

Teaching Philosophy Statement

We know about the Oedipus Complex not because of Freud, but because of a poet who lived in Greece thousands of years ago...

James Baldwin

Aesthetic inventions may seem inconsequential, but may well prove themselves crucial to our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Baldwin reminds us in the quote above that Sophocles, the poet, is to thank for Freud theory and the knowledge he brought about. When teaching art, I ask my students to be mindful of the potential art. Therefore I find it crucial to cultivate early on a sense of freedom and license to experiment, while the students learn the rigors of the craft. I strive for them to be equally imaginative and precise in their use of language pertaining to art.

Whether teaching drawing, painting, printmaking, or imaging software, I believe in teaching good work habits, discipline, and observation. I ask students to maintain a sketchbook, upload images and texts related to the subject being studied on the course blog, and make brief presentations about imagery that interested them. As I do in my lectures, I ask them to provide images from a variety of sources: Western and non-Western art-, popular culture, and scientific illustrations. I have occasionally assigned students poems to read and have asked them to glean images from. The class blog allows me to refer to examples that they have chosen and already resonated with. It also reinforces the concept that art is not created in a vacuum, and there is a cultural and historical context to what they create.

In group critiques, I try to foster an atmosphere in which students feel safe to speak their mind, and where they realize that a response to art is never “right” or “wrong.” These critiques also provide opportunities for students to value and learn from the diversity of opinions and inputs offered. Slowly the students take charge of their own work and stop considering projects as assignments. All advanced students are asked to write a statement that I review drafts of- to submit with their end of the semester portfolio.

Students are evaluated twice a semester and handed an evaluation sheet with a detailed rubric stating their growth, performance in craft, technical proficiency, participation, sketchbook and ongoing research, and creativity. The final meeting is an occasion to review their progress, and reiterate the importance of engaging in a creative dynamic that perpetually challenges the limits of their imagination.