

## Teaching Philosophy

I believe that the primary job of the art instructor is to create an environment in which all students learn from one another. If the classroom is filled with students who are deeply engaged with their own work, knowledgeable about and interested in historical and contemporary theories, and fluent in critical exchange, then a nurturing community will emerge that will benefit all artists involved. In such a community, individuals hold a sense of ownership in their program and work to elevate one another in creative pursuits.

Foundational studio, art history, and theory courses should give students a broad technical and conceptual base from which to embark on further exploration. During these crucial early experiences, students must find enough personal success to instill in them an insatiable appetite to learn. There is no instructional substitute for an individual's desire to succeed. An art instructor can teach techniques and describe concepts, but it is essential that these be tailored to the specific needs of the individual. Competency in basic studio practice, general knowledge of art history, and familiarity with dominant theoretical discourse are first steps to self-driven study, not rote ends unto themselves.

In advanced courses, students should continue to broaden their technical and conceptual understanding while beginning to hone their individual interests and strengths. It is important that each student begin to define her or his own direction while remaining open to and knowledgeable about a variety of ideas. It is essential that all advanced art students are aware of the dominant concerns of the contemporary art world and begin to build a broad base of practicing and historical ideological "allies." It is the duty of the instructor to be a knowledgeable and informative resource in maintaining that awareness. Advanced students should understand what is unique about their artwork, be able to articulate this clearly in speech and in writing, and be equipped to move into individual studio practices, with ever-expanding technical and conceptual investigations.

It is incumbent on an art instructor to be an example of a dedicated studio artist. Working alongside students and opening his or her studio to them, an instructor, through exemplary devotion and work ethic, can serve as a representation of commitment to the study of art and the personal and professional rewards such a commitment can bring.

## **Beginning Painting**

The earliest painting courses should focus on observational painting, with goals of creating convincing illusions of space and form, and learning to manipulate the materials toward a clearly defined goal. Whether still life, landscape, or the figure, painting from direct observation allows beginning students to constantly check their work against visual reality and provides an objective measurement for self-evaluation.

Beginning painters must develop a diligent work ethic. Assignments should be rigorous enough that students must devote significant studio time to their completion – several hours each week beyond class meetings. In this way, students will develop productive studio habits and, as a result, make rewarding progress in their studies. Working outside of class will help beginning students root themselves in the studio environment and bring

them into more contact with more advanced students, who may become important examples and mentors for them. The formation of a productive, progressive studio community will ensure that many artists will find enough personal success and peer support to push them toward deeper study.

Early painting study should focus on visual sensitivity and proficient handling of the materials. Beginning students need not be burdened with stretching canvases, priming supports, or any of the other tedious day-to-day studio practices. Rather, they should focus all of their energy on constructing images and logging experience with the paint. For this reason, I prefer that beginning painting students use pre-primed canvas stapled to boards (eliminating both the preparation time and the prohibitive sense of “preciousness” that stretched canvases can often inflict on new painters).

Studio safety must always be a priority. I will teach beginning students how to maintain productive, efficient, safe, and environmentally responsible oil painting practices without the use of aromatic solvents or pigments that contain cautionary labels. Removing these hazards makes the studio a safer and more pleasant place, and allows beginning students to focus on their work without the added anxiety of handling dangerous materials.

### **Intermediate Painting**

Intermediate painting students must continually advance in their understanding of the various painting media and techniques, including the safe and environmentally responsible use and disposal of their painting materials. Intermediate students should be introduced to specific historical and contemporary painting techniques, including traditional grisaille/glaze methods, modern direct painting methods, current technologies that can be incorporated into the painting process, and mixed media practices. In addition to honing their skills of representation, intermediate students should undertake significant experimentation in nonobjective and abstract painting.

Continued diligence is required, and intermediate painters must continue to install themselves into the studio environment. If they engage positively with the progressive studio community, these students will benefit equally from interactions with students at all levels.

Courses should serve to refine broad technical explorations and increase emphasis on conceptual issues. Specifically, students should be driven into conscious explorations of form/content relationships. Intermediate students should be aware of contemporary practitioners in their field and be able to relate themselves to dominant trends. They should be introduced to professional studio practices (constructing canvases, panels, and crates; documenting work; professional standards of storage, shipping, exhibition, etc.).

### **Advanced Painting**

Advanced painting students should be able to conduct a creative and efficient individual painting practice, holding themselves to high levels of professionalism. Such students must work diligently with and without supervision. They should become leaders in the

studio community, displaying exemplary work ethic, conceptual boldness, and scholarly devotion.

Students approaching graduation should begin to address the broader artistic community. Professors are duty-bound to guide advanced students in pursuing exhibition opportunities, in applying to graduate schools and for employment, or in establishing independent studio practices.

## **Drawing**

Observational drawing skills, whether employed to make finished work, to develop ideas for completion in other media, or simply to engage the visual world in a constructive way, are of foundational importance to any art practice. Therefore, beginning drawing students should be trained to accurately render from observation. Contour drawing should be studied extensively to help students develop sensitivity to forms and learn to represent visual reality with a sensitive, varied line. Additionally, students should learn to accurately render value and to organize the complex impressions of visual reality into two-dimensional compositions.

Once observational drawing skills are established, intermediate and advanced drawing students can explore the tremendous breadth of the media. This may include experimentation with nontraditional drawing materials and/or processes, including practices that push conceptual boundaries of drawing. Mark-making in performance, three-dimensional drawing, or various time-based or site-specific practices are some possible examples of conceptual directions in which advanced students may push the medium.

Active sketchbook practices are essential for visual artists in all media and at all stages of their educations or careers. Drawing courses of all levels should require students to engage in regular sketching. Beginning students should have specific guidelines and frequent deadlines so that the practice becomes regular and habitual. As students advance in the program, they should be encouraged to use their sketchbooks extensively for visual note taking, critical analysis, or recording whatever ideas they need to collect as they develop artistically.

## **Art Appreciation/Intro. to Art**

Students new to the visual arts should gain a broad survey of the history of art and art theory. This introduction should explore work from across the globe, time, and artistic disciplines allowing each student to access the art and ideas that most excite her or him. Students should gain a common vocabulary to support their continued artistic explorations, and to help them access the discourse of their peers. Emphasis should be placed on making connections: placing art within its historical, cultural, and philosophical context and telling the story of art as an ongoing narrative, rather than a disjointed collection of movements and facts.

Kyle McKenzie

A robust introduction must access art from the artist's point of view. Cultural and historical studies should be enhanced with in depth investigations into a variety of studio practices. Students should explore the artist's materials and methods, role in contemporary culture, and understand the artist's intent. Whenever possible, students should participate in (or view firsthand) some of the studio practices that they study.

While art from previous eras is important in allowing students broad understanding, special emphasis should be placed on recent and contemporary work. Students should come to understand art as a living discourse, which takes place across all cultures in constantly broadening practices. Students should be encouraged to become involved in their artistic communities on campus and in the surrounding area.