

THE SKETCHBOOK COLLECTIVE
MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ART

P3: THE SKETCHBOOK COLLECTIVE

How working as a collective produces student project ownership, boosts confidence and puts into action employability skills.



**Manchester
Metropolitan
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SCHOOL OF ART**

CASS ART
EST.1984

Mark Cass

Founder & CEO, Cass Art

“Cass Art supports artists across the UK and the Cass family has supported artists for over 100 years! We have partnered with the Sketchbook Collective for many years by supplying prizes of art materials for the winners of the Sketchbook Prize. It’s a very special and unique prize, as it’s such a rare opportunity to be able to see the initial ideas, sketches and inspiration that takes place in artists’ sketchbooks. These sketchbooks are very beautiful objects in their own right, and we’re delighted to be able to offer the prizes to encourage the winners to keep their sketchbooks filled with ideas.”



Yve Slater, Cass Art Special Mention

“The Sketchbook prize has demonstrated how this simple democratic tool is our most powerful asset to communicate and maintain our creative process in times of uncertainty.” — Geoffrey Mann, Senior Lecturer Three Dimensional Design, Product Design and Craft

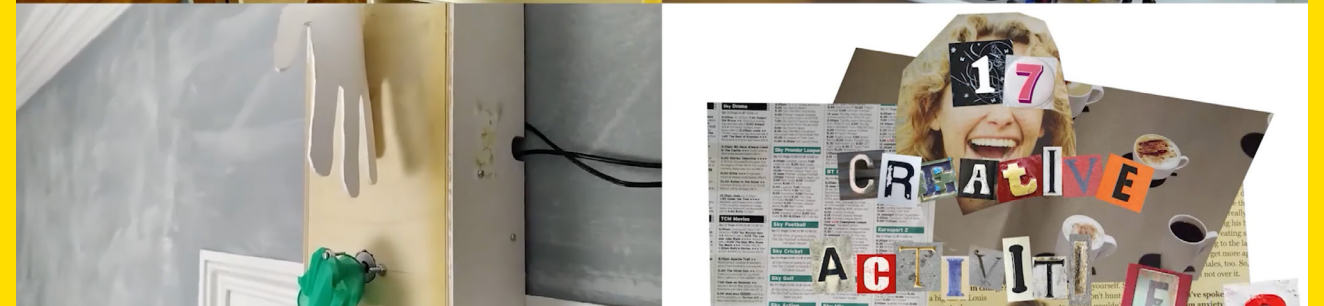
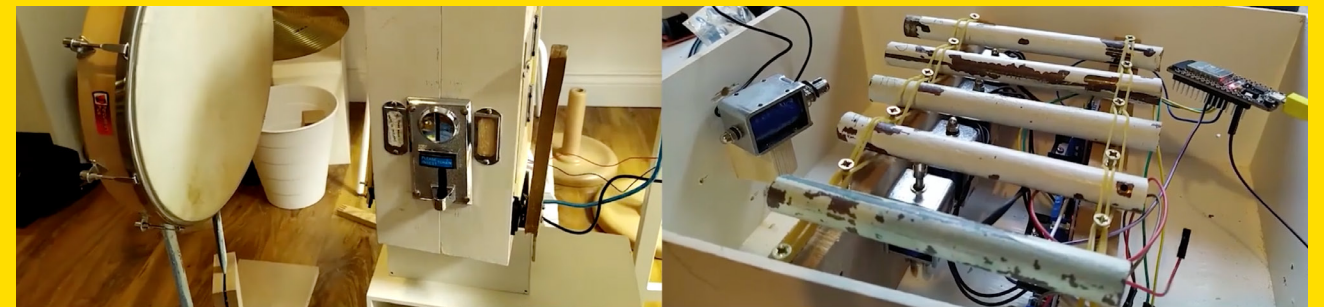
This year the Manchester School of Art Sketchbook Prize was handed over to a group of students. These graduating students formed a collective, working strategically and operationally to deliver a revised Sketchbook Prize. Starting as a live Professionalising Practice Project (P3) brief, the aims of the collective were to explore ways to develop professional working methods that can support practitioners upon graduating, leaving the studio and the community of an Art School. Collectives operate in many different ways, the common connection being a way to build relationships with other creative people, audiences, clients and to connect and support each other.

Support structures are so important when leaving the hive of Art School studio practice. The subtlety of everyday interaction found in the studio, opportunity for collaboration and feedback can vanish, we can take the studio culture for granted. This year, final year students did not experience that transformation of space from studio to degree show. They were asked to collect items and stay at home, without knowing what is going to happen. In an unprecedented experience this group of resilient students produced opportunity.

“Documenting thoughts, processes, decision making, trials and errors are all integral parts of the Art School pedagogy. Keeping sketchbooks is a way of looking back at work and understanding the depth of how students make decisions, solve problems and develop their practices.”

The four students: Ella, Catherine, Martha and Cathy, who took over the Sketchbook Prize pre-lockdown, have been a fantastic example of how quick problem-solving and collaborative working can transform a project from physical engagement to running remotely and online. The group remained connected, working collaboratively to form a true Collective methodology for project management” — Sara Merkaj, Education and International projects assistant

“For any current students wondering if they should be part of next year’s team, I can’t recommend it enough as a learning experience to push you as a creative into new opportunities beyond your comfort zone.” — Martha



Duggie Dundas, The 'Least' Sketchbook Sketchbook and Working in 3D Winner



Unpicking buzz words such as collaboration, collective, team working, creative thinking and problem solving, the group quickly identified shared values from their experiences, and concerns relating to these skills. Group work and collaboration were seen as a sticky skills, the group seeing the benefit of this, but having found it uncomfortable in the past, they hoped to develop new competencies by working in this way.

"(The project) pushed me into a group environment that I would have once found uncomfortable. I have gained valuable skills in communication, managing a social network and overall confidence." — Catherine

Behind the scenes the project was scaffolded while the group began to take ownership of decisions and development. The students acknowledged that by beginning the group work unpicking what a collective is, by exploring models of collaboration, they were able to then define how they would work together.

"I felt like you were always there to help us at any point, but I never felt like you were higher than us or that you're in charge. We were working together, that was really nice" — Martha

"This project showed me a way of working together without someone telling you what to do. It showed me that I can just do it, and I work it out." — Cathy

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"I feel like student ownership has become a really big part of it (the project), a big incentive for me to get involved in it . For example when we first started, the language that was used around the project, how we could be involved with the project, felt empowering. It didn't feel like another project that was set up for students, but it's really run by tutors and members of staff at the uni. We have been able to properly run a project as a group, and have felt equally involved as Sara and Elle." — Ella

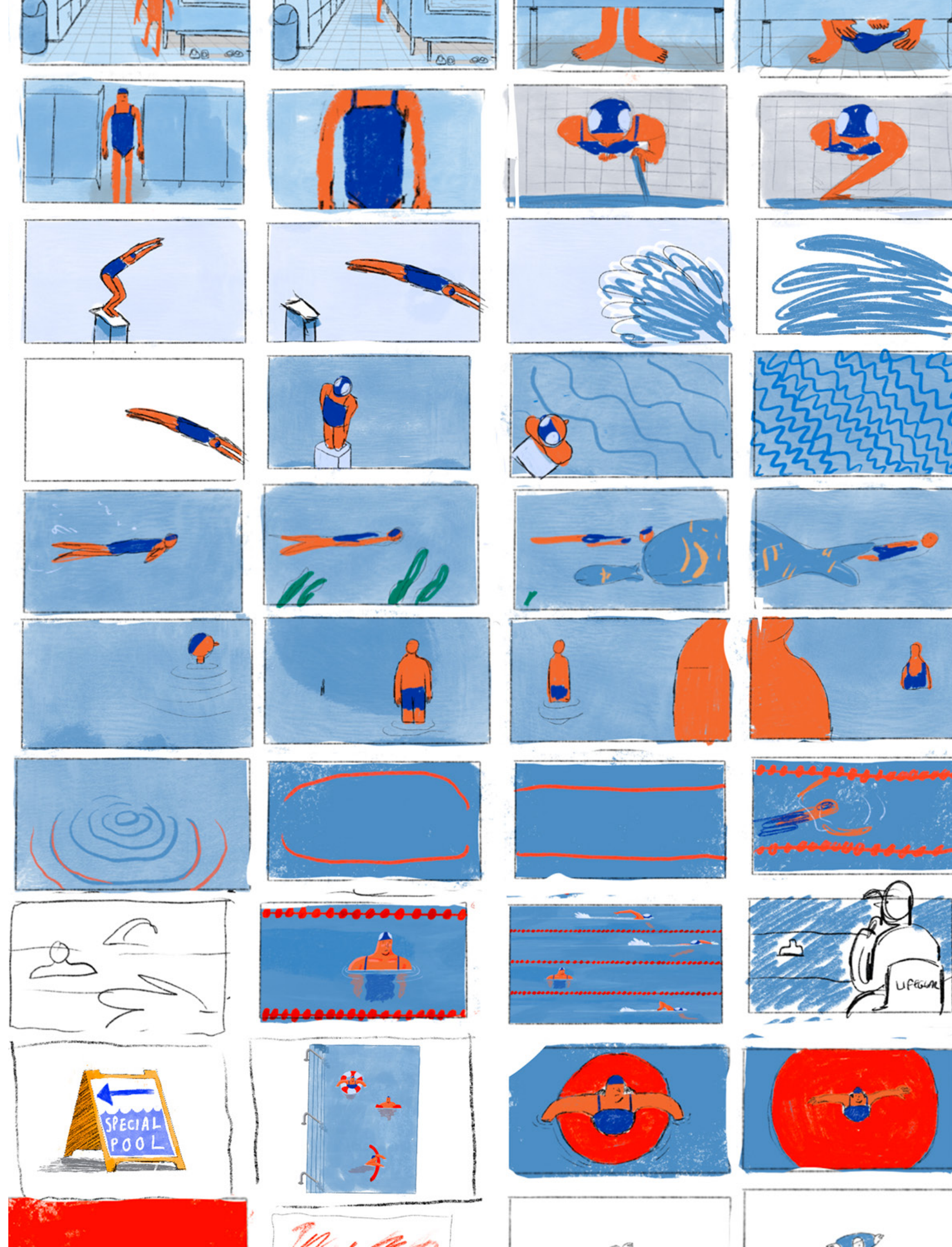
Applying critical analysis to real world situations is an important skill to develop in preparation for graduation. Working within the defined context of the Sketchbook Prize, the collective examined a brief, analysed the situation relating to Covid-19 lockdown, and problem solved the identified issues to reimagine the prize as an online, collaborative, social media driven exhibition. They utilised Instagram to draw audiences and extended and built audiences for the prize and the submissions at the same time.

The team demonstrated a high degree of professionalism using their initiative, their varying disciplines and shared creativity to motivate and support one another. Professional practice such as communication, self initiative and self management were highlighted as core skills learnt.

"It kind of underpinned the work I ended up handing in for my final units. I began to feel like I needed to take more ownership of what I was handing in and the project began to underpin my third year work outside of this." — Ella

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"I have done a lot of things on this project that were kinda 'oh no, that's not me' or 'I'm far too scared to do that'. Like sharing an idea can be quite a scary thing, what if people told me it was wrong. But we developed a space where we listened and I felt I could say what I thought" — Martha



“This year Sara and I wanted to hand the Sketchbook Prize project over to students as part of the Professionalising Practice Project (P3) live brief programme. With hopes to continue raising the profile of the Prize, and aims to develop working projects which support employability, skills and realisation of graduate outcomes throughout students’ experiences, we designed the project as a collective endeavour. With the student group, we looked at ways that artists collaborate, we explored what a collective is and how it can benefit practice and creative community, we wrote a manifesto and began outlining working methods and expectations we each held for the project. We listened to each other, we learnt by talking and we were honest about our aims for taking part, from both the staffing side and the students. By this I mean I was frank in my honesty about my working capacity, that the value of the project is evident, but I struggle to manage it alone. I spoke freely about hoping to change perceptions of the prize by handing it to a group of students from diverse courses, that I hoped student voices advocating the prize would develop audiences and build a stronger voice for the project as a whole. In return students were honest about their aims, highlighting struggles to work in groups and wanting to develop collaborative skills before graduating, wanting things for their CVs. We put all this information into the collective, and worked together to develop our aims as a group based on our own needs, values and hopes.

We had only met a handful of times before lockdown, the project had barely kicked off before we went online. The interesting thing though, we found that community and collective practice were essential to us all during this time. The students really pushed the project forward and we accommodated online collective working quickly. Roles and responsibilities were outlined clearly and collective members supported each other through learning how to manage a project of this scale. Sara and I took a step back and were led by the collective, we removed hierarchical assumptions associated with staffing roles, and took direction from the students always offering support when needed but often handing problems back to the group to solve, they were more than capable! Their ability to identify the impact this project has had on their career readiness and their confidence in their practice and situating themselves in a context they wish to work within is amazing. The collective made this project possible, they excelled themselves” — Elle Simms, Project Coordinator

The collective reflected on their skill development through the project, comments on professional behaviours and attributes were highlighted by the group. They felt they had the space to develop skills by doing the work, that by having autonomy over the project, setting goals and deadlines, they were able to figure out the key skills needed to be executed to ensure the project went smoothly.

“I had been working on the online prize exhibition, so it just seemed like a thing I could do - set up a website for an online exhibition. So I set up a website for my course, and everyone sent me their work and we had one, we just had an online exhibition! We worked in a similar way (to the collective), doing this project gave me the opportunity not to be shy about it”
— Cathy

The collective developed strong and positive working relationships using teamwork and leadership skills, recognising and respecting different perspectives and sharing responsibilities well.

“The project was more of a professional working dynamic than the relationship I have experienced with my tutors. Regardless of us being students or what age you are, we worked as a team” — Ella

“Working as a team, meeting online and discussing ideas and sharing work. This has become just as important as the Sketchbook Prize itself.” — Catherine

“Being involved in this project has been a lot of fun but we have also found ourselves in tricky situations where there has been no blueprint for us to follow. Regardless of the issues we have faced, the collective managed to keep this project running and make it viable for our audience to interact with us online. I would recommend anyone thinking about getting involved with the Sketchbook Prize in 2021 to put yourself forward!” — Ella

Managing their professional development and linking their experience to future opportunities became evident as we progressed the project. The collective reflected well on their group and individual progress and began taking appropriate action in relation to the skills they learnt. It is clear that working on a live project, where they took complete ownership of the potential aims and outcomes, allowed the students to pinpoint their own learning. They were able to highlight opportunities they had seen outside of university, and began using their experiences on this project as a method for meeting person specification, applying for jobs, and also thinking about further study.

"It helped bridge a gap between uni and what's next." — Martha

"I am currently making an application to do a PGCE in September. I feel that this project is something I can talk about and has highlighted to me the importance of sketchbooks."
— Ella

"I realised that things aren't that scary, like if I can collaborate in this group and talk to the partners face to face then things are not really that hard. I realised I could do this in the future, like go and talk to a publisher about my work" — Martha

"One of the best parts to witness has been the constant open and shared dialogue by including everyone in the decision-making process, creating a sense of community, and a supportive environment. A real collective working well together, challenging each other and supporting each other." — Sara Merkaj, Education and International projects assistant

The collective consistently worked together as a strong and supportive team, to gather the information they required. Producing the project, coordinating their resources and skills, asking for support where needed, they highlighted and acquired the necessary skills while evaluating situations such as working with partners, using university systems, working with the degree show team to work with existing frameworks. Synthesising through reflection, they pulled information from a variety of sources to continue to produce their part of the online exhibition.

"I'm definitely more observant, from writing to attention to detail. Observing things better, I have transferred this skill from the meetings to my own work" — Martha

"Something that has been really successful working on a project from the Art School but outside of our programmes has been the ownership of the project, the ownership that comes with choosing a role that you want to do." — Cathy

An astute awareness of their community contexts within their disciplinary field was evidently written into the project, listening to students and peers, having a deep understanding of the situation all creative students were in. A lack of access to materials and resources, access to studios and each other, had left them in a situation like no other. This understanding was embedded into the project.

"Doing this project in lockdown has shown us that there is no excuse for anything, you can always figure it out. There will be ways around any problem. Being at home and being separate hasn't stopped us producing an exhibition of work." — Catherine

"We had the opportunity to leave it, to not continue, we could have walked away. But it's just been another challenge that we faced and we found a way to get over it. You're faced with stuff in life and things can be hard, you have to find a way around things and make it work for you and everyone else involved as well. We have done that." — Ella

"It's been really positive for me to set the parameters ourselves, stating what we wanted to achieve and doing it" — Catherine

The aim of the Collective, set by the students themselves, from the very first meeting was to celebrate sketchbooks, but really challenge and understand what a sketchbook is and how to re-define the idea of a Collaborative Sketchbook by working as a Collective. All partners involved in the Sketchbook Prize could not be happier at the way this group of students met their intended aim, professionally, calmly, with creativity, clear communication and during a global pandemic all whilst finishing a degree from home!



Ruth Fildes, Cass Art Special Mention

Nadire Gokmen

Digital Sketchbook

Duggie Dundas

The Least "Sketchbook" Sketchbook
and Working in 3D

Ameerah Dawood

The Sketchbook as an Art piece

Alice Kell

Thinking in a Sketchbook

Alice Kell

Digital Sketchbook

Ameerah Dawood

The Least "Sketchbook" Sketchbook

Ruth Fildes

The Sketchbook as an Art piece

Molly Pilkington

Thinking in a Sketchbook

Chloe Watts

Thinking in a Sketchbook

Elsa Krawietzki

Thinking in a Sketchbook

Eleanor Walker

Working in 3D

Neeve Fletcher

Cass Art Special Mention

Yve Slater

Cass Art Special Mention

Ruth Fildes

Cass Art Special Mention

Anuj Modi

People's Choice Prize



Molly Pilkington, Thinking in a Sketchbook

Cass Art Blog Article —

www.cassart.co.uk/blog/the-manchester-school-of-art-sketchbook-collective-meeting-the-2020-collective.htm

Manchester School of Art, Virtual Show —

<https://inprogress.mmu.ac.uk/sketchbook-collective>

Sketchbook Collective Instagram —

www.instagram.com/sketchbookcollectiveprize

The P3 team would like to thank Catherine, Cathy, Ella and Martha for their hard work, leadership and positively creative support through this strange time. We have learnt so much from working with you. The project has proven to be a wonderful success and we cannot wait to run it again in this way. We also extend our thank yous to ALL the submitters to the Prize, it's wonderful to see your work and thinking in this way. Congratulations to all the winners.

Each year the prizes are judged by a panel of staff. This year we're keen to work with panel members from the early stages of the project. If you are a member of staff who would like to be involved in the Sketchbook Prize Collective, please do get in touch. Thank you to this year's panel, their time and their individual comments which were shared with the winners.

Contact Elle on e.simms@mmu.ac.uk if you are interested in this project in any way.

More information on the P3 programme can be found here: www.art.mmu.ac.uk/outreach/p3

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