

BIG IDEA PROJECTS

Developing an independent series of meaningful artworks

Honors Visual Art III/IV

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OBJECTIVE

Modeling the studio practice of contemporary artists, you will produce an independent series of works around a central concept, or Big Idea. Contemporary artists look to the world around them for inspiration, pulling ideas from personal experience, filtered through social interaction and viewed through the lens of art history. The work of contemporary artists is often conceptual – that is, it puts the idea forward and the idea leads to form and content. “The idea becomes a machine that makes the art”, said artist Sol Lewitt.

In this series, you will generate the idea that forms the framework for your series. A Big Idea is a large, overarching idea or question that generates other ideas. It should be explored through research, but also informed by experimentation and play. Process is equally as important as product. In that case, it is not important that you know what your work is “about” at first. The process will reveal the meaning behind your idea.

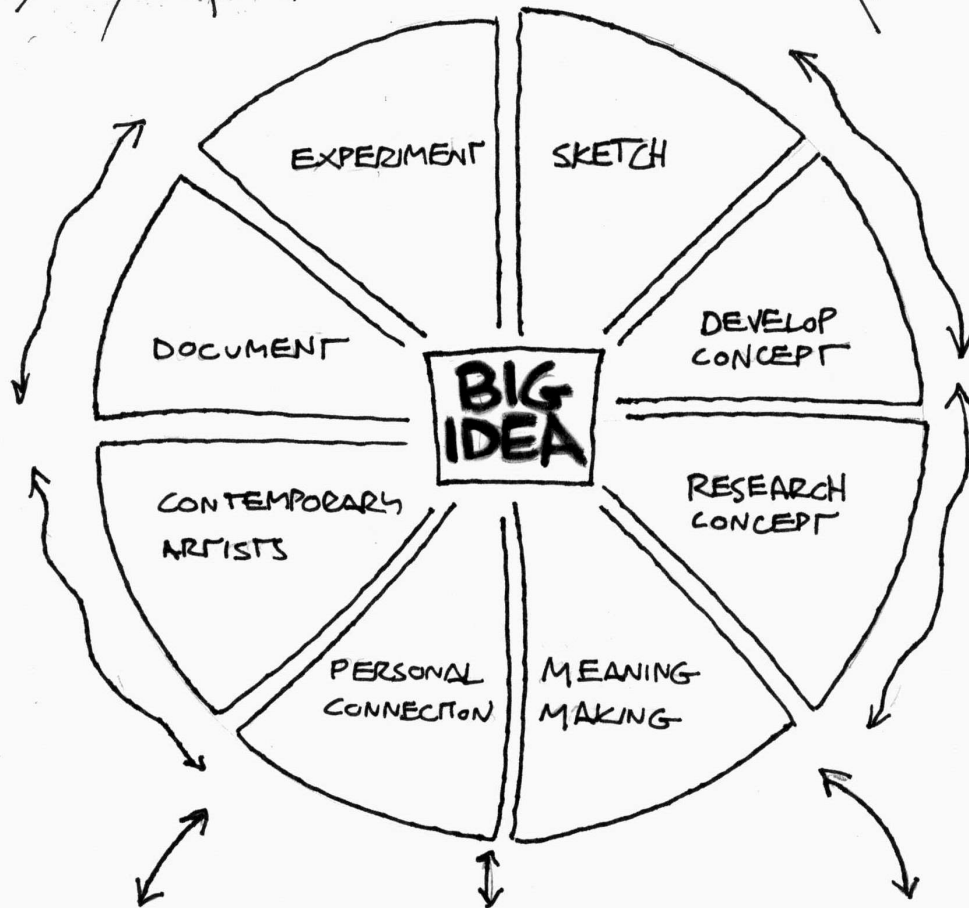
You will be asked to document the development of your series from experimentation and play, to initial spark of inspiration, to investigation of ideas, to production of works, and eventually to reflection about what your work means. At the end of the year, you will present your series in a professional gallery setting, and in a digital portfolio on your school web page.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

POINTS	ASSESSMENT
40%	PROCESS (Stage 1 & 2): Your <i>process</i> includes <u>evidence of thinking</u> about your concepts, researching ideas and artists, and planning for final works. Documentation of your process includes sketches, blog posts and visual experiments.
40%	PRODUCT (Stage 3): The <i>product</i> is your <u>series of final works</u> . You should produce a minimum of <i>three works</i> per quarter, in any media. Experimentation with multiple media is encouraged. <i>*note:</i> More than three works are encouraged. Grades for multiple projects may be averaged together. Artworks must reflect a quarter’s worth of work (Could be 2 large paintings, 50 minitature drawings, etc, etc)
20%	PRESENTATION (Stage 4): The <i>presentation</i> includes two components: A <u>gallery show</u> and a <u>digital portfolio</u> . You will also write an artist statement and reflect on your work in a video interview.



STAGE ONE



STAGE TWO

S E R I E S

FINAL WORK #1

FINAL WORK #2

FINAL WORK #3

FINAL WORK #4

etc., etc.

STAGE THREE

PROCESS
PORTFOLIO

- ARTIST STATEMENT
- REFLECTION
- CRITIQUE

GALLERY
EXHIBITION

STAGE FOUR

BIG IDEAS PROJECTS

*On the next pages, you will find the four stages of the Big Ideas project. **Document your process in your sketchbook and on your Process Blog.** You may emphasize some aspects more than others, but each stage should be completed by the end of the project.*

*****Important:*** This is *not* intended to be read as a recipe or formula for “how to make art”. It is expected that you will bounce between stages (especially 2 & 3) throughout the unit.

STAGE 1: EXPERIMENT & PLAY

EXPERIMENT!

PLAY!

The Big Ideas projects involve a fair amount of research and reflection, but before you begin any serious project, you should allow space for free, uninhibited, experimental and playful artmaking. *Often, it feels like the best work comes out of nowhere:* It's not the carefully thought-out and thoroughly-planned works that are the most satisfying or successful; it's the ones that hit you like a lightning bolt. That only happens when you open up a creative space through experimentation, collaboration and purposeful play.

- **Spend at least full one class period improvising, collaborating or otherwise playing** with art materials, techniques or styles. If possible, allow more than one class period (several hours in an evening or on a weekend will allow you to immerse yourself in the experience of creative play)
- **Reflect on your experience:** What ideas, images or possibilities emerge from this session? Don't look for revelations, only small kernels of ideas. Where can you take these small possibilities?

STAGE 2: PLAN & THINK

SELECTING A BIG IDEA

A “Big Idea” is a way to deepen your thinking about art, and to develop a body of work around a theme or question. It is a large, overarching concept that inspires multiple smaller ideas. *A Big Idea is not the same thing as “subject matter”.* Subject matter may vary, but the Big Idea should be the same. For example, you may choose “Heroes” as your Big Idea, but you may do a painting of a family member, and a mixed-media piece about civil rights history.

GETTING STARTED: The following activities will be completed in class (as a group) after each artist has spent time in Stage 1.

- **Brainstorm a list of Big Ideas:** As a group, brainstorm a list of possible Big Ideas. Collaborate with classmates to generate a master list of each Big Idea, and discuss possibilities they inspire.
- **“Speed-date” Big Ideas:** Before selecting a final Big Idea, spend a short amount of time with several different ideas. Take one “out for a date” (make work for a whole class period around that idea). Select one to “go steady” (spend a week with that idea, making artwork and researching artists). Are you ready to pop the question??
- **Select a Big Idea:** After you have gone through the above process, you're ready to select a final Big Idea for your series. *Select a concept that excites and interests you.* It should inspire you to want to learn more about the idea

WORKING WITH YOUR BIG IDEA

Note: These are not “steps”. You are not expected to complete them in order, but rather to cycle through these various processes as you see fit, throughout the course of making your work. However, each element below is an important part of the process and must be included in the development of your series.

SKETCH:

Draw, paint, collage & otherwise make images relating to your Big Idea. *Suggested activities:*

- Visual Brainstorming: Draw any images that come to mind when you think about your topic – the people, objects, places, symbols or signs that you associate with your idea. Let your thinking be free and playful.
- Context Drawings: Select images from your Visual Brainstorm sketches. In the next series, reimagine these objects in new contexts or settings. Pull ideas from the “objects” and “places” you brainstormed and look for surprising, contrasting contexts.
- Thumbnails: Draw small thumbnail composition sketches for final works

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS:

Personal Connections will make your Big Idea personally relevant. Why did you select this Big Idea? Why is it personally meaningful to you? Where are *you* in this idea? *Suggested activities:*

- Write a personal narrative: Write a statement or story about the experiences you have had with this Big Idea. Post it to your Process Blog. This will be the foundation for your Artist Statement.

DEVELOP CONCEPT:

Think of your Big Idea as an over-stuffed suitcase loaded with possibilities: Explore what deeper concepts your Big Idea has to offer by unpacking the suitcase with the following activities:

- Key Concepts: Key Concepts are the most significant aspects of your Big Idea. Creating a list of key concepts helps to unlock your Big Idea into something more specific, revealing new ways of thinking and making art. Begin with simple phrases, like “[my Big Idea] is...”, and then develop more complex statements.
- Essential questions: Essential Questions will guide the kinds of images you make. You are not looking for answers by asking questions: you are looking for new ways to approach a problem. Remember, your work should provoke questions, not provide answers
- Select Topics: Consider your responses to the activities above: Ask yourself which ideas seem worthy of investigation. Do any of these concepts or questions inspire further ideas for you? Do you want to learn more about any of these concepts or questions? Whatever you select will become the topic to explore in your artwork.

DOCUMENT:

Documenting your work – in sketches, photos, artifacts and reflection – helps me to see how you developed your work, but it also helps you navigate the choices you made, and will form the basis for your year-end portfolio. It is very important to establish a good routine regarding documentation, and keep it up throughout the year. *Suggested activities:*

- Daily notes in sketchbook: Keep a daily journal of everything you did each day, no matter how mundane. Focus especially on changes to works or experiments with new processes. A simple action list will suffice.
- Photos: Take a picture of your work, every day if possible.
- Weekly posts on Process Blog: There will be specific prompts for blog posts from time to time, but it is good practice to update your Process Blog frequently.

RESEARCH CONCEPT:

How does your Big Idea connect to the world beyond your art project? Learn more about your Big Idea through research, exploring interdisciplinary connections. *Suggested activities:*

- Search online: Research websites and blogs that relate to your Big Idea.
- Read articles: Look in newspapers and magazines for stories relating to your Big Idea. Clip them and place them in your sketchbook
- Go to the library: Ask a librarian to help you find resources for your Big Idea

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS:

Connecting your work to the way contemporary artist work is exciting for several reasons. It shows you how other artists have worked through similar ideas and problems, it inspires you with ideas and strategies, and it will help you see that what you do is relevant to the way artists make work today. There will be in-class activities and presentations, but you must also do your own contemporary artist research. *Suggested activities and resources:*

- Art21 (<http://www.art21.org>): Without a doubt, the most useful site for contemporary art. Search by idea, process or artist. Watch videos, read interviews, browse work, and document what you discover.
- Links on my webpage: In addition to Art21, there are many useful websites, blogs and resources dedicated to contemporary art. See my webpage for links.
- Use the library: The school library has some resources on contemporary art. Also consider the Sloan Art Library on UNC campus
- UNC Artist Talks: Unique opportunity to hear firsthand from internationally recognized artists, right here in Chapel Hill. Schedule will be presented in class.
- Go to galleries: There are a number of exciting galleries, museums and collectives in Chapel Hill and throughout the Triangle. Explore what the area has to offer!

EXPERIMENT:

Experiment with new visual ideas, processes and techniques. You will complete a number of teacher-led challenges that are designed to apply constraints (rules, strategies) and freedoms (experimental techniques, subconscious exercises, play) to your artmaking process, but feel free to innovate and experiment on your own. *Suggested activities:*

- Experiment with processes: What constraints could you impose that reveal new and interesting ideas? When is it useful to introduce a chance element? What would happen if you juxtapose one image with another or layer two images over one another? Play around with processes, see what you discover.
- Experiment with techniques: Try a new medium or new technique. You could try a medium you've never worked with before, or you could try new techniques that elevate your abilities in a medium you are proficient in.
- Experiment with ideas: Follow the inspiration of contemporary artists who are working with the same Big Idea. Try on some of their strategies and processes, see what fits.
- "Strategies Box": At any time, you may introduce a Strategy Card. The only rules are that 1) you may not fish for cards until you get one you like, and 2) you must use the card you draw in some way in your final project.

MEANING MAKING:

Delay meaning: As you make your work or after you have finished a work, consider what the work means. You may have gone into it with a clearly thought out idea, but how has that idea changed? What does the work mean to you? What will it mean to a viewer? *Suggested activities:*

- Write a reflection: Write a reflection about your work's meaning and how it has changed
- Ask for feedback from others: What is the viewers' involvement in the work, and how does the viewer affect the work's meaning? In a critique, public exhibition or one-on-one conversation, find out how others interpret your work.

STAGE 3: MAKE

A final work may begin at any stage in the process, not necessarily after the above steps are completed. This should be an organic process: An experiment may turn into a final piece, which may send you back to research, which may lead to a series of new works. As you embark upon a new work, consider the following questions (outline answers in your sketchbook):

1. What medium will I use?

You have the art room at your disposal, and may be permitted access to any materials at any time. You are welcome to make works in your preferred medium but you are strongly encouraged to experiment with new media and to combine multiple media. The medium is a major part of your work's meaning.

2. What will my topic be? What will my subject matter be?

Don't confuse Big Idea with subject matter. Your *Big Idea* is your overarching concept, your *topic* is your specific meaning, and your *subject matter* is the visual content of your work. For example, Marilyn Monroe is the subject matter of Andy Warhol's "Marilyn", but the topic is celebrities and the Big Idea may be consumer culture

3. What processes will I use?

Does this project call for appropriated imagery? Would projected images help in making the work, or is it necessary to make something by hand, without the aid of technology? Would layers and conceal/reveal strategies enhance the meaning? Refer to previous experiments, Olivia Gude's Postmodern Principles and the Strategies Box for ideas.

4. Does my work ask questions or does it only provide answers?

This is inquiry-based artmaking. *Delay meaning*: You should not assume you know exactly what your work is about, but should rather use the making of the artwork as a way to learn more about your Big Idea and your essential questions (and yourself). Good art, I believe, asks challenging questions that only lead to more questions. Other disciplines may seek to provide answers, but the artist seeks the unknown.

5. Is there room to change my mind?

It is very important to remember that your thinking does not stop once you begin making an artwork. Allow your thought process to continue throughout the making of your works, and let new ideas inform the choices you make. Continue brainstorming and experimenting throughout the series, and listen to your instincts.

STAGE 4: PRESENT & REFLECT

At the end of the year, you will present your work in two contexts: A **Process Portfolio** (a webpage documenting your process) and a **Gallery Exhibition** (a public display in a professional setting).

PROCESS PORTFOLIO:

A portfolio can take many shapes, but there are two basic types of portfolio. The first is a BEST-WORK PORTFOLIO. This is a compilation of your most successful pieces. This is what you would use to apply to an art school or to enter a competition. We are going to make a different kind of portfolio in this class: a PROCESS PORTFOLIO (sometimes called a “learning portfolio”). This will be used to document your growth as an artist, and will present a snapshot of all of your work throughout the year. In addition to your final works, you will be asked to keep track of any preliminary sketches, notes and research. You will also be asked to reflect on the piece in writing after it is finished.

Evidence of your process

For each work, please document some or all of the following in your sketchbook, then present this documentation in your Process Portfolio. *Note:* If you have been keeping up with process blog prompts, much of this content already exists on your webpage. You just have to compile it!

- Preliminary sketches
- Research about artists
- Reference images
- Practice with media
- Thumbnail composition sketches
- Daily progress notes
- Rubrics
- Final reflections
- Plans for future works

What will the online Process Portfolio look like? Which works should you select?

The digital portfolio is a webpage in which you present your *three most important works* created throughout the series. These are not your “best” works necessarily, but the works in which you grew the most as an artist. *For each work, include:*

- A digital image of the final piece
- A sample of the preliminary sketches with notes about the process
 - Pay special attention here to how the work changed or evolved
 - It's not every single sketch, just the most formative ones
- A sample of research with notes about the findings
 - Pay special attention here to what aspects of research informed your piece. Include only relevant information.
- A final reflection – 2 or 3 short paragraphs about the overall success of the project, and how it informed your artmaking. Also, discuss how this work might lead to future directions in your artmaking.

GALLERY EXHIBITION:

In mid-May, your final series will be placed on display in a professional gallery setting. The site is still to be determined, but you will be responsible for the following:

- Prepare work for display: Including title, label, artist statement and hanger, etc
- Install and remove show: Students are asked to install and deinstall the exhibition.
- Promotion: Students will produce online and print promotional materials
- Volunteer: Some galleries require student volunteers on site whenever the gallery is open
- Artist Statement: For your website and gallery exhibition, prepare a written statement introducing your work to the viewer – what does the viewer need to know about the themes you explored and the ways in which you present them? How can you enrich the viewer's experience without merely explaining your artwork?

*** Specific guidelines for all of the above tasks will follow*