

Teaching Philosophy

Learning takes PATIENCE, TOLERANCE, a sense of HUMOUR and a WILLINGNESS to try new things without fear. My method balances traditionally familiar classroom activities with the unfamiliar to RE-IMAGINE what studying art looks, sounds, and feels like. I may lecture one week, then ask participants to spend the entire class blindfolded the next. Training ourselves to BE CURIOUS, questioning what we think we know, and challenging how we experience the world is critical for anyone seeking a sustained creative life. Nurturing environments where one may thoroughly consider what circumstances and conditions are needed to maintain such a life is centered in my teaching practice. My courses also center MULTIDISCIPLINARY and EXPERIENTIAL approaches to artmaking, empowering participants to develop artworks that are not bound by one medium or discipline. I position myself as someone who will *lead* our time together rather than assume a role of the “all-knowing authority” in the room. Participants are included in day-to-day decisions that create our shared space for study. These decisions include collectively arranging classroom furniture, developing experimental critique methods, and collectively deciding how curriculum evolves over the semester. This approach boosts CONFIDENCE, builds COMMUNITY, and encourages SELF-MOTIVATION and SELF-ADVOCACY. While I weave theory into all my courses, theory cannot be the primary agent for accessing dialogues around artmaking, especially when working in experiential art forms. My curriculum prioritizes significant studio/working time and creative exercises. Making, thinking, experimenting, researching, discussing, writing, documenting, presenting, reflecting, and archiving are all positioned as “THE WORK.” Learning is not exclusively a cerebral endeavor. The BODY is always incorporated. I provide opportunities that deepen one’s physical, intellectual, and emotional awareness. I teach with inclusive, adaptive, anti-racist and trauma-informed methods that meet the needs of a wide-range of diverse participants (neuro-divergent, first generation, LGBTQAI+, BIPOC, etc.) My method addresses inequities and power dynamics that exist between individual and collective bodies, NIMBLY BUILD TRUST amongst groups and PRIORITIZE PLAY.

Link to student work: <http://www.sandrineschaefercuratorial.com/teaching>

A RADICAL WELCOME

On the first day of every course, I ask participants to introduce themselves by following the prompt: *Imagine a world where culturally agreed upon gestures for greeting do not exist. What action would you use to introduce yourself to others?* One by one, we introduce ourselves to one another using these actions. Exercises like this de-emphasizes verbal language as the primary way to communicate. This liberates participants who may struggle to speak in class and those whose first language is not English. This exercise introduces the expectation that participants will actively INVOLVE their WHOLE SELVES in cultivating our space for study. When sharing the work of artists and contextualizing art movements, I prioritize MEDIUM DIVERSITY and present the work of LOCAL, NATIONAL, and INTERNATIONAL contemporary artists in varying stages of their careers alongside historic notables. I prioritize sharing work that has been scarcely recorded in art history or eclipsed by more dominant narratives. Much of this work is sourced from archives of artist-run collectives and initiatives that may be difficult to access otherwise. I create opportunities for participants to DEVELOP SKILLS to SIT WITH TENSION and negotiate material they may have difficulty understanding.



SITE-SENSITIVITY + SITE RESPONSE-ABILITY

Participants learn site-sensitive/site-responsive approaches regardless of the medium they are working in. This means EMBRACING UNCERTAINTIES in the work, being FLEXIBLE and ADAPTIVE, and experimenting with IMPROVISATIONAL TECHNIQUES. This requires a deep understanding of the contexts we are sharing and exhibiting our work in. We research the histories, present identities, and proposed futures of the sites where our work is situated with the aim of connecting research to artistic practice. This includes locations INSIDE and OUTSIDE the classroom (public spaces, shared social space, virtual space, etc.) Participants are encouraged to work with what is already available in a site to aid in the presentation and making of their artwork. Practicing site-sensitive and site-responsive methods REMOVE OBSTACLES by USING RESOURCES IN IMMEDIATE PROXIMITY to create art. These methods often empower participants with skills to continue to make art without the reliance on educational institutions after they have finished their studies.

CRITICAL GENEROSITY

It is vital that participants develop skills to BALANCE creative IMPULSES and personal experience making art with its critical ANALYSIS. We practice giving ourselves PERMISSION TO EXPLORE the boundaries of our creativity in a space where we all hold one another accountable to our intentions. This includes taking responsibility for multiple readings of our work. Some actions/images can produce undesired and unintentional responses from our viewers. We practice forethought and own our choices. We assess risk and responsibility throughout our time studying together. Much of this happens in critiques. The art critique is a place ripe for learning. It is where an artist exposes their INTENTIONS, PROCESSES and VALUES. It is where they hear what their work is doing. In critique, we are asked to translate an experience with an artwork into speech. Critiques that do not acknowledge the hierarchies present in the room (inherited by art histories, the structures of the institutions we are in, etc.) may outweigh the benefits that the critique intends to offer. We approach critique with curiosity and EXPERIMENT with forms that aim to be MORE EQUITABLE. How might we explore critique to better understand the forms an artwork takes and the group dynamics unique to our class? How do we avoid getting stuck only offering technical feedback about a piece that contends with content that may be uncomfortable to talk about? At the beginning of the semester, we engage with tools like the LADDER OF INFERENCE and the SOCIAL IDENTITY WHEEL to help us understand our personal biases and how they may be influencing our personal critique styles. As we move through the semester, we collectively build a set of evolving critique guidelines revisited each time we critique work to help us further this questioning.

Some Critique Guidelines

- Begin with EMBODIED PRACTICE- Each critique starts with breathing exercises that mitigate nerves and attune us to the physical qualities present in the space.
- STAY in the room – Critique what is HERE not what the piece could be.
- Approach each piece with FRESH SENSES to avoid recycling feedback in critiques where multiple participants share work.
- “COULD” > “SHOULD”
- Critique ROLES- Critique roles are established collectively to best serve the needs of the work presented. Participants take turns assuming different roles throughout the semester. Roles may include, *Time Keeper, Discussion Leader, Scribe, etc.*
- Acknowledge when EMPATHETIC TRANSFERENCE occurs and when it may get in the way of offering constructive feedback.
- SOMATIC Feedback- Participants translate their experience of a piece through movement, action, gesture, and/or sound.
- Less can be more. Participants offer 5 WORDS to communicate their experience with a piece. This helps us identify what is essential in a piece and find concise language to describe it.
- Critique GESTURES- Some groups benefit from incorporating non-verbal gestures into critiques. This often nurtures a less defensive atmosphere (ex. participants may be more receptive to the following gesture that translates to “get to the point” rather than hearing someone say it.) 🙌👉
- WRITTEN REFLECTION- Either directly following a critique or revisited 1 week later, participants who have had work critiqued answer the following through writing:
 - Q. What did you hear/feel during your critique?
 - Q. Was anything overlooked?
 - Q. What in your peers’ work inspired you?
 - Q. If you were to rework this piece, what might you change?
 - Q. What did you learn about yourself that you didn’t already know?

TRANSLATION + CREATIVE RESILIENCE

If an artwork could be understood through the written word, it would be a sentence. If an artwork could be understood verbally, it would be a conversation. Yet artists are often asked to translate their work into these forms of documentation. This is a task of TRANSLATING the UNTRANSLATABLE. I approach this task by infusing curiosity that serves an artist's work rather than burdens it. I position activities like writing artist statements, artist manifestos, bios, project proposals, budgets, website design and social media presence as a practice that cultivates CREATIVE RESILIENCE. For those forging creative paths that value SOCIALLY-AWARE content and EXPERIMENTAL approaches, creative resilience and TRANSPARENCY around what life might be like after school is essential. Creative resilience is practiced in many ways. We develop and practice resiliency STRATEGIES and FUTURE ENVISIONING that is scaled to the level and focus of the group. We engage exercises that help us to COLLECTIVELY HOLD CHALLENGING CONTENT. We ask questions like: *How do we take care of ourselves and each other when exposed to and/or make works that engage difficult ideas and realities? What are practical ways we might support ourselves when we make work that cannot fit easily into an art market?* Practicing resilience offers participants space to think through imposed expectations to discover other POSSIBILITIES for SUSTAINING a CREATIVELY FULFILLED LIFE. In addition to studio-based and topics courses, I teach workshops and semester-long courses on the balance between art, life and money. This is where participants learn strategies to BUILD their OWN PLACE within art worlds, gain FISCAL LITERACY, translate their work into PRESENTATIONAL FORMS, and begin to define what "PROFESSIONALISM" might look like for them.

REFLECTION + EVALUATION

In every class, each person's presence and absence is felt. Participants are evaluated on their PRESENCE, PARTICIPATION, CREATIVE RISK-TAKING, and overall DEVELOPMENT throughout the semester. Are participants contributing thoughtful threads of questioning during discussions and critiques? Are they communicating their processes/concepts? Do they demonstrate follow through? Are they challenging themselves? Are they demonstrating growth? Are their ideas translated into actualized projects? Are they supporting others by exercising CRITICAL GENEROSITY? Adequate time for SELF-EVALUATION is woven into each course and strategically scheduled throughout the semester. Self-evaluations take various forms including meditative and somatic exercises, written reflections, discussions, and the COLLECTIVE BUILDING of a glossary of terminology used in class that we refer to throughout the semester.