

Suzanne E. Szucs

Teaching Philosophy

My approach to teaching art practice is its interconnectivity with the greater world; the classroom is a place for fomenting ideas that will serve as the foundation for future work and activities, whether within or beyond the art world.

Education is collaboration – between students, faculty and the institution they create. The academy shifts in response to the evolving voices that enter, the administrators and faculty providing an environment that embraces cultural change even as educating to affect it. Many students come to a fine arts education precisely because they want to creatively shape a non-traditional educational experience. Rather than follow a defined path, they apply their vision to creatively interpret the world, and through the exploration of potential, open pathways that are unique and challenging.

A contemporary approach to education embodies a classroom freed up to become a place where ideas are explored and concept is prioritized through interactive discussions, presentations and group projects. The contemporary classroom functions most effectively as a laboratory; the boundaries of *expertise* shifts as students combine their constant browsing of cultural phenomena with the guidance and depth of their instructors. As students practice how to communicate ideas they discover what they care about and how to push the boundaries of their experience. As educators, we offer them multiple approaches, at a variety of tempos, teaching technology – from ancient to potential – to support and communicate concepts. We locate their work both theoretically and socially, and encourage them to move beyond their comfort zones.

To create a sense of community within the student body I emphasize collaborative assignments. Students not only do the same assignment, they use each other as models, or work in teams. In learning from each other, they create a shared feeling of accomplishment when their work is presented to the greater school community. I ask my students to regularly evaluate their own work and comments from these collaborative assignments consistently include expressions of how much they were challenged by the projects, how much they learned from each other and how much they grew individually while making the work.

From mark-making to pixel-pushing, from the bookstore to Twitter, how we experience the world is in constant flux and students will take the expertise they develop into a rapidly transforming society. Artists and designers interpret the ways we interact with our technological world; new media evolves from the foundations of traditional image making, yet shifts our ideas of tangible space, narrative and authenticity. In order to support students in their ability to express ideas effectively, the classroom learning experience needs to be malleable and intuitive, emphasizing a multifaceted approach, where historical and contemporary techniques and concepts complement one another.

We cannot teach talent, or what it means to be an artist. These things must be individually discovered. However we can offer a supportive, demanding, professional incubator for the dedication and passion needed to be a successful artist. As mentors and motivators, we teach through our own practice, through our diversity of thought and willingness to risk failure; we demonstrate that practicing art is a lifelong learning project, the foundation for living life creatively.