

Teaching Philosophy

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My objects are to be seen as stimulants for the transformation of the idea of sculpture...or of art in general. They should provoke thoughts about what sculpture can be and how the concept of sculpting can be extended to the invisible materials used by everyone.

THINKING FORMS how we mold our thoughts or
SPOKEN FORMS how we shape our thoughts into words or

SOCIAL SCULPTURE how we mold and shape the world in which we live: SCULPTURE AS AN
EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS; EVERYONE AN ARTIST

– Joseph Beuys, 1979

As an artist and an educator I am responsible as a role model, a teacher of skills and a guide to cultivate students creative development. This responsibility includes creating a stimulating learning environment that encourages students to become proficient explorers, researchers and makers. My challenge is to teach students the importance of investigation—to become disciplined, independent, critical thinkers with the confidence to express themselves and communicate in a meaningful manner.

In foundation courses students need structured assignments to experiment with various techniques while integrating knowledge of art historical references and an awareness of contemporary art. It is important for them to learn artmaking skills including the processes, tools and technologies available to the contemporary artist. It is essential to stimulate thought with an emphasis on idea generation. There is a delicate balance between learning the process of conceiving ideas and mastering the skills necessary to realize a project, plus developing the language to criticize results.

In all my courses, I teach students to investigate who they are by brainstorming ideas from their experiences, interests and surroundings. I encourage research into other areas of study as a source of subject matter for their artwork. As students develop into young artists, I guide them through collaborative projects for a number of reasons; it requires decision making, the ability to compromise, sharing skills and/or specialties, engaging in an ongoing dialogue of problem solving and constructive criticism. Pragmatically a collective effort can achieve greater results, but more importantly the working process encourages learning both from and with ones' peers.

I believe in teaching students to address issues of audience and context, especially in public, site related art work and community based projects. Therefore, I teach students the process of proposing projects both on and off campus. Working in the community—both in and outside of an art context—provides students an extremely challenging atmosphere with a different set of rules. This process requires students to escape their safe havens by developing strategies and social skills that address issues of social responsibility in the public domain. This experience is invaluable; it prepares students to be well-rounded individuals for their future in whatever field they choose. For example, the Environmental Sculpture course is structured around a collaboration with a civil and environmental engineering firm; EcoArt class partners with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy to address environmental issues in Schenely Park; and the Green Roof was an interdisciplinary class, one component of a major team effort involving numerous university players, a priceless experience.

Ideally students are inspired to acquire an appreciation of art and life in general, to become knowledgeable about aesthetics, art history, cultural and critical studies in order to develop a meaningful art practice in society. For the young artist a university education both prepares them to apply creative problem-solving skills to all areas of their life and provides the confidence to continue exploring artistic endeavors. Participating as a teacher, in this adventure called art, is an extremely rewarding experience.