

Painting 1: Understanding Painting Media

Part four

The tondo: domestic interior



Emma Talbot, *Writers Block* (acrylic on canvas)

Use the grid below to keep track of your progress throughout Part Four.

Exercise	Page	Complete
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4.2	89	
4.3	89	
4.4	89	

Introduction

In Part Four you're going to paint on a round surface or 'tondo'. The word tondo comes from the Italian word 'rotondo' and means circular and complete. In Parts One to Three you've experimented with traditional and non-traditional materials and now you can really deepen your understanding of your chosen medium. For Parts Four and Five you'll work in the medium of your choice. The introduction to this course guide has some useful information about using different media as well as a medium-specific list of artists for you to look at. There are also some media-specific tips at the end of Part Four (see Assignment Four).

A circular painting often has religious connotations and implies harmony and perfection. Quakers used to sign their name in a circle to avoid one person being first or last on a list and to create a sense of unity.

Michelangelo is an example of a historic artist who made circular paintings. Contemporary artists who use the tondo include Mark Fairington, Roxy Walsh, Iain Andrews, Henny Acloque, Mindy Lee, Virginia Verran.

Iain Andrews won the Marmite Painting Prize in 2014. He is a practising psychologist as well as an artist and his works often refer to historical and classical myths and legends in the way that Sigmund Freud's theories do. Andrews also makes visual allusions to the works of historic painters such as Titian.



Iain Andrews



Henny Acloque (mixed media on canvas)

Henny Acloque references images from medieval tarot cards as well as the works of Breugel, Cranach and other artists of the German Renaissance to make paintings that describe her own inner life and emotional responses. She recently made a series of work that visually depicted the grief she felt at losing her father.



Virginia Verran, *Bolus-space (signal)*, 2010

Virginia Verran won the Jerwood Drawing Prize in 2010. She uses pen, watercolour and pencil to create large-scale round drawings using delicate lines to depict fantasy scenes.



Mindy Lee, *John's Overfaced (Bellini)* (acrylic on paper and metal plate)



Mindy Lee uses paper plates to create her visceral, thickly-painted, edible-looking paintings. She often uses a pastel palette similar to the colours used by Jean-Honoré Fragonard and later Wayne Thiebaud. Lee often presents the work on a table as if she has created a fantasy dinner party.



Mark Fairnington, *Cape Hunting Dog* (oil on wood)

Mark Fairnington works on a range of traditional surfaces including oak. This very close-up image of the eye of a hunting dog is part of a series he made from photographs taken in the Natural History Museum. The circular shape of the painting emphasises and focuses the central image of the eye and the reflections within it.

Your tondos will have a domestic focus so, before you start, you'll also find it useful to look at some ways in which contemporary artists portray the domestic interior.



Charlie Day

Charlie Day often paints from memory. The image shown here is of his grandfather's false teeth and glasses on the bedside table at night – a familiar sight to Day when he was growing up. Day also makes paintings of things that surround him – an eraser or pencil, for example – but paints these in a way that makes them look monumental. Day is influenced by Wayne Thiebaud, Philip Guston and Richard Diebenkorn. All of these artists use colourful, impasto paint to paint everyday scenes almost as a visual diary. Charlie Day's wife is artist Tori Day. Together they document their home life, studying the objects around them. These images often tell a subtle story about their relationship.



Jacquie Utley, *Flower Vase Sings*, (oil on canvas)

Jacqueline Utley paints on paper as well as canvas. Utley's paintings are small-scale and often have jewel-like accents of colour that make them look a little like icon paintings. She is influenced by the artist Prunella Clough. Utley focuses on the domestic interior and her paintings have been described as resembling the interior of dolls' houses. She celebrates subjects often associated with the female.



Research point

Do your own research into some of the artists mentioned above. Can you find any other examples of tondo painting? Try to decide why the artist in question has decided to paint in this format. Look also at artists who have focused on aspects of the domestic interior. Does any of this work give you any ideas for your tondo painting in Part Four?

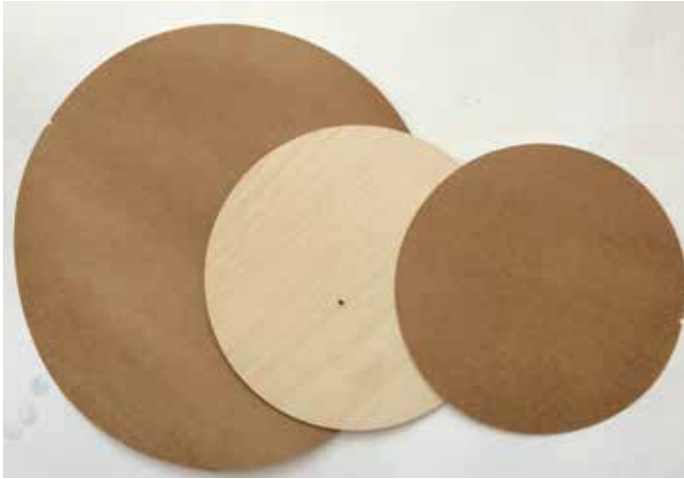


Annabel Dover (see above) often paints the objects in her house and provides an accompanying story, so that the viewer understands their significance.

Optional supplementary reading:

Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* ([1958] 2014, New York: Penguin Classics) considers the idea of 'physical memory' and how we function in our environment.

Before you start work on the exercises, draw round a bowl or anything else you can find in the house that is circular or oval. You could use watercolour paper, cardboard, cereal packets or oil-primed paper. Pizza, tarts and other foods from the supermarket often have cardboard circles that you can use. You can get cake boards and pieces of thin card online or at cake supply and craft shops.



Aim to collect the following surfaces to paint on: five circles, three ovals, three paper plates.

Exercise 4.1

Make a circular viewfinder. You can either:

- Take a photograph of something inside your house and place the viewfinder on top of the image.

OR

- Make a card viewfinder that you can hold up to an area you want to paint in your house and work from this.

Make a series of five circular paintings using thinned-down paint. You could use watercolour, gouache, acrylic or turps-diluted oil paint for this. The subject of your painting can be any of the following:

- the interior of a cupboard
- a shelf or mantelpiece
- the interior of a drawer or wardrobe
- a ceiling light
- a pile of post
- a dishcloth or flannel, in situ
- an unmade bed
- a bedside cupboard
- shoes, wherever they are kept
- a wash basket or pile of clothes.

Now take photographs of your paintings and leave them to dry for Exercise 4.4.



Making and using a viewfinder

Exercise 4.2

Make a series of three circular pencil drawings, using coloured pencils, of a scene in your house. Choose from the list above, or something different. Any size, any surface.

Exercise 4.3

Make a very fluid painting of any subject on the list. Once this has dried, paint or spray with gloss varnish or nail varnish. Use any size, any surface, any media. What effects can you create by applying varnish? Make some notes in your learning log.

Exercise 4.4

Using the paintings you made in Exercise 4.1, look at the scene you painted and add thicker paint to these thinly painted works. Leave areas of the thinly painted work visible. What effects have you created by applying areas of thicker paint?

Reviewing your work for Part Four

In Part Four you've chosen a medium to work with in greater depth. In your learning log reflect on the frustrations, successes and failures you've encountered. Keep and document your 'failures' – they may have qualities you don't yet see. Whilst reflecting on the work you've made for Part Four, consider how you'd like to develop this in Part Five. You can continue with your chosen medium in Part Five, start again with a new one, or combine it with another medium. Note down in your learning log what you feel are the qualities of the medium/media you've chosen and how you hope to exploit these qualities.

Turn back to the end of Part One and use the ideas there to help you think about how you can link your work on Part Four to the assessment criteria.

Assignment four

A circular or oval painting

Make a circular or oval painting of an area in your house, either from life or from a photograph. Refer to the work you produced in the exercises to choose a subject and composition that works well. Use heavyweight paper, card or board as a surface to paint onto.

Again, you'll find it helpful to cut out a circular shape to frame your image so you know how you'll paint it on the circle.

Think about the following while you're planning your painting.

- How would you like the painting to look?
- What it is about the image that appeals to you and how can you represent this visually?
- What types of brushes will you use to create your painting?
- What textures/density/hues will you use?
- Will you use gloss?
- Thin/thick paint?
- Will you paint a coloured or a white ground?

Here are a few tips to help you to make the best use of your chosen medium.

Watercolour

Watercolour is a light, translucent medium which can go dull if used as if it were an opaque paint.

Try leaving at least 50 per cent of your image as blank white paper. Look at one of Turner's paintings of clouds, for example; you'll see that a surprising amount of the painting is the untouched white of the paper. This gives watercolour paintings freshness and a bright highlight, which acts as a counterpoint for any dark tones you want to paint.

Be patient. If you want to lay layers of watercolour, you'll need to wait for each layer to dry. If you don't, the previous layer will bleed into the layer you're painting on top, giving you blurry lines and a watered-down pigment. Think about your image first in terms of tones. A pencil or ink drawing can be helpful for this. Remember, when you're looking at the domestic scene you're going to paint, either from life or from a photograph, squint your eyes and analyse how many tones you can see. The more tones you depict, the more three-dimensional the subject of your painting will appear. Leonardo da Vinci used very thin layers of oil paint to create many modulations of tone and build up very three-dimensional looking people, for example. This technique translates well into watercolour.

Remember to work light to dark. Start with the palest tones you can see, wait for this layer to dry and then paint your next layer. Remember also that because you are layering the paint, if there is an overlapping layer this will take on the tone of the layer underneath, automatically creating a darker layer. This also means that you only need to layer the paint in very slightly darker layers to create depth and darkening tones. A common watercolour mistake is to try and get the painting too dark too quickly. Because watercolour works best when it is used watered down as layers, this can create a frustratingly medium-toned painting that refuses to get any lighter or darker.

Don't use watercolour as if it is an opaque medium like oil paint or acrylic paint. The strength of watercolour is its subtlety. Some artists, Annie Kevans for example, use very thin oil paint and you could easily reproduce this using watercolour. Kevans works light to dark, as opposed to the traditional oil painting method of dark to light.

Try not to use black watercolour to create shadow or depth of tone: mix a few different colours. Alizarin Crimson and Paynes Grey work well mixed together to create a dark tone that still has colour and depth.

You can use opaque white paint as a highlight but try not to. Sometimes it is tempting to try and save a murky watercolour painting with opaque white highlights, but this method rarely gives the fresh look or depth of tone that leaving areas of the paper white does.

Finally, finish earlier than you had planned. Leave the painting to dry and wait for a day or two. Take a photograph of it and then, if you still want to, add more layers of paint. Compare the painting you made earlier to your final work and reflect in your learning log on what you think you gained and lost by adding extra layers. Try experimenting with different types of watercolour paper. HP (hot pressed) watercolour paper produces more predictable results but CP (cold pressed) watercolour paper has a rougher surface that can give texture when using washes.

To summarise:

- Be patient and leave each layer to dry.
- Work light to dark.
- Try and keep at least 50 per cent of the image as the white of your paper.
- Use a lot of light-toned layers rather than heavy tones.
- Don't use the watercolour as an opaque medium; you would be better off using gouache if that is the effect you're trying to create.
- Stop early.

Gouache

Gouache is a matt, opaque medium. It is essentially watercolour with 'body colour' or white pigment added. Look at the work of Andrew Penketh for inspiration. Roxy Walsh also mixes watercolour with gouache, playing the thin delicate layers of the watercolour off the opaque velvet surface of the gouache. Walsh sometimes uses gouache when she wants to create more impact in an otherwise pale watercolour. When using gouache it is important to have a plan and to have enough paint ready. This is because gouache can dry quickly; if an area is not painted in one go it will leave a tideline and this can distract from the opaque matt graphic surface that gouache otherwise produces. Keep your brush clean, rinse it through and then dry it on a soft cotton rag or piece of kitchen roll. Use fine brushes

Oil paint

Clean your palette regularly. Disposable palettes are handy as they keep your working area clean. A dirty palette can very quickly produce a murky painting. Use soft brushes rather than the stiff hog brushes that are often described as 'oil painting brushes' in shops. Unless you're making very thick impasto oil paintings, it is easier to control oil paint with soft brushes.

Try not to flood your brush with the mixing medium. If, for example, you're using turps or its equivalent to rinse your brush, always wipe your brush with a soft rag afterwards. You can use loo paper or kitchen roll, but be careful not to let it disintegrate and stick to your brush in bits.

Give yourself enough room and ventilation. Oil painting can be messy; if you're stressed about the environment you're painting in, you'll find it harder to focus on your work. If you find oil paints too messy and cumbersome to use, try water-based oil paints as used by the contemporary artist Karen Kilimnik. Try to clean the neck of your oil paint tube before putting the lid back on, otherwise it will stick solid and you'll lose a lot of paint trying to get it out next time.

When laying the paint out on your palette, don't put a huge amount of paint out; try a 10p size to begin with and see if this is enough for you. Make room for your medium on the palette too. For example, if you want shine and a quicker drying time you might choose Liquin. Have the Liquin central on your palette so you can mix your paints quickly and focus on your painting. Leave enough room between your dollops of paint on the palette so your palette doesn't become murky.

Have a number of brushes to hand so that if you're in the process of cleaning some you still have others you can use.

Oil paint can be manipulated for a long time due to its long drying time. You can wipe off parts you dislike or paint over them. You could try making an oil painting using the traditional dark to light method, however this takes time even with a drying medium added, as each layer needs to be fairly dry for you to make a lighter layer on top.

Many artists find painting with oil paint easier if the painting is laid onto a flat surface such as a table, rather than at an angle on an easel. Wet paint will not slip if the oil painting support is flat. Gieve Figgis, for example, places her painting support flat and lets the oil paint 'pool' to create her paintings.

Ink

If you want to paint with ink it would be useful to look at the watercolour tips. Blotting works very well with ink too. Look at the work of Marlene Dumas if you decide to paint with ink. Dumas uses wet-on-wet blurry layers in combination with more defined layers she has added after these blotted layers have had a chance to dry. As with watercolour, it's useful to work out how many tones you want to depict in your painting before you begin. You could then dilute your ink into as many different tones in different cups. Remember to wash and dry your brush between each tone to retain control over your medium.



Henny Acloque, 2011 (mixed media on canvas)

If you're not happy with your final tondo, whichever medium you've used, paint another or go through one of the processes in the exercises that you found successful.

Send to your tutor by whatever means you've agreed:

- your final tondo
- a selection of work from the exercises in Part Four
- the relevant pages of your learning log or your blog url.

Reflect on your tondo. What were the opportunities and limitations of working within a circular or oval shape? If you were to develop this work, how would you do it? Which artists have influenced you and how? What, if anything, does your tondo say about your domestic life?

Reflection

Remember to revisit the assessment criteria listed at the start of this course guide. Think about how well you've done against the criteria and make notes in your learning log.

Reworking your assignment

Following feedback from your tutor, you may wish to rework some of your assignment, especially if you are ultimately submitting your work for formal assessment. If you do this, make sure you reflect on what you have done, and why, in your learning log.



Tori Day makes studies of everyday interior scenes on a small scale.

