THAD DUHIGG

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My pedagogical approach addresses not only a particular problem but also lays a foundation for the application and synthesis of information through meaningful learning. In my curriculum, I scaffold the classes from 3-D design to graduate sculpture.  The three pillars that guide my teaching are educating students about how to communicate through their work, imparting the importance of subverting conventions through collaboration and helping them professionalize their art practice.

How we understand an idea can create opportunities for greater comprehension of how we see our world. By challenging students to educate themselves about the concept they want to communicate, I encourage deeper conceptual development. One of my projects requires students to “communicate the idea of a cube without producing the physicality of a cube.” After delivering an introductory lecture on semiotics, students read, view images and listen to podcasts broadly relating to the concept of a cube and then express it in their work. Students have created works inspired by ice cubes and Ice Cube (the rapper) and utilize video, sound works and 3-D print out of the spoken word “cube.” This project also shows students that they already communicate conceptually but perhaps without realizing it.

Subverting conventions through collaboration is not only a tool to be used in sculpture but in all aspects of life. I emphasize the importance of teamwork and utilize peer-to-peer reviews (for written work and in critiques), thus creating a sense of community based on personal bonds. I also teach skills that take students out of their comfort zone, such as welding, which requires that they work in pairs, per safety regulations. This collaboration assists them in stretching their ideas and skills beyond the limitations of established individualized pedagogical practice. Moreover they confront the stereotype that ‘Women can’t weld.’ Through collaborative learning, which facilitates team building, female students successfully weld (one recently constructed a twelve-foot tall fabricated steel figurative work) and defy stereotypes about women and machinery.

Professionalization of students is paramount in my teaching. I stress that the how and why of art making is just as significant as the “how to” of forging a career in the arts. Students need the tools, mentorship and mindset to accomplish their goals. To this end, I require them to enter at least two juried exhibitions per semester. Preparing proposal packets for my Large-scale and Public Sculpture course has enabled former and current students to excel at securing major museum exhibitions, public commissions, professional teaching positions as well as admission to competitive graduate programs. By writing professional documents and entering juried competitions, they begin to understand what is needed to become an art professional.

Ultimately, learning how to communicate ideas, understanding how to subvert conventions through collaboration and appreciating professionalization, has allowed the students in my classes to reexamine their capabilities. As a result I have been privileged to witness some of that remarkable potential as my students continue to succeed in their chosen paths within and beyond the art world.