

Teaching Philosophy

Every successful work of art rests on a strong foundation of technique and concept. This essential art foundation is built by learning mechanical and technical skills, taught alongside the challenges of concept, creation, and design. The strongest groundwork is laid for students by teaching them not just how to make a great piece of art, but why they are making it.

Student success can't be achieved in the arts purely by lecture and demonstrations, and I believe a one-on-one response to work in progress is absolutely essential. After introducing a concept, I frequently give students individual feedback by walking around the classroom while students are working on the lesson or project. At all levels of study, I encourage students to speak about their work with their peers both in critiques and in the classroom environment. While individual attention is crucial in helping the students fully realize and understand their work, my homework assignments also serve to solidify their new skills.

In foundation classes, I give the students time and opportunity to learn the necessary basic skills of draftsmanship or color. My beginning Drawing and Painting classes are founded on the idea that the work crucially helps the student to look at form, value and color, composition, and mark-making. While maintaining the use of these basic skills, we can then move into more heavily exploring the creative side of art, eventually leading up to the formation of idea and content. This happens within a semester of a foundations course, while higher level courses address not only the execution but the intellectual depth of the work from the beginning.

In my intermediate to advanced classes, I begin to teach students that art is not simply a visual medium - that to become a true artist you need to consider more than a technical adequacy. I firmly believe Picasso's quote; "Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist." Here I begin to teach deconstruction, manipulation, and simplification. I treat my introduction into abstraction less as a pure abstraction/ pure representation dichotomy, and more about how even small changes from what the eye sees lead into greater things. For example, Arshile Gorky's shape-concentrated figure paintings, Modigliani's simplified women, and John Singer Sargent's brisk paint strokes all demonstrate that they understand an image is something more than a mechanical representation of its subject. It is with this new visual acuity I breach the topic of subject vs idea. I push my students to begin to think about the 'why' of their art, instead of solely the 'what'.

I also ask my students to experiment with different techniques and materials, so they can develop a nuanced understanding with a medium and push their art in new directions. This ranges from conventional methods such as painting with a palette knife or using

powdered charcoal to somewhat more unusual methods, such as painting oil over acrylic, working with collage and transfers, or drawing with pastels over watercolor. I encourage cross-disciplinary artwork, such as installation, photography, or digital additions to their drawing and painting work. As many of today's artists branch out into multi-media or new media works, I promote contemporary practices while maintaining a traditional art education.

With my advanced students, I bring conceptual understanding to the forefront by holding roundtable discussions of critical art theory texts. We discuss ideas from John Berger, *Art and Fear* and *But Is It Art?* among others. Berger's 'simple' question of painting a figure as nude or naked can be a groundbreaking revelation for students; from that launching point, we tackle ideas of craft vs fine art, intent, and context. Our group critiques flourish after these discussions.

There is more, however, to being a successful professor than classroom teaching. As a student, I found that having straightforward and accessible professors were more helpful than those I only met during class, and were crucial to my work. I met with my anatomy instructor after class to learn about color theories in painting. Dinners with painting professors changed my life and my art. Knowing that we do play a role as not only teacher but mentor, I strive to mimic those who have shaped my enthusiasm and artistic appetite. I make time to meet with students outside of the classroom environment, and to act as faculty advisor in student activities. I am open to independent studies, taking students to museums or art shows (often out of state), and participating in critiques outside of my own classroom. Based upon my own experiences both as a student and professor, I firmly believe this comprehensive approach to art education is the best path to student success.