

Programme Specification

Award and title: MFA Illustration

<i>School:</i>	School of the Arts
<i>Subject area:</i>	Art (Fine Art, Illustration & Photography)
<i>Entry from academic year:</i>	2026-27
<i>in the month(s) of</i>	September
<i>Awarding institution:</i>	York St John University
<i>Teaching institution:</i>	York St John University
<i>Delivery location:</i>	York St John University, York campus
<i>Programme/s accredited by:</i>	
<i>Exit awards:</i>	Postgraduate Certificate Illustration Postgraduate Diploma Illustration MA Illustration
<i>UCAS code / GTTR / other:</i>	
<i>Joint Honours combinations:</i>	N/A
<i>QAA subject benchmark statement(s):</i>	
<i>Mode/s of study:</i>	non-standard period of study as follows: Full time for 2 academic years - 4 semesters 30 weeks study each year
<i>Language of study:</i>	English
<i>Paired with Foundation Year</i>	No
<i>Study abroad opportunities:</i>	Yes
<i>Opt-in YSJU Placement Year opportunity:</i>	No

Introduction and special features

The MFA Illustration is part of a suite of rigorous academic Level 7 programmes including MFA Fine Art and MFA Photography. This MFA focuses on progressing and professionalising your Illustration practice. The aim is for you to produce a body of rigorous creative practice that is underpinned by a theoretical understanding. Its emphasis is on practice, supported by theoretical knowledge and framed through the application of clear research methodologies. As a student you will develop a deeper knowledge of your Illustration practice that will enable you to cultivate appropriate methodologies and formulate propositions. The programme has been designed to meet the needs of students who have both just finished undergraduate programmes in the UK/EU and International and returners to learning.

The MFA supports you to identify, develop and professionalise your particular approach to your practice through a combination of taught sessions, tutorials, critiques, briefs and live projects, field trips and participatory events. You will be supported to work independently to explore your own potential, focusing on practices that are directly relevant to your interests. You will be expected to think globally, produce work of high quality and develop your professional networks. You will be challenged to transcend barriers in both your thinking and your making. You will be enabled to position your work in response to current issues such as de-colonisation, digital and environmental issues. You will be supported to build on your knowledge of

Illustration practice through both material thinking and critical theory in order to underpin your studio practice and situate your work in the professional and scholarly field. You can expect:

- A supportive community of artists working at different levels in related disciplines.
- The opportunity to incorporate professional practice, live projects into your programme.
- A focus on developing your own creative practice in a supported, well-paced and structured manner.

Special Features Include:

- Interdisciplinary sessions to expand the thinking around practice.
- Guest speakers with a range of specialisms and the opportunity for one-to-one discussions
- Subject- specific technique classes
- Access to specialist studios and workshop spaces
- Field trips e.g. art fairs, biennials, and galleries
- The opportunity to spend one or two semesters aboard at Agder University, Kristiansand, Norway in the second year of your study.
- Opportunities to apply for residencies and art prizes (e.g. York Open Studios, The Eleanor Worthington Prize)
- Invitations to join staff/student research groups (e.g. The Ecological Justice Research group)
- Group exhibitions (e.g. in the Creative Centre)
- Networking opportunities with local, regional, and international arts organisations (e.g. York Art Gallery, York Mediale, Chrysalis Arts, Aesthetica)

The MFA is deliberately spread over 2 years of full-time study to allow for a mature and considered practice to develop. Taking inspiration from the slow art movement, the summer between the first and second year of the programme will allow studio access so you can continue engaging in your practice without any formal assessed outcome.

The principals underpinning the programme:

1. The programme builds upon and responds to scholarship at the vanguard of the artistic practice, aiming to facilitate scholarly innovation and the development of new knowledge that can be effectively shared;
2. The programme reflects on and integrates current or emergent professional practice in order to align with identifiable career paths, thus supporting entry to significant careers and related opportunities;
3. The programme is underpinned and supported by the pedagogic expertise, academic knowledge, professional skills and research capabilities of members of staff in the University.

This programme will enable you to broaden, understand, refine and develop your own practice. You will rigorously investigate and question your field of study in order to reflect upon and improve your own practice including research skills, philosophical approaches, and project management skills.

Admissions criteria

You must meet the minimum entry requirements which are published on the programme specific webpage. In addition, you must have:

- A portfolio of your current practice

If your first language is not English, you need to take an IELTS test or an equivalent qualification accepted by the University (see <https://www.yorks.ac.uk/international/how-to-apply/english-language-requirements/>).

If you do not have traditional qualifications, you may be eligible for entry on the basis of [Recognition of prior learning \(RPL\)](#). We also consider applications for entry with advanced standing.

Programme aim(s)

1. To develop your personal Illustration practice so that it is rigorous, ambitious, self-directed, professional, and sustainable.
2. To utilise your practice in order to deal with complex issues and test the parameters of established theories and practices of representation, and to expand the concept of your Illustration practice in order to form new discourses.
3. To exercise initiative and personal responsibility in experimenting through your practice in terms of its inter-disciplinary possibilities and test its boundaries in terms of its creative potentiality.

Programme learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of the programme students will be able to:

Level 7

- 7.1 Deploy systematic research methods appropriate to organised academic inquiry that facilitate the forming of creative connections and experimental strategies through rigorous critical exploration.
- 7.2 Demonstrate material intelligence via a comprehensive understanding and application of techniques to enable critical analysis of complex information related to art and design
- 7.3 Synthesise, evaluate and comment upon relevant new knowledge at the forefront of the discipline through a range of research (incl. practice-as-research) approaches
- 7.4 Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of your subject area through creative, critically and conceptually informed, analytical and evaluative aesthetic decision making that negotiates uncertainty, ambiguity and knowledge limitations.
- 7.5 Develop focus for your practice by formulating a systematic research trajectory, including initial questions, relevant methodologies and research imperatives, that establishes the parameters for your creative practice.
- 7.6 Identify and engage with appropriate resources and networking opportunities that compel you to respond positively to challenges and novel situations that impact on your practice.
- 7.7 Critically evaluate and comment upon a range of approaches to creative research and practice that demonstrate your research trajectory and commitment to your practice.
- 7.8 Evaluate practice and knowledge in its wider cultural, social and professional environments using an appropriate professional expression, lexicon and register.
- 7.9 Demonstrate critically informed and professional project management by deploying appropriate and innovative methodologies, which incorporate relevant materials, processes, tools and techniques and engages with external organisations.
- 7.10 Formulate and communicate a creative proposition in an informed manner to an audience, articulating an original, specialist and sustainable self-directed and mature practice.

Programme structure

Code	Level	Semester	Year	Title	Credits	Module status	
						Compulsory (C) or optional (O)	non-compensable (NC) or compensable (X)
ART7010M	7	1	1	Experiment	40	C	NC
ART7011M	7	1 & 2	1	Coexistents	40	C	NC
ART7012M	7	2	1	Explore	40	C	NC
ART7013M	7	1	2	Emerge	60	C	NC
ART7015M	7	2	2	Confirm Illustration	60	C	NC

Any modules that must be passed for progression or award are indicated in the table above as non-compensable. A non-compensable module is one that must be passed at the relevant level (with a mark of 50 in order to progress).

Learning, teaching and assessment

The teaching methodology is informed by an in-depth knowledge of pedagogy and incorporates a broad range of good practices. These diverse practices are relevant to both studio-based practice and experience-based learning and are aimed at challenging the boundaries of your practice. The teaching and learning environment is informed by workshop facilities, teaching spaces, technologies and intermedial exchanges between analogue and digital cultures as well as a community of peers.

You will experience a range of teaching and learning strategies across the modules. These will include workshop and studio sessions, seminar discussions, supervised projects, crits, professional experiences and project work to enable you to be co-creators of your learning. Your creative development will be underpinned by an ongoing process of experimentation, action, reflection and evaluation, facilitated by action research methodologies and expanded through different modes of reflective practice. As a result, you will gain an in-depth understanding of the different modes of artistic production and will be able to re-define and situate your creative practice within the wider visual arts landscape.

Formative assessment will be employed throughout the programme through a range of tasks, projects and presentations. Summative assessment will take a variety of forms including presentations, portfolios, exhibitions and written work.

The Modules

The practice-based modules in the first year will introduce you to new approaches to your practice that enable you to Experiment (40 credits semester 1) and Explore (40 credits semester 2) with your creative ideas in a broad and engaged manner. Coexistents (40 credits across semesters 1 and 2) will enable you to consider the contexts and wider debates around your work, develop research methodologies and position your practice as research. The second year sets you on a trajectory of practice led investigations informed by theory and an expectation of a professional approach to your practice embedded throughout. In Emerge (60 credits semester 1) you will begin your final Master's project which is completed in Confirm (60 credits semester 2) as a self-directed body of research.

Progression and graduation requirements

The University's [general regulations for](#) postgraduate awards apply to this programme.

Any modules that must be passed for progression or award are indicated in the Programme Structure section as non-compensable.

Students that fail to achieve the 240 credits required for the MFA but who successfully pass 180 credits, which must include the 60 credits for the Confirm module, will be eligible for the exit award of an MA illustration.

Internal and external reference points

This programme specification was formulated with reference to:

- [University mission and values](#)
- [University 2026 Strategy](#)
- [QAA subject benchmark statements](#)
- [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications](#)

Date written 6/1/21 revised:
Programme originally approved: