

When thinking about teaching, I'm immediately confronted by all of the ways contemporary art continually resists our attempts at immediate and simple definition. Art is a complex discipline, and even to practicing artists it can appear intimidating and even overwhelming. In order to be successful artists in the future, art-making demands that students have a rigorous understanding of plural contexts, social and political relationships, and consistently shifting material techniques. The need for this complex understanding informs the overarching principle to my teaching philosophy - that students need to learn how to integrate rigorous critical thinking along with highly creative making, or what I refer to as a critical art-making practice.

For me, the idea of a critical art-making practice consists of three key things. First, there is a need for critical inquiry that's equally paired with creative research methods. Creative research is how artists think; it is not abstract, but a materially-based thinking through. It is what transitions students from uncritical consumers of cultural products to art-makers with a thoughtful and reflective approach to their creative practice. Second, students need to have knowledge of the histories and theories of art both as a whole and in their specific discipline. This directly informs their perspective and relationship with contemporary art and cultural practices. Finally, students need to possess a deep understanding of their medium and the material processes of art-making. In order to learn the talents and skills of their medium, students need to be provided with adequate time, proper facilities, and material resources. Altogether, this approach leads students to develop their own creative and intellectual autonomy.; artists that are critical thinkers - talented in material and technical skills, but also thoroughly knowledgeable in the histories, politics, and theories of their discipline. The goal is not to reproduce art students the share my own theoretical and material approaches to art-making, but provide students with the critical faculties that will allow them to establish their own creative practice.

The one things I stress in all my classes is learning how to think like an artist - exploring what that looks like, and ways to begin that process. In my experience, students already have a history of making art - but often they don't fully understand the creative process and what it means to develop and critically evaluate their ideas. For me, this idea of thinking like an artist involves applying critical thinking to playful, yet rigorous creative inquiry as a method of solving problems or asking interesting questions. For classes, I expand the idea of drawing beyond the traditional model of pencil and paper. Instead, I frame it as a method of creative research, or a way of experimenting with ideas - an approach that uses drawing as a kind of thinking, or a way of learning through making. I have students make multiple studies and continue to push the idea based on the results of these drawings, allowing for new possibilities to emerge. Using drawing as a way of working through and exploring an idea is integral to any art practice, regardless of medium. This is why, in all my classes, I assign exercises that use the class medium - a video camera, for example - as a drawing tool.

Using this model of creative research as one way to develop a critical art-making practice has positively effected my students' perspective on the studio class and their own artwork. This model positions the studio class as a safe space where students can experiment with techniques and ideas, evaluating their results based on their effectiveness or even allow new unexpected results to shape their original intended outcome. It's been my experience that when students are asked to view their artwork from this perspective, instead of a binary right/wrong model, students are much more willing to ask interesting questions, take creative risks, and begin to see themselves as artists with creative and intellectual autonomy. Additionally, reframing their artwork in this way helps relieve some of the anxiety of "masterpiece syndrome" some foundations level students experience. Instead of focusing on a single "finished" piece, I emphasize the work shown during critique is a resolved version based off of all the previous drawings, sketches, and prototypes. This way, students begin to see that art-making is a continually growing and evolving process instead of the means to a single endpoint. At the same time, I also use this idea in upper level classes to underscore the importance of working towards completion and resolution as necessary to the continual growth of studio practice and for new artwork.

To master their discipline, artists have to spend many hours a week in the studio practicing techniques, improving on mistakes, and improving their skills in the medium. In the same way, critical thinking requires

the same constant practice. Discussing and thinking about art shouldn't happen occasionally in the semester during critique, but integrated throughout the entire course. I balance the structure of my courses so that students can continually practice making and practice thinking alongside each other. This integrated approach allows me to implement the three key parts of a critical art-making practice I mentioned before - the creative research methods, the histories and theories of art, and the material techniques and skills of a medium - in all my studio classes. This happens both when covering the course material and when applied to students' individual projects.

I approach course material by balancing technical instruction with the examination of broader theories and ideas related to the medium. The goal is for students to develop an understanding of the larger structure or framework of the technology as well as the theories and ideas surrounding the medium. Digital media is a medium, not an end unto itself, so instruction is geared towards providing a means of art-making, not as an end. As technical skills are constantly changing and software is consistently updated, students especially need to know the means of production rather than being able to reproduce a single, soon to be obsolete skill. We also view and discuss examples of artists and their work related to the topic - looking at the historical and relative artwork as models for entrance, and an introduction to learning both formal and conceptual issues surround the medium. For example, on the first day of my Video 1 class, I often show the early experimental video work - telling students they're approaching video art from the same perspective as these early pieces. Both are trying to experiment, define, and learn the language of video art-making.

For students to become more creatively and intellectually autonomous, all their artwork present during critique is self-directed. This independent creative research challenges students to ask questions, to get an understanding of what they don't know, and learn how to find the resources they need to achieve their creative goals. This provides the means for students to take ownership and investment of the medium. Having students direct their own creative projects allows for a range of diverse perspectives - important for students from marginalized, underrepresented, socially disadvantaged backgrounds. I also have students discuss their works in-progress among each other, using their peers to workshop technical and conceptual ideas. This builds a supportive community among the class, and I've found that during critiques students are more likely to be engaged and forthcoming - and the discussions more productive - when they're aware of everyone's progress throughout the semester.

A critical art-making practice isn't medium-dependent - rather, it's a way for students to define and engage in new ways of thinking and making. As contemporary art-making becomes more diverse and pluralistic, the rigid boundaries between disciplines become more porous, and students need to be on the forefront of emerging technologies and ideas. In the future, my goal is to apply this idea of a creative art-making practice to more interdisciplinary art classes. I would like to help students use new technologies like desktop 3D printing and interactive microcontrollers as a way of opening new possibilities in existing disciplines such as painting, sculpture, and digital media.