

Big Apple, Even Bigger Opportunity!

“If a student can knock on the door of an art director in New York, show them their work and come out relatively unscathed, they can do anything.”

Illustration Course Leader, Alan Male, is explaining about the Professional Practice trip he organises to New York each year, when his third-year students meet some of the most prolific publishers, art directors and agents in the world.

Many students return with live commissions and publishing deals – four were headhunted by Saatchi and Saatchi last year. “On our first trip, a couple of students got complete children’s book deals,” says Alan. “Others have been taken on by agents. Meeting the professionals is invaluable – these are people who have to like someone’s work enough to pay for it, who understand the market. Their advice is critical.”

Alan has been visiting New York with his students ever since he staged an exhibition with some of his colleagues at the prestigious Society of Illustrators. Most of Alan’s clients and his agent are based there, so he has an address book that would be the envy of many. “The USA is by far the biggest and most lucrative market for illustration in the world,” explains Alan. “New York is the crème de la crème.” Beforehand, the students benefit from portfolio surgeries with UK industry professionals to help them make the most of their time in the Big Apple, and then arrange their own appointments with art directors and publishers. Making those calls can be daunting: “But after two or three, when they get a positive response, their confidence just rockets,” says Alan.

Alan’s professional reputation opens doors to his students that they would not normally have even the slightest chance of getting through – like those of Scholastic Books. “I’ve illustrated about 10 books for them,” Alan explains. “Because they know me, they’ll allow my students in, look at their portfolios and talk to them about the whole process of book production.” Alan also takes students to see his agent, Michael Mendleson, President of American Artists Representatives Inc, who says: “Falmouth students have been coming to see us with their portfolios for years now and it gets better with every visit. The quality of their work, and the way they present themselves, you’d think they were already practising professionals.”

Alan’s New York trips place Falmouth students streets ahead of their contemporaries at other institutions –but then Falmouth is not a conventional place.