

Meet the Royal College
of Art

Why an accountant, a scientist and a business consultant enrolled at art school

From corporate to creative, three students reveal why they took a 'leap of faith' and left their jobs to pursue their artistic passions in photography, illustration and animation

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Royal College of Art
Postgraduate Art & Design

About this content

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Fri 1 Dec 2023 14:16 GMT



📷 Many postgraduate students at the RCA come from non-arts backgrounds

You might have an image in your head of a typical art student – someone imaginative perhaps, expressive, who has always been drawn to creative activities.

So it might surprise you to discover that many of the students who study at the Royal College of Art in London have backgrounds in non-arts subjects, ranging from science and technology to accounting and law.

Whether they've decided to revisit their early artistic interests, want to bring design thinking or creativity into their current career, or are thinking about switching careers altogether, non-arts students from across the UK and internationally have been attracted to take up a postgraduate place at the renowned arts institution.

Below, three RCA students reveal their own stories about what caused them to pause and switch tack to a more creative field, and how they're finding the change.

'At first I worried about my non-arts background'

Finan Malcolm, 25, studied environmental science in the US, then worked in advertising before moving to the UK to take a photography MA at the RCA.

"Growing up on my family's organic vegetable farm, my childhood was about being outdoors, immersed in nature, so it made sense to choose a degree related to environmental science. I also felt that a career in Stem [science, technology, engineering and maths] would lead me down a more successful path than a job in the arts. This was even though I had enjoyed photography since I was 12, when I got a camera for my birthday, and had studied photography at high school.

"After graduating, I took a job in advertising and client services in New York City. It was the height of the pandemic, so I had just applied for any opportunities I could, and it was very unfulfilling.

"While working from home, I rediscovered my love for photography and the arts. My photography was story-based, whimsical, fantastical, creating scenes in the

woods and the gardens with my siblings. My passion for photography had been reignited because I was back at home with my family, remembering how we used to entertain ourselves as children, and using that same form of entertainment as adults.

"After two years, I took a leap of faith and decided to pursue my passion. I started my MA in September 2023, and at first I worried that I didn't belong because of my non-arts background. But I've been supported by the RCA -they have welcomed me with open arms to be a part of the art community without any worries about my background. In fact my tutor has told me that she thinks it makes me quite unique, and that it shows through my work.

"I have made so many friends across various programmes, including architecture and printmaking. It's exhilarating to be able to meet people that I can both rely on as a support group as well as collaborate with in the future. I'm not sure what path I'll go down after my MA, but my hope is that I'll be able to continue making art and doing what I love for the rest of my life."



📷 Riccardo Ennio: 'When I came across the Graduate Diploma Art & Design at the RCA, it seemed the perfect fit for someone like me.'

'I couldn't stop thinking about my love of drawing'

Riccardo Ennio, 28, left his job as a fund accountant to study for a graduate diploma in art and design.

"Back home in Italy, I studied economics and finance, planning to pursue a career as an analyst. After graduation, I got a job as a fund accountant, but I couldn't stop thinking about the love of drawing and illustration I've had since I was a child.

"I didn't want to look back on my life and see that I'd missed the chance to follow my passion, and my economics and finance degree had given me the safety net and freedom I needed to pursue it. When I came across the Graduate Diploma Art & Design at the RCA, it seemed the perfect fit for someone like me, who wasn't sure about their future path in the arts.

"As an interdisciplinary diploma, it offers students the chance to find their identity. I started the course in May 2023, and I love that it's designed to give

students freedom - all the projects we work on are open to interpretation, depending on our interests. I've leaned towards animation - I'd love to work as a visual storyteller - so after my diploma, I'm thinking about continuing my studies with an MA.

"Discovering my potential is so exciting. What was daunting at the beginning is now just exciting. I can see so many possibilities in my future."



'Switching from economics to art completely changed my perspective'

Francisco Coppola, 27, was a business consultant before applying for an MA in animation at the RCA.

"After studying economic history at the London School of Economics, I got a job as a business consultant with a design company. Working alongside architects and designers, I soon realised that I wanted to be able to express my own creativity, rather than just selling other people's.

"I began researching the creative industries, and discovered that people who worked in animation were exactly my kind of people: warm, welcoming, and happy to help you learn.

"Then, when I accompanied a friend to an open day at the RCA, my world was turned upside-down. I saw it was a place where my background wouldn't hold me back, and where I could remould myself into anything I wanted to be.

"Hell-bent on creating an animation portfolio, I taught myself during lockdown using online courses. It took a lot of soul searching to eventually apply for an MA at the RCA, but if I didn't take the risk, I knew I'd always regret it.

"I started the course in 2021, and being exposed to the artistic sensibilities of other animators was so exciting - I felt like I was part of a big community. During my studies, I focused on a mixture of commercial and artistic work, including a film that was exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Arts and now, post-graduation, I'm looking to get a foothold in the commercial industry.

"Switching from economics to art has completely changed my perspective. Instead of living for the weekend, my work is part of my life. I took the risk of doing something I thought I'd love, and now it doesn't feel like work at all."

From animation and architecture to fashion and fine arts, find out more about how you could unleash your creative passion and boost your career at the Royal College of Art