Open College of the Arts and UCA celebrate 30 years of creativity for everyone

Wednesday 7 February, 2018

30 years after Michael Young, Lord Young of Dartington, announced the foundation of the Open College of the Arts (OCA) at London's Royal Academy of Arts, OCA Principal Will Woods and University for the Creative Arts (UCA) Vice-Chancellor Professor Bashir Makhoul are inviting former OCA students to join them in celebrating 30 years of creativity through distance learning. OCA became part of the University for the Creative Arts, the UK's number one specialist university for the creative arts, in 2016.

To launch the campaign, OCA students and tutors joined the Principal and the Vice Chancellor at the gallery@oxo on London's South Bank. *Showcase*, a week-long exhibition of student and alumni work, will open at the gallery on 24 October. The public exhibition, the culmination of OCA's 30th anniversary campaign, will champion OCA's and UCA's commitment to making university-level creative arts study accessible for everyone.

The nine-month campaign, which coincides with UCA's 150th anniversary, will give students and alumni the opportunity to feature in films, exhibit in the #weareOCA30 online gallery, and download special release online courses on subjects from photography to fine art.

> Will Woods said: 'There are thousands of adults all over the country with the ambition to study the creative arts at higher level but whose personal circumstances mean that studying full-time at a campus university is out of reach. OCA is for them. If you have studied with OCA in the past, no matter how long ago, we'd love you to get in touch and tell us where your creative journey has taken you.'

OCA Principal Will Woods also announced a 30th anniversary bursary to support a student through an OCA undergraduate degree programme. The bursary will be funded from an auction of 30 individual artists' book editions of a collection of 30 essays on creativity being commissioned as part of the campaign.

Professor Makhoul, an internationally renowned fine artist in his own right, said: 'The opportunity that OCA provides to study for a qualification from anywhere at a distance has opened the door for so many artists and creative practitioners. As UCA's reputation has grown world-wide, the addition of OCA offers a unique route to a creative arts degree for those who find that more traditional study options aren't suitable to match their ambition. This campaign exposes the true diversity and talent UCA wishes to nurture by developing its distance learning portfolio through the OCA.'

Free creative courses for everyone

Between now and September, OCA will be publishing a series of foundation-level short courses which will be free to anyone who wants to download them. Courses include *Key Ideas in Photography*, which looks at concepts in contemporary photographic theory, and *Studying the Creative Arts in HE*, which prepares students for studying the creative arts in higher education. Students will learn the basics of traditional art and design practice through lessons on topics ranging from mark making and mixing colour, to drawing from portraits and painting the landscape.

The first course in the series, *Art & Design - 30th Anniversary Edition,* is being published today. The course takes around six hours to complete and uses material from OCA's first course, *Art & Design*, published in 1988. Visit to download the course free.

Farmers, firefighters and a circuit judge

The first students began studying with OCA in January 1988. Among them were architects, cooks, dentists, teachers, waiters, farmers, firefighters, accountants, taxi drivers, hoteliers, midwives and a circuit judge. Students studied for a day a week at home and attended a three-hour tutorial every three weeks in one of 30 colleges around the country involved in the OCA pilot.

Speaking about his vision for the creative arts to be taught at home Michael Young said: 'We are challenging the orthodoxy that you can only teach the rudiments of art, craft and design in a studio.' 30 years later, more than 50,000 people have studied with OCA, ranging in age from 18 to 80+.

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OCA now offers 12 undergraduate degrees, in drawing, fine art, graphic design, illustration, moving image, music, painting, photography, textiles, visual communications, creative writing and the creative arts. Students who want to find out if studying the creative arts at higher level is for them can sign up for one of OCA's Foundations courses. In 2012, OCA launched the first MA Fine Art in Europe to be studied entirely through online distance learning.

Making university accessible for more people

Many students choose OCA because they want to fit their studies in with work, travel and family commitments. For others, online and distance learning enables them to cope with a disability or with caring responsibilities. Some are serving custodial sentences. Nearly a fifth of students define themselves as suffering from a physical, mental or learning disability. This compares with 7% of students studying full or part-time for a first degree in mainstream universities who are receiving Disabled Students Allowance.

In the new academic strategy to be published in its 30th year, OCA will state its ambition to be at the forefront of developing and delivering accessible creative arts education through distance learning for an evolving society. OCA aims to create a national, online creative arts community, and to prepare students for sustaining their creative practice once they graduate.

Campaign hashtag: #weareOCA30

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