



Royal
Botanic Garden
Edinburgh

RBGE Diploma in Botanical Illustration Online Course 2021-24



Thank you for requesting further information on the RBGE Diploma in Botanical Illustration Online Course. We are delighted that you are considering joining this three-year course, which we offer in a format designed to fit in with a busy life wherever you are located.

Through PropaGate, our virtual learning environment, you will be able to work remotely throughout the three-year course. Online tutorials via Microsoft Teams will be scheduled at intervals to support work in progress.

This is a fantastic place to study – a world-renowned centre for horticultural and botanical training and research. We have superb resources, the jewel in the crown being our living collections: over 15,000 species of plants growing across our four gardens at Edinburgh, Benmore, Dawyck and Logan. Perhaps even more important for our students, though, is the expertise of our horticultural and botanical staff who are integral to the development of our online courses. The Diploma in Botanical Illustration offers students the benefit of this expertise, as well as tuition from world renowned specialists in botanical painting.

This handbook introduces you to the RBGE Diploma in Botanical Illustration Distance Learning Course (there is also a taught version of this course which takes place over two years and is delivered here in Edinburgh). I hope this handbook answers all your questions, but please don't hesitate to contact myself or the education department (details below) if you have any further queries. We look forward to receiving your application!



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1. Introduction to the Course

'The most fundamental reason one paints is in order to see.'

Brett Whiteley, Artist, Australia

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) Diploma in Botanical Illustration, Distance Learning Course takes place over three years and follows a set timetable. Through PropaGate, the RBGE's virtual learning environment you will work through the same learning modules as the long running attended course. Online tutorials are scheduled at intervals throughout the course to support work in progress, and these will typically make use of Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Skype.

This course requires a significant amount of home study - approx. 20 hours per week. All course content is delivered via PropaGate with online tutor support and feedback. Years 1 and 2 will cover essential techniques and skills of botanical illustration, leading to the production of a themed collection of paintings to be completed by the end of year 3.

The course tutors are botanical artists Jacqui Pestell, Isık Güner, Sarah Roberts, Sharon Tingey and Claire Banks. There will also be input from RBGEs botanists and horticulturists, for specific modules.

The Diploma is awarded to students who successfully complete the three years of study and produce a themed and agreed collection of artwork to an approved standard. The Diploma is awarded by RBGE and externally moderated by acknowledged experts.

2. Entry Requirements

Although there is no formal level of qualification necessary for entry to this course, there is a need to demonstrate a high level of motivation, together with evidence of personal commitment to botanical illustration. It is expected that all artists who join this course will embark on a steep learning curve*.

Students aiming to enter the Diploma course will also be required to demonstrate a pre-existing level of skill in drawing and painting, ideally botanical or plant in subject. There is considerable competition for places and initial selection will be through portfolio assessment (8 - 10 pieces) and your application form. Your application can be submitted online and should also demonstrate your skill, interest and enthusiasm for the subject.

*Please note that this course is not designed for beginners. Artists at beginner's level would gain most benefit from the RBGE Certificate in Botanical Illustration course. The certificate course has been created as an ideal stepping-stone to the Diploma and offers an introduction to the basics skills of drawing and painting needed to record plants and produce a portfolio of work. Full details can be found here: www.rbge.org.uk/certbi

3. Course Structure and Dates

3.1 Course Structure

The RBGE Distance Learning programme is facilitated through PropaGate Learning – RBGE’s virtual learning environment

<https://propagatelearning.rbge.ac.uk>

Modules, lessons and assignments are delivered through PropaGate Learning. This will also be the main method for RBGE tutors to engage with the students and provide feedback on your activities and assignments, as well as answering any questions you may have.

Interactive methods used on the site will include picture galleries, forums and access to demonstration videos. There will be step-by-step footage as well as links to a bank of further botanical demonstrations and places of associated interest. PropaGate Learning also offers student discussion forums so you are able to communicate and support each other which has proven a wonderful resource for our student groups.

Throughout your three years of study with us, you will also be tutored by the Course Director. You will also be allocated different specialist tutors throughout the course depending on which module you are studying. They will conduct the assessments, provide feedback and online support which may include video tutorials via Microsoft Teams to monitor your progress and development.

3.2 Course Dates

The course begins on Thursday 11th March 2021 and will follow a set time-table, meaning each module needs to be completed by a certain date. The notes and activities for each module will be made available following this time frame. Students need to pass each module to progress and to achieve the Diploma.

Year 1: Thursday 11th March 2021 – Thursday 7th April 2022

The first year of the course will introduce each of the following:

- Module 1: Drawing Fundamentals
- Module 7: Botany Part 1
- Module 2: Painting Fundamentals
- Module 3: Painting the Details
- Module 8: Historical Context
- Module 9: Native Tree Project Part 1

Year 2: Friday 8th April 2022 – Thursday 16th March 2023

The second year of the course will introduce each of the following:

- Module 4: Measured Drawing
- Module 7: Botany Part 2
- Module 5: Other Media
- Module 6: Complex Compositions
- Module 9: Native Tree Project Part 2

Year 3 Friday 17th March 2023 – 21st March 2024

In year 3 students will be working independently with online support.

- Module 10: Themed Collection of Paintings

4. Online Learning

PropaGate Learning is an online learning environment that you log into in order to access your course. It's a place for learning and for discussing topics and progress with your tutors and other students. PropaGate Learning allows you to study from home, whilst becoming part of a thriving and enthusiastic learning community.

Your course consists of a number of elements including: slideshows / presentations, notes, videos, galleries, forums, online meetings and an upload area for your assignments and portfolios called MyPortfolio.

4.1 How can I prepare for studying online?

Experience of using your computer, using websites, using email and participating in online forums will stand you in good stead for learning online. Your course involves uploading your drawings and paintings to an online portfolio area, so experience of scanning images using a scanner, taking photographs with a digital camera and of editing/re-sizing images would be very useful.

It is expected that you take time to familiarise yourself with the online environments. Prior to the course starting, you will be given access to PropaGate Learning and MyPortfolio to find your way around. This will enable you to fully engage with the course itself once it starts, rather than spending your time learning the software.

4.2 What hardware or software will I need?

You will need access to a desktop or laptop computer with a reliable internet connection. Most of the course will be accessible via a tablet, but we recommend using a laptop or desktop computer. You may find some aspects of the course will be easier to use on a computer. You will also need access to a scanner (we recommend an A3 flatbed scanner) and/or a digital camera.

Regarding software, you will need an up-to-date browser (e.g. Firefox, Chrome, Safari). You will also need software that will open PDFs (e.g. Adobe Reader), as well as an image-editing programme and Microsoft Teams.

PropaGate Learning is available 24/7 with the exception of any maintenance work, which we will inform you about in plenty of time.

4.3 What support is available?

We encourage everyone to make the most of the discussion forums on the course. These provide a way for students to talk to one another and to tutors and ask each other questions. Tutors usually check the forums at regular intervals (e.g. once or twice a week). There is also a private messaging activity within MyPortfolio where you can contact your tutor directly.

If you ever feel you are stuck with a course-related technical problem, and have already tried working through the help and guidance provided online, you can contact the PropaGate team at: propagate@rbge.org.uk

5. Course Aims, Content and Modules

5.1 Course Aims

- To develop observational skills through the direct visual examination and informed study of botanical subjects. This is in order to render accurate and informative imagery of the specimens, using watercolour, pen and ink and other graphic methods.
- To develop an understanding of botany and plant structure (form, function and ecology of plants).
- To develop an appreciation of and a familiarity with the living, preserved and library collections at RBGE and other Botanic gardens. To get to know some of the key areas of botanical research and conservation and the role that botanical illustration can play in this.
- To develop and enhance the students' drawing and painting skills, together with proficiency in botanical illustration, for artistic, illustrative and scientific purposes.
- To develop in students an understanding of the process of thorough botanical research and an awareness of the historical context of botanical illustration.

5.2 Course Content

- Students will be trained in visual analysis, where emphasis will be placed on the development of skills through a series of tight and precise exercises.
- Botanical painting will also be studied within its historical context.
- The course will cover fundamentals of botany, the essentials of different plant structures, and the ability to produce and assess botanically accurate drawing and painting work.
- The broader aspects of biodiversity and ecology will be covered in so far as they impact upon botanical illustration.
- The 'Native Tree Project', running through the first and second years provides an opportunity for individual research, draws together all the skills you learn in parallel to focus them on all aspects of a single subject, and gives an insight into the practical potential of botanical illustration.

5.3 Module Outlines

The course is divided into the following ten modules, including practical and theoretical topics, and credit for each is as indicated (total 200 credits):

- 1 Drawing Fundamentals: leading to complex skills (5 credits)
- 2 Painting Fundamentals: mixing and application (10 credits)
- 3 Painting the Details (10 credits)
- 4 Measured Drawing – pen & ink (10 credits)
- 5 Other Media (10 credits)
- 6 Complex Composition (10 credits)
- 7 Botany: Plant Form and Function (5 credits)
- 8 Historical Context (Pass only required)
- 9 Native Tree Project (40 credits)
- 10 Third Year Major Project (100 credits)

For each module, you will be assessed according to specific criteria.

Module 1 - Drawing Fundamentals (5 Credits)

Description

This is your first drawing module in the first year. This first stage will cover the fundamentals of drawing accurately and will use plant subject matter. It is essential that the drawing of the plant is undertaken in an almost objective, analytical way; the emphasis must always be on observation. By observing the characteristics of a plant and having the tools, techniques and skills to record these, the resulting drawing will represent that particular plant and its species.

Learning Areas

- Botanical accuracy- a demonstration of keen observational skills.
- Draftsmanship – demonstrating proficiency in the application of techniques in both pencil and other media.
- Aesthetics – demonstrating artistic sensitivity, effective composition and control of expression.

Assessment

You will be assessed through a collection/portfolio of preparatory that will include technical competence and your project being brought to a conclusion.

Module 2 - Painting Fundamentals (10 Credits)

Description

This is your first painting module in the first year. This first stage will cover the fundamentals of painting; the materials and equipment needed to carry out painting exercises and eventually finished artwork. We will develop paint application skills through to rendering accurate colour descriptions of outer and inner fruits and seeds; the representation of convincing three-dimensional subjects will be explored. There will be an emphasis on observation, alongside growing confidence in achieving naturally painted subject matter.

Learning Areas

- Colour theory and a knowledge of the paint box -a demonstration of manipulation of colour including shadows.
- Colour mixing and application – demonstrating proficiency in the application of a variety of techniques using paint.
- Aesthetics – demonstrating artistic sensitivity, and convincing rendering of a subject.

Assessment

You will be assessed through a collection/portfolio of experimental and finished paintings.

Module 3 - Painting the Details (10 Credits)

Description

This is your first opportunity to produce a whole painting. We will cover composition and how to place the specimen on the page, and address aspects common to all orchids or comparable plant – spotted leaves and flowers, fine hairs and possibly roots. You will use the techniques you have studied so far to create a plant portrait. The project includes accurate colour reproduction of flowers, buds and leaves and the production of a convincing painting which reads as three-dimensional.

Learning Areas

- Application of colour theory studied in Painting Fundamentals 1 and manipulation of colour including shadows.
- Colour mixing and application – demonstrating proficiency in the application of a variety of techniques using paint to accurately represent the plant.
- Aesthetics – composition demonstrating artistic sensitivity, and convincing rendering of subject.

Assessment

You will be assessed through a collection/portfolio of preparatory drawings and a completed composition over the sessions.

Module 4 - Measured Drawing (10 Credits)

Description

Measured drawing is the technical drawing of botanical art. It aims to capture the botanically important characters for identification purposes – something that is often a secondary concern in other forms of botanical art.

In this respect, details as fine as the overall appearance and patterning of hairs can be crucial to the success or otherwise of the image. An elegant mix of simplicity (this is simple line drawing, after all), and intricate complexity of shading, hatching and stippling to capture the form of 3-D, real-life structures. The challenge is heightened by the fact that many measured drawings try to resurrect the plant to its living state from a flat, dried herbarium specimen. Accuracy of scale is essential throughout this procedure, and you will also develop skills in plant dissection.

You will be given tuition in the techniques required for accurate, measured drawing from online herbarium specimens, and fresh material if available, including dissections of living flowers.

Learning Areas

- Botanical accuracy- a demonstration of keen observational skills with dried material.
- Draftsmanship – demonstrating proficiency in the application of pen and ink to the plate.
- Gaining knowledge and understand from the botanist.
- Aesthetics – demonstrating artistic sensitivity in the habit drawings, effective composition and control of expression.

Assessment

You will be assessed on proficiency with pen and ink to correctly illustrate a completed composition of the given genus.

Module 5 - Other Media (10 Credits)

Description

This module will give you the chance to work with some media you may not have encountered before. It is often very rewarding to try your hand at a new technique and try to achieve an accurate depiction of your subject in a totally different material.

Graphite and coloured pencils when used with skill, they can achieve incredibly detailed surfaces and almost unrivalled solidity. With embossing and blending techniques, this can produce stunning results.

Vellum is an ancient material that is extremely durable and is the traditional scribe's material. It involves fine painting with a very dry brush and layering to build up surfaces. This achieves a very vibrant, rich end result with excellent potential for conveying 3D solidity.

Learning Areas

- To gain an understanding of the layering of graphite and coloured pencil to build up a variety of surfaces.
- Application of graphite and coloured pencil to demonstrate proficiently the breadth of techniques available to accurately represent the plant.
- Aesthetics – a composition that demonstrates artistic sensitivity, and convincing rendering of the subject in this medium.

Assessment

You will be assessed on a collection of on-going studies leading to a final composition. (same as other modules)

Module 6 - Complex Composition (10 Credits)

Description

This is an opportunity to produce a complete study, a complex composition, involving a collection of seasonal flowering plants. This is to be a fully painted piece with a series of layered plant material juxtaposed against each other, to create an interesting arrangement. Extensive supporting material should accompany the final piece, in the form of sketches and preparatory work leading up to final piece.

- Minimum of 3 subjects
- Compose in a balanced, agreeable way
- Paint rendering three dimensions and a convincing depth of field

Learning Areas

- To capture the character of a group of plants within one composition.
- Application of skills learnt in both previous painting modules and to be expanded upon.
- Colour balance, mixing and application between the different chosen plants.
- Aesthetics – Composition demonstrating artistic sensitivity towards a group piece.

Assessment

You will be assessed through a collection/portfolio of preparatory work and finished complex composition.

Module 7 - Botany: Plant Form and Function (5 Credits)

Description

This module looks at some of the huge range of ways in which plants have adapted to cope with the habitats in which they live. We will look at the development of fruits, seeds, leaves and stems and the ways in which these special structures contribute to the sheer diversity of in the Plant Kingdom. We will also look in more detail at flowers and how four simple whorls of organs can be modified in innumerable ways to ensure the continuation of species. Sessions on the cryptogams (non-flowering plants) allow an insight into the world of these exquisitely structural plants.

Learning Areas

- Understanding plant nomenclature and structure.
- Field observations and speed sketching.

Assessment

The assessment for this module involves trying to capture the botanical detail of the plants, focusing on morphology – the form rather than the subtleties of shade of an individual plant. Your anatomical sketches will be accompanied by scales and full labels.

Module 8 - Historical Context

Description

During the year each student will prepare and deliver an illustrated essay (around 1500 words) on their research into a chosen historical or contemporary botanical artist or movement. Once completed these will be made available to the rest of the group via PropaGate Learning.

Learning Areas

- Historical Study- learning effective use of resources and materials.
- Understanding – developing an understanding of the history of Botanical Art and illustration through study and appreciation of prominent Artists or types of illustration.
- To gain experience skills of critical analysis

Module 9 – Native Tree Portfolio Project – Part 1 & 2 (40 Credits)

Description

At the beginning of the course a presentation will be delivered to you on native plants, introducing the Native Tree Portfolio Project. This will be an in-depth project spanning the duration of two years, covering all aspects of botanical research, descriptions and plant development. Critiques of on-going work are scheduled throughout and the project is submitted at the end of year two.

Learning Areas

- Composition – an ability to produce a final composite piece that is both aesthetically pleasing and comprehensive in what it shows.
- Techniques and skills – an ability to use the appropriate medium sensitively in order to describe the form, texture, and colour of the subject.
- Botany – develop a keen awareness of the fine detail, and wider context of the plant's ecology and also its place in botanical art. This draws on wider research.
- Climate Change – gain an understanding of issues and effects on the species.
- To learn the importance of mapping and recording your plant.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on the submission of their final painting as well as the portfolio collection.

Module 10 - Year Three Major Project (100 Credits)

Description

The third year of the diploma is a period of self-study and development and honing of skills learnt in years 1 and 2, augmented with online support and tutorial assistance. The aim is to produce five finished pieces held together under a common theme, with a supporting portfolio of work (sized between A3 and A1).

Throughout the first two years you should be considering the plants around you that you encounter in your local gardens, in the field, or at home with a view to deciding on a subject or subjects for year three.

Assessment

Weighting is 70% finished artwork portfolio, and 30% research and supporting material for each work. The finished project must be handed in / posted to RBGE for final marking /verification.

**Students who pass the course will be offered the opportunity exhibit their work as part of the RBGE Diploma Show Online Exhibition.*

6. Student Assessment

Modules will be assessed through activities, written research and final pieces of work.

For each module students are required to produce supporting preparatory work in their portfolio illustrating their investigative research and their developing themes. A clear demonstration of the progression from preliminary studies to the final piece of work will be vital. Satisfactory submission of each module is assessed by the course organisers.

For the award of the RBGE Diploma in Botanical Illustration (Dip BI) all relevant modules must be passed, followed by submission of the third year's independent study.

Each module is graded as follows:

- Referral* 0-49%
- Pass 50-59%
- Merit 60-69%
- Distinction 70%+

If there *is* a valid reason for missing a submission (due to ill health etc.), supporting evidence is required and a revised submission date will be set in agreement with the Course Director. You must obtain written confirmation of any extension (e.g. through an e-mail.)

If the assessment work was submitted and returned to students marked as "Referred" it can be resubmitted but students can only receive a "pass".

Please note that these bandings may be moderated before final awards are made.

Year 1 – 2

Overall marks for Year 1-2 are graded in the same way, with the modules weighted as outlined on Page 9.

Year 3

A pass of years 1-2 year is required to progress to the final year.

The weighting of the final marks are as follows:

- Year 1 - 2 marks 50%
- Year 3 marks 50%

7. Course Fees and Additional Costs

The fee for the Diploma in Botanical Illustration Distance learning course is £3,850. Course fees must be paid in full prior to the start of the course.

This fee will include the following:

- All modules online with video demonstrations and techniques.
- All online assessment and communication with tutors over three years.
- Online private tutorials and optional face to face tutorial in year 3.
- Full set of course notes.

Additional costs to be borne by students:

- All art materials and specialist equipment (e.g. Rotring pens/ fibre tipped pens, coloured pencils and measuring tools) *Please note: On acceptance of a place a detailed list of appropriate materials and specialist equipment will be provided.*
- The following IT requirements for the course:
 - A computer with reliable online access and ability to video call (for tutorials)
 - A digital camera or high quality mobile phone camera
 - Access to a scanner (A3 size flatbed scanner is ideal – many photographic shops provide this as a service)
 - An image manipulation package (Adobe Photoshop elements works well)
- Postage of work to and from RBGE for marking and verification (Module 10)

Failure to stick to the course timetable will incur further costs to cover the extra time tutors will need to mark assessments or provide feedback on your work.

8. Application Procedure

8.1 How to apply

To apply for the course, you must complete our [online application form](#) and submit a supporting portfolio.

Applications for this course will open at 9:00am on Wednesday 25th November 2020 and will close at 5:00pm on Wednesday 6th January 2021. These times are UK times, please take this into account if applying from outside the UK.

Spaces on this course are limited. Selected students may be invited to join for an interview. Successful candidates will be selected based on the quality of the portfolio of work provided. Should we receive a large number of applications that are of a high standard, spaces will be allocated to people based on the date the applications were received.

Successful applicants will be notified within 2-weeks of the closing date.

8.2 What to include in your portfolio

You are required to demonstrate a pre-existing level of skill in drawing and painting, ideally botanical or plant in subject. There is considerable competition for places and initial selection will be through portfolio assessment (8-10 pieces) and your application form. The portfolio work should be close observational work in pencil as well as watercolour.

- Please supply 8-10 examples of your work
- The name of each file and creation date should be in the title of the file
- Provide us with a link to your work

Publishing and sharing your portfolio

Please publish your portfolio to your own website or to a blog or photo sharing site such as Google Photos, Flickr, iCloud, OneDrive, Wordpress etc. Check you

can access it using popular browsers such as Safari, Chrome or Firefox, without using a password.

Please do not:

- share your portfolio through Facebook
- share it as an attachment, via a file sharing website or any way that means viewers have to download files or plug-ins

Obtain some advice about sharing files if you're not sure. We have outlined how to use Google Photos below, however we are happy for you to make your portfolio available to use via your website or any other photo sharing service, provided we can view your portfolio easily.

Using Google Photos to send us a link to your portfolio

(from support.google.com/photos)

1. On your computer, open photos.google.com
2. Sign in to your Google Account
3. Upload up to 10 images of your selected artwork that you wish to include with your Application
4. In the menu at the left, click **Photos**.
5. On each photo or video that you want to share, click Select ✓
6. At the top, click + and select Album > NewAlbum
7. Enter an album title and click ✓ at top left. Title your album: [your name]
RBGE application portfolio Dip BI
8. When your album is complete, click Share <.
9. Select **Create Link**
10. Copy link and add to your application form

Terms and Conditions

- RBGE reserves the right to cancel this course.
- RBGE cannot be liable for additional costs incurred by student (travel, accommodation etc.) in the event of cancellation.
- If the course does not go ahead any money paid to the RBGE would be refunded in full.
- You will receive a full refund within the 14-day cooling off period (14 days of payment) minus the value of the course available and accessed, if applicable.
- If you withdraw from the course within 28 days of the course starting, your fees would be refunded minus your deposit. If you withdraw after 28 days no refund will be given.
- In exceptional circumstances and by formal application students may apply for a learning extension in order to complete the course. Additional fees would be applicable.