of myths from

countries I have visited in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This will require much more advanced artistic, writing and animation skills than I currently have. I need a clear progression plan to develop these over time, building on the work I have produced so far.

Based on the limited information on the level 3 course sample in-line, I developed the following provisional staged plan.

Module 3.1 Advanced Practice

A key concern in Viscom level 3 is the need to focus on projects that are manageable and achieve quality outputs within the timeframe. In this first module I want to focus on projects that further develop basic skills in figurative imaging and simple animation and take to completion some of the work I have already produced. I plan to:

- Upgrade my existing figurative skills in drawing from life and street and landscape photography to broaden the range of perspectives, visual dynamics, fluency and range of images I can produce so I have more control over the image and narrative.
- Bring my painting, collage, iPad art and particularly printmaking and mixed techniques to a more professional level through producing a series of cards based on selected images with a potential local market.
- **Develop skills in basic animation and interactive on-line presentation using Photoshop, Adobe Animate and After Effects.**
- Publish one or more projects with commercial potential as an e-book and/or self-published printed book.
- Develop an on-line visibility and widen my social networks to promote and get feedback on my work.

I envisage working on three main projects (based on 6 sketchbooks) over two years, overlapping with module 3.2:

1. **People: from life to abstraction** as a basic and cross-cutting theme and key focus in Assignment 2b. Based on life drawing classes, museums and video footage of physical activities that enable me to improve my understanding of anatomy, experiment with gestural drawing and detail from different viewpoints, my skills in portraiture and portrayal of different cultures. These will then be abstracted, drawing on different cultural traditions, for animations and imaginative narratives. ~~I will explore different types of animation of simple figures: frame by frame, tweening, IK, maybe stop motion with models and simple 3D.~~
2. **'People and Place' sketchbooks from life to print-making and on-line animated experiences:** as key focus in Assignments 2a and 3, market research in assignment 4 and selected work followed through in Assignment 5. Although all locations could be illustrated in any media, my access/working conditions and types of market suggest a focus on different media and working processes to develop a range of skills and outputs in the short term:
 - ~~Cambridge and river Cam~~ where I live and have most time and flexibility to do repeated sketching of people in the same location over time and do longer detailed crayon, watercolour and gouache from life (learning a lot from local urban sketchers and illustrators). There is a vibrant, growing but competitive market for print-making, cards and possibly illustrated 'alternative' tour books if I link with a tour guide and other friends for interesting content. Some of the colleges and other locations could be interested in illustrations for cards and promotional material.



- **East Anglia (Assignment 2b includes Cambridge)** where we go for weekends and short holidays. Here I would focus on iPad art, continuing and much improving my work on Aldeburgh for Illustration 2. But focusing on new work from Norfolk, Suffolk and Fens. For this area I have possibilities to go into some depth on local history and issues, do some local interviews and revisit during different seasons. There are significant social issues here around Brexit and tourism/second homes, and environmental concerns about coastal erosion and climate change. But I am more limited in opportunities for paintings and detailed drawings. There are a number of local artist networks and a potential but competitive local market for tourist prints. There are a lot of very good local painters and linocut and screen printmakers, But the landscape also lends itself well to monoprint, drypoint, lithography, photolithography/photoscreen and collagraph. These could potentially be developed into illustrated books or mobile phone e-guides on specific locations or walks.
- **Spain** in a travel documentary sketchbook from a month's holiday October/November. This will principally focus on pencil/ink sketches, photography/collage and iPad sketching and techniques for documentary illustration, accompanied by text. To be developed as on-line experiences.
- **Going North (Assignment 5)** from forthcoming holidays next spring/summer in Lakes, Orkney and elsewhere. Here I hope to do more watercolour/gouache painting from life as well as iPad painting. Again with travel narrative. To be developed as illustrated narratives/on-line experiences.

3) **On-line animated interactive training resources** for development agencies on gender concepts and issues building on my professional work. Key focus in Assignment 4 and 5. These resources would include:

- **very simple but expressive animated cartoons** using Adobe Animate/Illustrator/After Effects. The cartoons would be pictorial only to avoid the need for translation, be accessible for people who cannot read and write and low bandwidth for mobile download in rural areas (increasing numbers of men and women farmers these days have smart phones and are on Facebook, particularly youth). A number of digital styles could be explored for different types of content/animation and market tested: a) visual drawing style from training with communities using flipcharts and four coloured markers b) digital pixels c) colour drawing on photographs. These have a potentially huge outreach at significantly reduced cost as part of more home-based work contracts for me with development agencies and private companies. Outsourcing this work to local or European designers in NGOs has never been successful because they are 'tech guys' based at HQ in capital cities who don't really understand the participatory methodology or gender issues enough, particularly for people who cannot read and write.
- **Interactive pictorial website** using Animate html canvas and Dreamweaver/Wordpress where this material would be hosted. This website should be navigable for people who have access to rural computing centres/mobile internet even if they cannot read and write, linked to other my other existing websites for more information and written material.
- **App download of website and material.**

Some of my work community-level work was presented in Book Design 1 and Illustration 2 but not developed. Taking at least a couple of pieces to completion and made available on an expandable website should generate further client-led paid work as with international development agencies as part of more home-based contracts to produce training materials on other topics.

In the short term I hope these three projects will give me more experience of possible markets for my work - or at least a realistic assessment of what is not worth pursuing further. In the longer term it will hopefully help establish my credentials as an artist and illustrator who can work on a range of topics and in a range of media if commissioned. For further development after completion of the VisCom degree.

Module 3.2 Visual Research: illustration as political practice

Use my photos, drawings by people in communities and on-line communications and resources as well as my own travel writing for:

- Ethiopia (Assignment 2a)
- Philippines (Assignment 3)
- Kyrgyzstan (Assignment 4)

I want to look at different ways in which illustration is used as political practice. This includes both political documentary/cartoon and political allegories and animations. It also includes protest Street Art, infographics and NGO work.

My approach will be cross-cultural, drawing on my work in Illustration 2 and Book Design 1 and looking forward to Module 3.3. It will continue my interest in:

- Western graphic novels like those of Art Spiegelman's use of illustration to powerfully tell a true story and animation by Scarfe and others.
- Japanese illustration and animation - particularly anime dealing with historical experiences like Hiroshima
- Islamic and middle eastern political illustration and street art dealing with feminist and other issues
- Eastern European political allegorical animation

I am particularly interested in the ways in which photographic and/or 'fully created' images in different media (drawn, painted, print etc) are used and combined (eg in video/animation/collage) to create illusions of 'truth', 'myth' and 'imagination' in different types of political illustration from 'direct messaging' to political allegory. I am particularly interested in which types of media and approaches are most effective in drawing particular viewers in, and getting beyond mere shock and compassion fatigue to inspiring change. Specific considerations are:

- **do photographs create a greater sense of 'reality' than 'fully created' images** - to what extent, in what ways and contexts, and why? Given the inevitability of subjective choices in photography, the potential for almost total digital fabrication of photographic images, and the potential for drawing and painting to accurately record events and 'distil the essence' behind multiple complex realities.
- **how is narrative constructed in individual images? Cartoons? Information graphics?**
- **Does narrative combination and sequencing of images differ** between documentary and fictional illustration? Between photographic and fully created illustration? Between printed work and on-line animation? Why and what are the effects?
- How is **text/speech** used to complement the images?
- What are the implications for my own political illustration practice?

I may focus on one particular medium like animation or collage, using the other questions or media as background comparison. Or I may select a small number of political themes or cultural traditions or illustrators/animators to compare.

Module 3.3 Sustaining your Practice

My plans are still open, depending on professional work by then and **progress** in the first two modules. Possible areas are:

- What is feminism? (most probable) Producing artwork around concepts of feminism – both playful 'A to Z of Love and Sex', allegorical from found textures and serious infographics.
- Landscaping the world (maybe for later photography degree) – looking at the way global corporations are shaping our environment. Political illustration based on my photos from Africa, Asia and Europe (Spain and UK)

I am aiming to focus on pictorial print and/or e-book and/or on-line animation of a selection of about 5 self-written feminist allegorical adaptations of myths from countries I have visited in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These would be aimed at and disseminated to a global audience through my various social networks for Visual Communications and also international contacts for my professional work. I am not sure yet how far the material would be aimed mostly at adult women and men, and how far they would also aim to be attractive and suitable for children.

I am also not sure about medium and style – how far I would incorporate digital photography from my travels to give a sense of 'realism', whether I would base the images on printmaking techniques, iPad art and/or other methods derived from my textural and mark-making 'imaginings' that have been uploaded in the Illustration folders on this Google Drive. But my images would aim to be distinctive and different from what is already available, and adapted and relevant to the cultural context and subject matter, based on skills developed in Viscom 3.1 and my research in VisCom 3.2 and my current practice.