

Observations and Reflections of Learning and Teaching in a University
Studio Art Class: Interview with Susan G. Scott

Kate Walker

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ABSTRACT

Observations and Reflections of Learning and Teaching in a University
Studio Art Class: Interview with Susan G. Scott

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As a teacher of art I am constantly reflecting on effective teaching in studio art classes and the qualities that define good teaching in order to inform my own practice. The question I am investigating in this study is “What organizational and personal qualities of a teacher, as exemplified by an active artist and studio teacher at Concordia University, lead to the success of a studio art class at the University level and contribute to the essence of good teaching?”

In order to answer this question I returned to Susan G. Scott’s 460 level painting course, Materials and Methods of the Artist because it was as a student of hers in this course that my model of ‘good teaching’ began to form. Through reflective practice I re-evaluated my own learning experience in this course. Using the methods of participant observation and interview I uncovered and examined the organization of the course, the content and the pedagogical qualities of Susan G. Scott that contributed to the success of the course. The information that emerged from this study enabled me to define the essence of good teaching for me and to develop a base from which to construct my philosophy of education.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As an artist and beginning teacher I am constantly searching, questioning and reflecting on my experience as a learner and a teacher in order to understand effective teaching. I am always asking myself “How does one define a good teacher? Is it someone who is compassionate, patient, knowledgeable, nurturing, creative, respectful, organized and self assured? Is it someone who teaches content that is challenging, interesting and meaningful?” Arthur D. Efland wrote that in order for teachers to design and implement a good studio art curriculum they must answer the questions of “what to teach, how to teach and to whom to teach” (Efland, 1976, p.66).

As a teacher of art myself I want to reflect on effective teaching in studio art classes and define the qualities of good teaching in order to inform my own teaching practice. Therefore the question I am investigating is, “What organizational and personal qualities of a teacher, as exemplified by an active artist and studio teacher at Concordia University, lead to the success of a studio art class at the university level and contribute to the essence of good teaching?”

During the 2001-2002 academic years I enrolled in a 460 level special topics course at Concordia University called Methods and Materials of the Artist. I did not take this course during my four years as an undergraduate majoring in Studio arts at Concordia; it was only when I returned as an art education student that I

became interested in taking the course. Upon reflection, I realized that, even though I had taken many painting and drawing classes during my undergraduate, I did not feel confident in my knowledge of art theory or art making. When I returned to Concordia a few years later I was hungry for more technical training and skill development in art making, and so I enrolled in this course that was taught by Susan G. Scott.

When I started the course the differences between Susan G. Scott's class and other studio classes were not apparent to me but upon reflection I feel I was taught something in this studio class that I was not taught in others. My knowledge of art deepened, and I progressed as an artist by improving my visual art making skills. Because of this class the art works that I had studied in the previous years were no longer simply images from the past but became much more meaningful. I now understand the process of how these works from art history were created, how the different techniques and mediums were used to create vastly different effects. I have a better understanding of the relationship between content and method. Because the course dealt with historical and traditional methods and materials of artists, it provided me with a stronger grounding for my contemporary art practice.

It has been three years since I completed Susan G. Scott's course and I find my creative practice is still influenced by what I learned. I feel more secure in my technical ability, which makes my art making more intentional. In my own

artistic production I am more aware of how the formal elements work together, whether they succeed or not. This confidence in my image making means I am able to play, to explore and to push my own boundaries as an artist.

I responded as a learner to this course because of its specific structure, it was more structured than other courses but still allowed room to explore and experiment. This class provided me with the tools and techniques allowing me an effective outlet for individual expression. It was out of this course that my model of 'good teaching' began to form.

I had kept in touch with Susan G. Scott over the years, dropping in on her class every now and then to see what the new students were working on. A friendship developed and I asked her if I could come back as her teaching assistant and collect data for this research. I later returned to Susan's class, then a teacher myself, in order to reevaluate my own learning experience. In observing the organization of the course and the pedagogical qualities of Susan that contribute to its success I wanted to reflect on my own learning and teaching practice and develop a personal definition of good teaching that incorporates my philosophy of art education.

Susan is a professional artist whose career spans over three decades. She is described as a narrative painter who is "often inspired by controversial issues,

usually working in a series loosely based on a story line selected from world literature”¹.

Born in Montreal in 1949, she studied at the Pratt institute and the New York Studio School of Painting and Sculpture in New York, the Boston Museum School and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Drawing in Maine. During her career as a teacher she taught in art schools all across Canada before settling in Montreal in 1984. Susan is currently a part time teacher at Concordia University where she has taught a large variety of courses including foundation painting and drawing courses to advanced painting and drawing.

For the last six years Susan has been teaching Materials and Methods of the Artist, a course originally developed by Tom Hopkins. In the Concordia University Course Calendar, Materials and Methods of the Artist is defined as a course that focuses on painting and drawing which “familiarizes students with some of the historical materials, techniques and other aspects of the artists concern”². Susan’s aims and objectives for the course, as stated in her course outline, are:

to develop painting and drawing skills in traditional and contemporary mediums, and to understand the composition and application of those mediums... by the end of the course, students will have a basic understanding of materials and techniques used in watercolour,

¹ Susan G. Scott -Bellefeuille Gallery. <http://www.debellefeuille.com/scott.html>

² Foster, Cynthia (Editor). Concordia University Course Calendar, 2003\04, p. 541. Published by the Office of The Registrar, January 2003.

encaustic, egg tempera, fresco secco, distemper, egg oil emulsion and silverpoint. As well they will understand the properties of materials other than 'off the shelf' art supplies³.

The students also develop an understanding of these methods and materials in relation to a contemporary art practice.

It is my experience in this class and my respect for the teaching abilities of Susan to educate artists that are the basis for my research. Over the following chapters I describe and analyse this course in depth as it evolves over the academic year. I then discuss the specific qualities and structures that helped me to shape my own experience in this class and develop my philosophy of art education. I also discuss the personal implications of this research for my own art practice and teaching and the implications this has for the field of art education.

³ See Appendix. Scott, Susan. Course outline for Materials and Methods of the Artist. 2003\2004

Chapter 2

Research Methods, Procedure and Analysis

The methodology I used for this qualitative research was participant observation and interview as informed by J. Amos Hatch (2002), John W. Creswell (2002), Patricia James (1996) and Ardra L.Cole and Gary J. Knowles (2001). Each author helped me to design my research methods and to define my role as a researcher, my process of data collection and the advantages and disadvantages of the different forms of collection. Their influence is discussed further in the chapter.

My thesis is focused on observing and documenting a particular aspect of teaching within a studio art course designed for university fine arts students.

Participant Observation

By observing Susan in her class and interviewing her, I hope to develop a better understanding of her teaching phenomenon and how this has been an influential model for my own teaching.

To accomplish this, I volunteered as Susan's teaching assistant in her 460 level studio art course at Concordia University. This allowed me to critically observe her teach the 460 level course, Methods and Materials of the Artist, every Friday from 9-1pm throughout the academic year.

The Materials and Methods course is an elective within the Fine Arts department of Concordia University; therefore, the students that enroll in it are there because they are personally interested in the course content or the teacher. All the students who enroll in the course are at an advanced level. In order to take the course students must have completed an advanced 300 level painting course and drawing course. As is written in the course outline “formal and aesthetic sophistication required of a 400 level student” is necessary.

I was actively involved in the class both as a participant and an observer. As a participant, I acted as Susan’s teaching assistant during which I helped prepare classes and grade student work, and also took part in some of the studio assignments and critiques, both of my own work and the work of the students. As an observer I observed the structure of the course, the external curriculum, the implicit curriculum, the criteria used to evaluate the student’s art work, and the notable examples of what I perceive as good teaching. I also observed the other things Susan does that do not relate directly to the course objectives such as, her contribution to the school, the art world and how this comes into the classroom. I took note of Susan’s knowledge of the philosophy of art, art history and contemporary art through the discussions that arose in her class. Through this experience of being Susan’s teaching assistant I gained a deeper insight into what goes into making this course a success.

I gathered field notes, in the form of weekly journals, which were observations, both descriptive and reflective. I referred to the three categories (Foundation, Studio and Critique) used by Patricia James (1996) in her investigation of a college level, introductory, sculpture, studio course. These three categories provided me with an informal structure in which to base my own observations. My field notes contained detailed examples of the structure of the course; the foundation phase, how techniques were introduced, demonstrated and what examples were shown; the studio phase, student's interaction with materials, interaction with the teacher, classroom dynamics; and the critique phase, the frequency, the purpose, what is critiqued.

I analyzed my field notes for common themes, qualities and outcomes of instruction. Finally, based on my field notes and analysis, I developed a list of questions to be used while interviewing Susan.

Interview

The purpose of the interview was to gain a deeper understanding and perspective on the qualities, methods of instruction, personal observations and pertinent questions that arose during my observations. I adapted Amos J. Hatch's (2002, p 91) "outcomes of interviewing" as objectives for my questioning. The first objective is "*here and now construction*", where the participant explains events, activities, feelings, motivations and concerns. During the interview I asked questions that addressed Susan's class content and structure, questions that arose

from my weekly observations, the methods of instruction that I found particularly successful or interesting, how she prepared for the class, her broad objectives and her specific goals.

The second objective is “*Reconstructions*”, an explanation of past events and experiences. Ardra L. Cole and Gary J. Knowles’ theories of Life History research informed how I structured this portion of the data gathering. Through life history research methodologies I uncovered key experiences in Susan’s life that connect to her role as a teacher. Some of the interview questions probed into her past, and the decisions she made that have brought her to her present position as an artist-teacher. I inquired into her role as a learner and teacher, her development as an artist and past teaching experiences.

Hatch’s third objective of interviewing is “*Projections*, explanations of anticipated experiences”. These questions were based on the class in relation to the art world. In order to find out what Susan was doing I needed to know what her hopes are for her students, how she teaches them to be artists in society, what the objectives are for her students and what changes may be made to the class.

The fourth and final objective is “*Member checking*, verification or extension of information developed by the researcher”. The interview process allowed me to verify my observations and my interpretations. It provided me with the chance to check the accuracy of what I had interpreted during previous exchanges with

the participant and what I have observed in the class. In this way, the data was jointly constructed. Together, Susan and I discussed the interview and how to transcribe it in a voice that was acceptable to her.

Before the interview I provided Susan with a breakdown of the interview process. The questions, setting and tone of the interview were mutually agreed upon. Susan was fully aware of my research intentions and the ethical concerns that could arise. The issue that arises is a potential risk to the participant's reputation at Concordia. By allowing me to have full view her course and herself as a teacher she is potentially making herself vulnerable to negative commentary.

The goal of the interview was to 'generate data'. Although I entered the interview with specific questions in mind, I had hoped that these questions would generate open-ended discussion on the topic. As informed by Knowles and Cole (2001), the interview was to be structured as a 'guided conversation'. This approach to interview is consistent with their notion of research as a natural process and embodies the principles of "reflexivity, relationality, mutuality, care, sensitivity and respect" (p.73).

The interview was conducted, video recorded, audio recorded and transcribed by me. A copy of the transcript was given to Susan so that she could validate

my findings and elaborate on anything. Subsequent conversations and inquiry via e-mail were to be used to clarify points.

The interview took place at her studio on Beaudry Street on a very cold day in March, 2004. As an artist it was very informative to see how Susan works on a professional level; the way she sets up her paints on a large table with wheels, how she lays out her pigments and stretches her canvas, the way she works on paintings and how she stores her work. Susan pre-stretches her canvas then hangs the canvas on the wall instead of working on a stretcher. She also has a wonderful way of storing her work so that they hang neatly in rows that move by a system of tracks.

Sitting together at a coffee table over cappuccinos, I started by asking Susan broad open ended questions that allowed her to reflect on her life, career and methods of teaching. I then followed up with more in depth questions.

Reflective Inquiry

By triangulating interview, participant observation and unobtrusive data, I hoped to uncover more truths about what Susan does in the classroom and its effects on the students. As unobtrusive data I have included course outlines and notes handed out in class and personal reflections from when I was a student of hers.

Reflective inquiry allowed me to describe, and outline meaningful events and learning outcomes as I remembered them occurring in her course. I recorded these memories and my feelings at the time and then analysed them in order to find out exactly what it was that made these learning experiences meaningful. This information is of interest in that I am making links between my experience as a learner, as a researcher and a teacher. By doing so, I will support my findings and their educational and social effects.

Analysis

I used Hatch's (2002) "Typological" approach to analysis (p.152). First I read through the transcript of the interview then I grouped common themes that emerged into predetermined categories that were generated from art education theories, personal experience and research objectives. Within each typology I would then try to make meaning by searching for patterns, qualities, characteristics and links.

As informed by Hatch, I linked my data and analysis with related theory and research. I reported on my findings and how my research fit within the larger picture in order to construct meaning and understanding (p. 222).

Limitations

Participant observations have their limitations; because data collection involves careful listening and paying attention to classroom interactions, I might have

missed something while I was participating instead of taking field notes (Hatch, p.74). A personal limitation is the fear that I did not observe the right things, that I focused on irrelevant instances or that I missed important data. My level of involvement and my role changed from primarily a participant to primarily an observer depending on the circumstances

My experience with the interview also brought up fears and questions such as, how to conduct an interview that is fluid; how much should I talk, should it feel like a conversation or do I simply ask the question and let the interviewee do all the talking? And of course, were all my questions answered? What if the interview brought up more questions after it was complete than were answered during the interview?

The study relies on how I perceive Susan as a teacher and my understanding of the essence of good teaching based on my own knowledge, biases and experiences. I recognize that my experience as a student of Susan's was very positive. I recognize that I have much to learn from Susan and this is where the notion of mentoring is an important implication. Considering the above, another limitation to this research is the ability to remain objective throughout. I was able to minimize these limitations by keeping careful notes of all my observations and reflections in the most objective way possible.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

It is rare that an artist-teacher will reflect on his/her own education or write about education theories or issues that present themselves in their classes.

Artists write essays that relate to their studio practice, that “deal with critical, aesthetic, technical and social questions” (Stout 1999, p.4). They often write to “communicate, to explain and to clarify thoughts and feelings, to reinforce, extend and validate visual messages” (Stout, p.4). Therefore, I will try to situate potential goals of artist-teachers within a framework of the theories developed in the field of art education.

To clarify my position within the field of art education I have investigated literature that examines the notions of post modernism, modernism, teaching towards understanding and the role of artists in society and their implications within fine art studio courses.

Calvin Tomkins (2002) best articulates the problematic issues surrounding studio art education in universities when he writes “in a time where art can be anything at all, how do you teach it?” (p. 44). The field of art education is in a continual state of change with scholars presenting their point of view on the many conflicting and competing theories in art education. The question for painting teachers teaching artists is, how and what should art students be taught?

I feel that David Pariser (1983) describes very clearly the notion of art education. His definition of art education is “an apprenticeship during which certain skills and bodies of knowledge are mastered so that they can be used in the service of personal expression” (p. 50). Pariser uses the notions of art and craft to develop his definition. To create art is to realize personal expression and idiosyncratic content, and through a series of problem solving acts make it meaningful to others as well as ones self (p. 50). The traditional model of the craftsman is one who is “primarily concerned with cultural conventions and mastery of the medium” (p51). Pariser argues that one must use a craftsman like approach in order to put art into a form that is accessible to others. In other words, art education should focus on the things that are teachable, such as technical skill; by giving students the technical mastery, a high sense of craft and a sense of autonomy, the teacher can build confidence.

Pariser’s notion of the craftsman and artist complement each other in art making and art teaching and I agree that both notions contribute to the essence of good teaching. Students should not immediately be given free reign to create but should first be taught the ‘rules’, the techniques, methods and materials that are available so that they may successfully communicate their ideas.

The modernist tradition, which still exists alongside postmodern paradoxes in art schools, follows the thought that art is believed to exist in and of its self.

Modern art had no regard for function, representation or ethical concerns; its

meaning was reduced to pure aesthetics, it was purely about the picture plane. In this tradition formal qualities became important elements in the creative process. Formalism is a way of interpreting a work of art based on how it was put together: how colour, line, eye gravitation, value and space are arranged on the picture plane creating an optical space as opposed to a linear space. Artists began to obliterate any distinction such as foreground and background, figure and field, and slowly they even began to reduce line and contour, color and pattern (Wolfe, 1975, p. 96).

The purpose of instruction rooted in such notions is to uphold a certain standard of quality based on these formal elements. Principles of design, coherence and strength of form were principle sources of value when judging a work of art or developing studio production. (Efland, Freedman, Stuhr, 1996, p.3) Students were evaluated based on originality or creativity with the aim of art being to solve the creative and artistic problems one proposes to oneself as an artist (Pariser, 1983; Wolcott, 1996; Becker, 2001).

According to Anne Wolcott, today's artists have a different purpose for making art. Unlike Modern art in which the sole function was to contemplate aesthetic qualities and enhance aesthetic experiences, contemporary art aims to provoke the observer to read meanings and messages in their signs and symbols (Wolcott). The art work needs to be understood as a dialogue between the art work and society.

Teachers need to be aware that contemporary art is a commentary on culture and therefore must be discussed, interpreted and understood based on contemporary cultural references. (Efland, Freedman, Stuhr, 1996; Wolcott, 1996).

Carol Becker, dean of faculty at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago states that, now more than ever, it is important for people to take notice of their surrounding political and social environment and to situate their position, have an opinion, a voice and to use it. In this respect artists become public intellectuals, using their skills to communicate through visual means as a way to reach people and to state their concerns and views on what is happening in the world. Becker comments that the goal for art educators is therefore to enable artists to become active participants in the larger world, not simply the art world. In order to do so art educators cannot simply train students in the technique of painting and sculpture but must also encourage students to use visual mediums as a way to creatively address the complexities of the world and to solve the problems that they pose to themselves (p.15). Students should be encouraged to explore as many things as necessary in order to find a form that best suits the vision they are trying to communicate (p.16) even if it means transforming or obliterate form all together. This also includes a solid foundation in subjects outside of the art world such as politics, history and liberal arts (p.16).

The notion of teaching towards understanding as explained by David Perkins and Tina Blythe (1994) is another way of looking at this same theory. Perkins

and Blythe define understanding as the ability to explain a topic, find evidence and provide examples and, to apply and or present the topic in a new way while at the same time advancing it. Perkins and Blythe go on to explain that teaching towards understanding means to “engage the students more thoughtfully in the subject matter; drawing connections between student’s lives and the subject matter, between principles and practice, between past and present” (p.4). In other words bringing meaning to a subject by placing it within a context that the students can identify with.

The aim for art educators therefore is to help students to go beyond the visual level of art work and to enable them to gain access to the complexities of meanings that works of art possess (Wolcott, p.69) and to create art that deals with multiple meanings and the issues of today whether it is personal or global. Now more than ever it is important to make links between the student’s lives, what they are trying to communicate through their art work and what is happening in the world around them.

One notion of contemporary art is that it deals with content not form. Teachers need to be prepared for issues of appropriation, quality, varying styles and content that critique culture and society. But with artists focusing more on creating art that explains social ills and that tries to reform society, aesthetic quality and good design can be overlooked. (Fehr, 1997; Stinespring, 2001)

This theory of content over form found within the broad scope of postmodernism is criticized by John A. Stinespring in that embracing 'anti-aesthetic' values promotes "shoddy craftwork, lack of visual continuity and , in the classroom, permissiveness that allows students to do anything they want without regard for the "old" values of design, craftsmanship and effective communication" (Stinespring, p.151). Today's studio art teachers need to be aware of this so they can develop a curriculum that challenges their students in both form and content.

Chapter 4

Observations: Foundation phase, Studio phase, Critique

There are three main phases that make up the structure of this course: the foundation phase, the studio phase and the critique. During the foundation phase, if the budget permitted, a guest speaker would be invited to demonstrate the particular technique to be learned. This gave us a rare opportunity to meet other practicing artists and discuss their work and artistic process.

If there was no budget (which is often the case) Susan would give a demonstration for each new technique. For example, when teaching the technique of egg tempera, Susan demonstrated how to do an ink under painting in preparation for the egg tempera overlay. She first showed the class how to mix a value scale, in ink, of about 7 greys from light to black. She then demonstrated on a prepared panel, how to use cross hatching to create light and dark values in the under painting. Susan then explained that this under painting was necessary in order to achieve the desired effects of egg tempera.

Susan was most involved, from demos to feed back, with the techniques of oil glazing and watercolour because those are the two techniques she uses herself. She definitely displayed a sense of confidence for those mediums. During the technique of oil glazing Susan brought in examples of her own work. She showed three examples of canvas prepared with different coloured toned grounds with an under painting on each (a portrait done in white highlights) and

one example of an oil glaze carried through to the finished painting. She then described each step to the class and what the purpose was (a monochrome under painting on a toned ground helps with the over all tonality).

To quote Susan,

If I had a budget I would bring in experts, because I am really not an expert. I mean I am sort of totally self taught on these different materials and I am very embarrassed to be looked at as somebody who knows more than I do, I don't. You know, with oil painting at least I have a long experience with that and I can answer a lot of questions on that, but with egg tempera and encaustic, I am really a novice. (2004)

Susan told the class that she had been a student at six different art schools and had never been taught the technique of glazing. It was only twenty years later that she learn about the useful aesthetic effects of under painting and oil glazing.

During the foundation phase Susan provided handouts that listed recipes for making mediums, the supplies needed, and an explanation of the methods and techniques. She assigned reading, for example, in the Ray Smith book, *The Artists Handbook*, which discussed the techniques more in depth. Susan showed the students slides on artists, both historical and contemporary, who have used the various mediums so that students would get an idea of the different ways they can be used to create art. In the tradition of modernism, most of the examples she showed in class came from Western, European, white, male artists.

At the beginning of the course the class is very 'teacher centered' in that "the function of education is to transmit facts, skills and values to students" (John P. Miller & Wayne Sellers, 1990, p.5). Susan is in the role of an authority, teaching the students the different techniques and materials. As the course continues this role is reversed and the responsibility for learning is left to the students as they pursue their own projects. But this does not happen immediately, students need to acquire that information and instruction first.

I remember one class in particular; Susan had hired a model for a watercolour session. The moment the model arrived and set up, the students started to paint, exploring watercolour on their own. The following week Susan came in to the class and announced that she felt she had not done her job properly; having just let the students go to it without any instruction when they really needed instruction because they "don't know how to use watercolour". Susan then spent most of the class discussing watercolour materials and techniques.

First Susan told the class what kind of colours they should have as a palette; Titanium white, Azo Yellow (synthetic colour) or Cadmium yellow (med or light), Cadmium orange, Cadmium red (this is essential for creating certain skin tones), Viridian green (transparent glazing colour), Yellow green (for example permanent green), Cobalt blue (she warned students that it is very expensive), Yellow ochre, Burnt Umber, Alizarin Crimson and if they have a larger budget, Windsor violet, Naples yellow, Burnt sienna.

She then set up a full palette of colour and on three different types of water colour paper she began three identical still lifes. Susan told the class to experiment with different papers until they found one they liked to work with. She said that they should think about the scale they are working in and to use the appropriate sized brushes. Susan stressed that the most important thing when painting with watercolour is the brushes, and they should come to a good point. The second most important thing according to Susan is the type of paper and third, the colours used.

Susan also discussed her own practice. She uses a resist medium like paint and not only to block out or protect areas. She works on two watercolours at once to allow for drying time.

Studio Phase

During the studio phase, students worked both in groups and individually. On the first day of class, Susan divided the students into four groups of five. In these groups the students shared supplies, and ingredients, they cooked together, prepared mediums, discussed techniques and worked out questions and problems together. Having the students work in groups created a good class dynamic and an atmosphere that allowed students to get to know each other. This exemplifies what she said in the interview, that one of the most important things you can do in art school is make friends!

I really try to make a dynamic in the class where people realize that their best allies are the other students that are in the class with them and that I always have said that the most important thing you are going to do in art school is make a few friends; and those are the people whose studios you are going to visit when you leave and, those are the people who are going to help you in those tough years after you leave art school and they are going to encourage you and you are going to encourage them and so you have to make friends while you are here at Concordia even though it is a very hard thing to do because of the structure of the school, so anything I can do to have students realize that. (Scott, 2004)

During the studio phase students worked on the class assignments while Susan would circulate and talk to the students on a one to one basis. It was during this time that Susan would give students feedback and answer questions.

Susan once said there are two questions that artists always ask- what to paint and how to paint it. For the most part, because of the nature of the assignments these two questions were answered for the students. Each assignment provided a direction with the purpose of teaching the students something new that they would later build upon and improve. From the foundation phase to assignments to studio inquiry, the information taught in class was slowly built upon; nothing was learned in isolation. For example, the method of egg tempera incorporated the technique of cross hatching and tonal rendering to create an under painting as did the method of oil glazing. The effects of watercolour were similar in quality to fresco secco and watercolour could also be used to create an under painting for encaustic.

Through specific and challenging assignments, students addressed both the technical and aesthetic problems of art making. For example, the very first assignment given to students entailed going to the Museum of Fine Arts and choosing three pieces of artwork from different epochs, different artists, subject matter and materials. The students were asked to make a detailed drawing, in the museum, of each work chosen, in black and white using a full tonal range. Then the students were required to make three works using their sketches as a point of departure. These works had to be done using non-traditional materials and on non traditional supports.

Throughout the year, for every new technique learned the students had to complete a copy of a master working in that technique. This meant that the students not only had to go to the library and/or museum to research a time period, a technique and an artist but by copying another painting they developed their hand-eye relationship and strengthened their observation skills.

Critiques

Formal critiques occurred twice a year and took the form of group critiques. Susan said that having them as a group allowed students to benefit from hearing what everybody felt about the work and to hear the multiple readings one work of art can have. The students would comment on the work, then Susan would try to give a more philosophical reading or an over view of the direction of the work. If the student spoke about their own work it was generally after everyone

else had spoken. The critiques were not the time for the artists to explain their work but to find out how others perceived it.

One method of critique that I found particularly successful was to have each student comment in writing on each others works. Each student was given a sheet of paper that had the following categories on it; Technique, Content, and Improvements.

When I was a student of Susan's we used the same method of critique. We were asked to comment on the formal aspects of the work: composition, use of the materials, and tonal values and textures created for each technique. We were asked to comment on the success and/or accuracy of the copy and on the content of the more personal piece. We considered the subject matter. Did it engage, provoke or question? Did it disturb, enlighten or bore us? Did we feel the work was ambitious? We were also asked to comment on the student's development over the year: which works we found were the strongest and which we found were the weakest. In essence each student was asked to describe, to interpret and to evaluate each others works (Tom Anderson, 1993). Susan explains her intent for critiques:

I think the critiques are crucial because that's a way of them looking how other people have gone through this experience and being able to articulate what they see, what they have learned, what the strengths and weaknesses are of the other work. I mean building up a language to talk

about what you have done visually is very, very important. Without that language you can't, I mean, in this time in history you can't just sit in your studio and make your paintings. You have to be able to communicate on another, on a verbal and a written level what you are doing in your studio. It is just the name of the game right now. (Scott, 2004)

Organizing critiques in this way was effective and added to the success of the class. An important aspect of studio art education critiques can be both a positive and negative experience because there is always an underlining value judgment of the work (Anderson, 1993). Giving student's guidelines for critique helps them to think through their initial evaluations of the work in question. It helps the students become involved with the work, to question the artwork and their response to it, and to think about it on their own terms before sharing their thoughts with the class. The students benefit from one another, they learn from the knowledge and world views that each student brings to the critiques, they learn from Susan and from historical and contemporary art.

As the course progressed it became much less structured and focused less on tradition and art historical references. The organization of the course opened up allowing for and encouraging personal exploration and artistic growth. Once the students had completed the exercises involving a master painting, they were left to explore the medium and techniques studied and to make them their own by working on personal imagery.

For the final project (which took up the last two months of the course) the students had to choose two techniques learned in class and complete six works measuring at least three feet on one side, using those techniques. Within these guidelines students were encouraged to explore personal directions in their art making. The students were asked to write a proposal outlining the medium they were going to use, the specific size of the works and the inspiration or themes behind the project. Susan read each proposal and gave feedback to each of the students on the content and the feasibility of the project.

By leaving students free to work on their own images encourages “original thought and helps the learner to break conventional boundaries and engages in creative process moving beyond the surface of understanding” (Simpson, Carroll & Delaney 1998, p.). In other words, because the second part of the course is organized in an open fashion it requires the students to think about what they have learned and to use it in a personal way which deepens exploration and brings learning to a deeper level of understanding.

It was at this point in the course that students were expected to pursue the direction they were moving in as young artists. The students were evaluated on how they had mastered the technique, their originality and whether they had pushed their own work to an interesting level.

Chapter 5 Discourse

Aims and Goals

As mentioned earlier, to be able to take the course students must have completed both a three hundred level drawing course and painting course. Susan explains,

the idea behind that class is that I want only students who have been through three years of painting and have some sense of what they want to be painting or some sense of, some kind of identity as a painter and then, from there go into this very fast paced clip of doing different materials sort of, every month for the first semester so that we cover egg tempera and encaustic and fresco secco, and silver point...They (the students) have a sense of form and structure and composition, you know, hopefully some art history and we always find gaps...but they have had some training and so when they get to this year, I'm not talking about form and structure and composition because there is too many other things to be covering and there is always, this, you know, every few years people say, well this should be opened to the two hundred level and, you know, it is at the beginning that students should be learning these techniques so that they can use them as they are going through school, which is fine. But I don't want to teach that. If someone else wants to come in and teach a Material class in the early level, I take my hat off to them. But I really think that for the intensity of the class I want to have these more mature students. (2004)

Susan stated during the first class that composition, form and individuality are as important as learning and using the techniques but she also mentioned that this

class does not concentrate on form and structure and composition. Susan states her aims as the following,

these are totally lost techniques so, in the end there are two things, I want them to realize that the technical aspect of their, of the decisions they make, as artist in the studio, are a hundred fold, you know, you have a million possibilities, as to how you are going to put a painting together technically. And, my second determination is that when they look at painting they have a very different relationship to what they are seeing. After studying these different methods, whether they are in a museum or whether they are looking at contemporary art, they have a completely different appreciation and understanding. (2004)

Based on my observations and my experience as a student in this class I feel that this course emphasizes form, structure and composition, as well as understanding and appreciation of art more than most studio courses I have taken. These aspects of art are implicitly taught through Susan's critiques, her own artistic value system and the language she uses to communicate information and express her opinions.

Language of Communication

When Susan looks at works of art, whether it be student work or works found in art history, she has the ability to break them down and explain exactly what is happening aesthetically. During critiques Susan will tell students where she thinks the work is successful and where it is weak, always inviting the students to resubmit all or any of their work. She shows students how they can improve

the work, sometimes by talking and pointing, sometimes by actually sketching out the painting to illustrate her point.

I remember her critique of one of my larger paintings. It was a painting of a seated girl looking out the window at a city-scape. Susan looked at it for a short time; she started by commenting on how beautifully the drapery over the chair was painted. Then she went into what for her was not working successfully and the things that could be done to improve it if I wished to go back into the painting. She started by saying the city-scape in the background was too defined for her and that I should tone it down a bit, making it less of a focal point. She said I should push the hand back and lighten up the woman's hair so that the space is more believable. She said that even though I had no real light sources I should add some light onto her thigh and finally that the horizontal line dividing the wall in the background was distracting.

What I enjoyed about this critique was that Susan did not revert to talking solely about the content of the painting and what it meant to her. She was able to evaluate the painting on an aesthetic level, to describe it in its parts and as a whole thereby giving validity to her evaluation. It was this directed approach that helped me to improve my studio practice; to paint evenly, taking care to work each aspect using deliberate mark making with respect to the whole painting. I began to understand that each mark I make on the canvas has an effect on the viewer.

The language Susan uses and what she looks for in her student's work is based on formalist properties such as line, colour, shape and value. Her focus is on the works aesthetic qualities and less on its content, its social function or the artist's activist intentions. Unlike the multifaceted notions of postmodernism where meaning is made through the links to everyday experiences, external knowledge and references, Susan focuses on meaning that is contained within the art work itself. Susan encourages her students to make personal works of art that are first and foremost visually successful.

Susan once said that when critiquing a painting she looks to what is not working and goes from there. In a typical critique of a students work, Susan looked at the composition; the relationship of the figure to the space around, how things meet up in the picture plane and where the eye is directed. She looked at the space created on the picture plane, whether it was deep or shallow and whether it was it interesting or not. She looked at the use of tone and how the lights and darks were working.

For those working abstractly, issues such as where the colours were in space, and where the shapes were placed in relation to one another became what the painting was about. I remember her telling one student who worked in abstraction not to intellectualize what he/she was doing but to look at it visually. She gave the student a tip: if the student were to block out areas or take things

out of the painting would those elements be missed. I thought this was very good advice for all painters.

During another critique a student presented a small ink drawing of a B.B. gun. Susan pointed out that the light and dark values were done very well but that the B.B. gun looked like it was floating on the table instead of resting on it. This, she said, was because the shadow created by the gun was depicted too light in the ink drawing. Susan explained that this was happening because the B.B. gun was painted too black in value and was throwing off the entire grey scale. Black, she said, is hard to work with because it is difficult to see. Susan suggested that the student darken the shadow.

A second thing she commented on was the composition of the artwork. The student had cropped the B.B. gun on both sides so that it formed a 'V' shape on the panel. This made for a bad composition because it did not keep the viewers eye within the square, it almost forced the eyes out of the picture.

It was during these critiques that I learned so much about the importance of form and the different ways a work of art can come together. By listening to Susan talk about paintings I started to develop an art language of my own, which is essential in the essence of good teaching.

The Interview

During the interview I had hoped to gain access to Susan's thoughts and reflections on her teaching and her organization of the class. Although, a few times light was shed on these aspects and the essence of good teaching, I did not really gain insight into her reflections and thoughts on what she does in the classroom. The interview did not give me more insight into how she consciously organized the class, how she structured the class so that it fostered learning or her intentions for developing skill and creativity in artists. Organizational and personal qualities that I observed during the class, things that I felt were successful, were not elaborated on in the interview which left me wondering what Susan does intentionally and/or what she does intuitively based on her experience.

After interviewing Susan, many of the questions asked did not elicit the reflective answers I had hoped for. I was left wondering whether Susan is aware of how the organization, the structure and guidelines placed in the first half of the course effect the students learning or contributes to the success of the class. I got the feeling that Susan doesn't often reflect on the education of artists but it could be that unlike "novice teachers who are more likely to adhere to taught rules and little discretionary judgment, expert practitioners use implicit and unconscious practice based on deep understanding and intuition" (Brown, Fry, Marshall, 2003).

Essence of Good Teaching

During the interview I was able to unearth the qualities Susan thought were important in the essence of good teaching. In brief these qualities are: being a role model, being highly involved and having a point of view.

During the six years that Susan was at art school she had very few role models, someone who exemplified for her that it was possible to have a career in the art world, to teach and have a family. Therefore, she feels it is very important to be a role model for students. Susan elaborates on this:

well I just feel that there I am doing it, you know, I am a practicing painter who exhibits regularly, and, you know, has a family and, so it is sort of like, a way of saying it its possible, this is a possibility, where as, I don't think I had that....the thing about having a female role model, is something very, conscious that I have wanted to be, because in all my six years of art school I think I maybe had one. (2004).

As a woman artist teacher, Susan has a lot of experience and knowledge to rely on which comes out during the class. An example of this was the frequent discussions that occurred during class. Susan was not always in the mood to talk about art and that is when the students would just get straight to work. When she was in the mood however the students would gather around the table that was filled with articles and books on artists to listen to Susan talk. She would take four or five books and discuss the artists in them, their position in the art world, their contributions, what art movement they were involved with and who

they were affiliated with. Susan would talk about each painting and how the artists used the picture plane (as a window or as a surface) or she would talk about the artist's intention for the work. I found it particularly interesting when she would point out the similarities between artists that seemed so different. For example, she would point out relationships between British abstract painter Howard Hodgkin, French painter Edouard Vuillard and Indian Miniature paintings or how the fifteenth century Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch and contemporary Portuguese painter Paula Rego played with scale in their work.

One student remarked on how passionate Susan is when she talks about art. The student said "Susan always has things to say about art that are so interesting and we learn so much from it". It is this passion for art that is infectious and makes it all so exciting and enriching.

A second quality attributed to good teaching is a high level of involvement and availability to students. Susan respected her students as artists and was genuinely interested in their development. She was interested in whom her students were influenced by and the work they were doing outside of class as much as the work they were doing for her class. She was curious about their personal interests and how this effected what they were trying to communicate through their art.

When asked about her relationship with her students I feel Susan's response was not in the same light as my observations. Susan explained,

I think over the years I have gotten, I mean, in some ways I feel that I have gotten much less demanding. I used to be much tougher and I don't think I am anymore. I guess I feel like those who are serious are serious, and, they are going to perform to their own level of determination and those who aren't, aren't, and it is a waste of my energy to be pushing those who aren't. In a way, I mean, I guess that is how I feel about that. I mean I give a tremendous amount when I am there. I am totally focused and totally, you know, available and I feel that I am extremely giving and extremely (pause) opinionated about what I believe, has a quality and what I think doesn't have certain quality. (2004).

I found Susan to be very demanding but also very encouraging and involved with the students. I remember at the beginning of the semester Susan and I were walking down the hall and she stopped a student who was holding a large painting of a man. She asked the student if he was finished and then said, "You did not ask for my critique but I am going to give it anyway". She then proceeded to tell him what she thought worked and what did not, why and how to improve it should he want to.

It is this directedness that causes some students trouble. During a casual conversation about the course one student commented that Susan had no understanding of how her comments affect her students. The student felt that Susan was very hard on them and could be quite negative instead of bringing out

the positive. The student added that Susan's words had a negative effect and that she never once acknowledged how much effort the students put into the work they did for this class. An example of this would be in the silver point exercise. Over the holidays the students were assigned to do three drawings using silverpoint, a technique that was introduced before the students went on holiday. Upon returning all the students showed their silverpoint drawings and Susan made no comment. From my point of view I thought they were quite good and was happy with the amount of care and effort that was used. The following week Susan told the class that they had the option of redoing their silver points because compositionally they were weak.

It is this demanding nature that I found very refreshing in a studio course. Susan is very serious about the class and in turn expects the same from her students. I agree that at times this quality and directed approach can have a negative effect if taken personally but Susan never gave negative feedback without positive reinforcement, it was always constructive.

During the interview I asked Susan what the essence of good teaching was for her. Her response had an incredible impact on me. She said that

the teacher has to have a point of view that the students can then react against...and to provide a forum where reacting against is a healthy and positive thing...I don't want people to come out painting like I paint or thinking that what is important is what I think is important....But I have

to give them something that I feel is important after all the years I have put into working and then they themselves will, come out with their own sense of what is important in art work; whether it is painting or music or drama or dance or theatre. (2004).

The point of view that Susan talks about comes across in her critiques and in her own value systems. Susan has a sharp critical eye and certain confidence in her evaluations and judgments. She is not afraid to voice her opinion and to tell students what she thinks about their work and why. As mentioned earlier some students may find this quality tough to bear but for me this is a quality that I value and would like to emanate.

Susan is also not afraid to voice her opinion on what she feels is 'good' art. She openly praises what she likes and what she does not feel is 'good'. For example, Susan was in the process of introducing a new technique using the explanations found in *The Artists Handbook* by Ray Smith. This book is a reference manual of tools, materials and techniques used by artists. It includes illustrated step by step sequences to preparing and using different mediums and techniques. While explaining the new technique Susan announced to the class that the illustrations used in the Ray Smith book were horrible.

Susan expects good work from all her students which includes thoughtful and interesting composition and exploration of technique. She always acknowledges the individual and aims to challenge her students and help them achieve a higher level in their art. Even though the prerequisite to the course is a three hundred

level painting and drawing class, not all the students are at the same level of ability. In every class there are a few art “stars”. They are the ones who have very good technical ability but who also possess that little something extra in terms of conceptual understanding. They are the ones who will go on to change art. Of course there are other students who come to a four hundred level art course and have never used oils or have never heard of some of the pivotal theories that have shaped art such as Formalism. Even though Susan recognizes and is stimulated by the “stars” in her class, she is incredibly attentive and encouraging to all her students. By being interested in who her students are, who they have studied with and what they are working on both within her course and outside of it, Susan understands what the students already know and what they have experienced and is therefore able to create avenues so that the students can push themselves to new levels of understanding, creative thought and technical skill (Simpson, 1998).

Chapter 6 Reflections and Analysis

As described earlier, the nature of Material and Methods of the Artist is such that students learn different techniques of art, (some would say lost techniques of art) at a very fast pace. These traditional techniques of art involve “rules”. The students had to follow specific steps and methodical processes in order to make the materials and use the techniques. Therefore they had to be organized and well prepared because there was a lot of new information being covered in the beginning of the course.

Everything about the course was grounded in theory and art history which meant that each method was learned step by step through looking at images in art history and contemporary art, through demonstrations, both by Susan or a visiting artist, and through studio practice and critique.

Importance was placed on both the process of the artist, in other words, making mediums, understanding their uses and developing ideas and images, and the product of the artist.

As a past student in this course I have come to understand that what I responded to as a learner can be loosely defined as the method of “Transmission” (Miller and Seller, 1990). I acquired skills, knowledge and values through one way instruction and was praised when I successfully transferred this information. As

a student I want to learn tangible information and see improvement. It is for this reason that I feel I respond very well to the technical, craftsman like approach to art education.

I find it difficult to communicate meaning, ideas, and issues visually and because of this I was frustrated with the other painting and drawing studio art courses I attended during my undergraduate. I found them to be vague, unstructured classes that rarely focused on technique or mastery of skill, choosing instead to focus on the development of personal expression and meaningful aesthetic depiction. These studio courses left me asking three questions 1) Where do I find meaningful ideas, 2) How do I successfully realize my ideas and 3) What have I learned.

As a learner in the Materials and Methods of the Artist course I was looking to develop my skill as a painter by receiving more technical instruction, more challenge and a better understanding of a contemporary art context. I began the course not knowing what egg tempera, fresco secco or encaustic were and I left knowing how to make them and how to use them in my own art making as well as an understanding of the history of their uses. I learned more drawing techniques and reached a certain level of mastery through instruction and practice which gave me a solid foundation from which to build my contemporary practice. The knowledge learned could easily be transferred and

used with confidence to solve the creative and artistic problems I propose to myself as an artist.

It was a complete surprise to me, then, when I realized that the most valuable and meaningful things that I felt emerged from my data collection were the things Susan did and said that were not outlined in the course curriculum. I realized that it was this information that made my learning so much deeper than technical skill development.

My understanding of how to look, see and understand how formal elements and meaning are used in other people's work developed immensely. I developed a language of critique and I learned to question things, two qualities that I find very valuable for teaching. I was given new inspiration and enthusiasm for art. I found meaningful ideas through the historical and contemporary examples of art shown in class. I developed a voice, and wanted to share it with others in a visual medium. My ideas about art expanded and made me want to seek out new artists and theories; to read more, see more, learn more and paint more.

In this respect one of the most important aspects in Susan's teaching is the intellectual links she makes between art history, the student's life and art work, and where that is situated in a larger context. Susan focuses a lot on aesthetics and the formal qualities of the work, but she also "engages students more thoughtfully in subject matter learning – drawing connections between students'

lives and the subject matter, between principles and practice, between past and present.”(Perkins & Blythe, p. 4). In doing so Susan fosters a deeper understanding of art and art making in her students.

As described earlier, at a certain point during the course Susan hands over the responsibility of learning and exploring to her students and makes herself available only for guidance. The students are given the freedom to create art that has meaning, to “connect their works to the social, political and historical contexts in which they live” (Wolcott, 1996, p. 78) thereby creating contemporary artwork that is a dialogue between the artist and society.

During this phase of the course, informal one on one and group discussions would arise on such topics as art history and contemporary art, where art is currently headed, how to clean your brushes, the proper colour palette to use, how to use an oil medium, the pigments that when mixed together create the best skin tone, how to document your work etc. It was this extra knowledge that brought this course to a different level than most other studio courses.

Susan was the first person to tell me to use a medium with my oils; she said I should be using a mixture of a 1/3 dammar, 1/3 varnish and 1/3 turpentine. During another discussion when I was a student of hers she advised me that if I was using photos as reference for my paintings, I should sketch from life as much as possible. I remember one time she looked at my brushes and said “you

call these brushes?" I had not even realized how short the bristles had become, stubby little things on a handle.

Each class Susan would bring in different art books for us to look at and she would open up the class for discussion on any new exhibitions, projects, and visiting artist lectures. I found this extremely helpful because it enabled me to keep abreast to what was happening outside of the classroom, in Montreal and around the world and to understand how contemporary art was currently being shaped.

Susan would show videos on artists, for example, Montreal artist, Peter Krauss who works in fresco secco and, Montreal artist Jacques Payette who works in encaustic. These videos not only gave students insight into the process of the artists but they also showed the students contemporary ways of using traditional techniques. Looking at the work of other artists for inspiration and instruction was not only accepted but encouraged. Although the students were being evaluated on their creativity, individuality and innovation there was still room for appropriation, referential material, and a dialogue between the students and other artists. It is this idea of making art based on art that I find valuable.

On several occasions Susan would bring the students to museums and galleries around the city. The class went to the Bellefeuille Gallery to see former Concordia student Fabien Jean as well as, the Musée D'Art Contemporain to see

the work of Montreal artist Kamila Wozniakowska. The purpose of this is to encourage students to see shows, to understand what art is today and to talk about art and artists which is an important part of art education as explained by Susan:

Art's a language, and there are tools to know the language and tools to be able to speak about the language and analyze the language and, have some sense that you have, the ability to critique, because you have the ability to understand where different art forms are coming from and what the sources are and what the influences are. (2004)

Susan would make links between art history and the information covered in class, for example; she brought all the students to the Museum of Fine Arts to look at renaissance and pre-renaissance examples of egg tempera and oil glazing. She then connected these examples with contemporary art thereby encouraging the students to apply the techniques in new ways.

To a lesser extent I also found that Susan imparted professional training by discussing the role of the artists in society. She informed students of juried exhibitions that they should apply to or galleries around town that they should look into. Susan asked the students about the Galerie Gora and whether or not people had to pay to exhibit there. The class discussed the challenges of showing their works of art and how many galleries want the artists to pay upfront. Susan briefly talked about having an agent (not really worth it) and how much commission galleries take (up to sixty percent). Susan also

commented on the fact that there was very little English coverage of the visual arts in Montreal. This was in response to visual art critic Isa Tousignant's well written, but negative review of an exhibition by a Concordia alumni student, seen in the weekly journal *The Hour*.

Other topics of discussion were the grants that were available to students such as the Greenshield grant, the DuMaurier grant or the Pierre Ayot award given to emerging artists. We also addressed topics such as the moral issues that come with such corporate grants as DuMaurier.

Susan advised the class that as artists we need to put money into our art work in order to get something out of it because nobody is going to come knocking on our door and say "you are talented we want you!!"

Susan provided insight into her own practice as an artist, her artistic process, her struggles and experience with the art world. During one class Susan told the students she had recently received a call from a man who had bought one of her paintings twenty years ago. He was calling to say that the painting was starting to chip and asked Susan what she was going to do about it. Susan used this anecdote to remind the students that they have a responsibility to know what they are putting on their canvases and how they are putting it on.

It was wonderful to discuss and share information and experiences as artists not simply as students and teacher. All of this, which is not outlined in the course curriculum, is what makes the class so rich with information.

Susan teaches art: the application of art, the language of art, the history of art and contemporary art as well as a standard for quality art making. She elaborates on every piece of information taught in class with explanations, examples, demonstrations and links to a larger body of knowledge. Not only are the students taught how to draw and paint but they were also required to think about art; its meaning and impact on society. In a studio art class I don't think one could ask for more.

Chapter 7

Discussion and Conclusion

From my observations in the Materials and Methods of Artists course, the interview and my experience as a student in this class several important factors have emerged that help define its success for me. The first factor is the way in which the course is organized; from very rigid to very open in terms of art making. The second factor is the additional knowledge and information included by the teacher that helps to create new avenues of creative exploration and a context for course content. And the third factor in the success of the course lies within the qualities embodied by Susan. She is a practicing artist who has both expertise and a broad knowledge of different techniques used in art making; she has a deep appreciation and passion for art; she has a good critical eye and communicates very well.

The organization of the course is successful because it works for a broad range of learners. Some may enjoy the slow detailed work of egg tempera or the challenge of copying a work of art from history. Others may respond to the gestural, quick process of encaustic and the minute-to-minute changes and decisions required in this process. While others may respond to the freedom of working on personal imagery, developing their personal style of art making, and pushing their work beyond the boundaries. But each student no matter what their goals are, learn new tools and information that can be applied to their future art making.

It can be argued that the organization of this course is guided by the nature of the topic and that teaching a two hundred level introductory drawing class would be very different. On the one hand I agree teaching students how to make different artist materials using a recipe is very different than teaching students how to draw the human form; but I also feel that the qualities I value in this course can be of use in all studio courses to teach students of all levels.

By organizing studio art classes so that they are based in technical instruction and skill development and by presenting this information within a larger context of art knowledge and personal experience greatly enhances learning. It engages students, gives them ideas and enables them to make meaningful links between the information taught in class and the external sources of inspiration and knowledge in their lives and in art.

Art education cannot solely be organized around the imparting of skills and techniques because art is value laden, filled with ethical issues, social concerns and judgment (Martin, p. 301). The goal is to impart a large body of knowledge which incorporates understanding, appreciation, past and present contexts as well as technical skill. It is these elements together that make the study of art so rich.

As a teacher, it is my goal to design and implement a good studio art curriculum in higher education. In order to do so I believe studio art courses need to be divided into equal parts structure and freedom. The term 'structure' for me

means that students are taught tangible information through instruction, demonstration and experimentation.

Students need to learn the craft, to develop drawing skills, visual acuity and knowledge of their materials and the different techniques in order for them to communicate successfully through art. It is this structure that will provide students with a solid base of information to refer to throughout their careers as artists.

Improvement is fostered through exercises, assignments and critiques. It is during this portion of the course that students will also develop a language of art and formal aesthetic knowledge not as modernist but “as generic to the pictorial understanding of painting” (Spicanicov, 2000, p.28).

When I use the term ‘freedom’ I mean that as teachers we need to help students develop good ideas and to communicate these ideas effectively using the techniques taught. We need to build students confidence by teaching them that their technical knowledge and visual experimentations of form and content can be used to communicate opinions and concerns to the rest of civilization and that this is both valid and necessary (Becker).

According to Becker, art educators need to

provide every opportunity imaginable for our students to be challenged in both form and content, to encourage them to become as radical in form as

they are in content, to help them learn to ask themselves the most difficult questions, to push themselves as far as they can go and to be educated in such a way that they cannot hesitate to take their stand within the public arena. (p. 24).

It is through this that students learn to be artists, they take the skills they have been taught and relate it to their own interests, experiences and beliefs and create works of art that communicate. I feel that it is important that students realize they have a voice, that their ideas are important and valued. As a teacher I can help students to understand the impact they can have on society by creating art that makes a statement, and that is ambitious. To help students to create art that is not only technically sound but that also challenges, provokes questions, disturbs, enlightens and even bores us.

It can be difficult for students to find meaningful ideas therefore it is important to explore this in class by challenging students on an intellectual level by giving them assignments that address history, emotions, politics, social and aesthetic problems and themes and to guide students, helping them clarify their ideas and put them into a visual form. We need to create an environment where ideas, technique, problems and successes and feedback are shared and a group dynamic is created. This is what art is and therefore it must be addressed in the classroom.

Through observing, listening to and reflecting on Susan teach this course I have learned that teachers teach much more than the course content outlined.

Teachers also teach students through their actions, personal experience, language of communication and personal point of view. The teacher becomes a role model; someone to look to for information, support and guidance.

As teachers we need to share our thoughts, opinions and points of view with the students but we must also recognize that our point of view is not the only one.

We must share with the students our passion for art, our knowledge of it and the experiences we go through in making it.

Talking to students and being available to them is an important factor in studio art education but a reciprocal relationship with the students must be encouraged, in which there is a shared responsibility for learning. All the specific goals, content and curriculum structure must be shared with the students so that they will know what is expected of them but it is also important to understand what the students already know and what they want to know so that we can help them to achieve those goals.

It is important for teachers to keep up their own practice as artists because it is their personal experiences in the art world that can be of use in teaching the students. As a teacher it is important to constantly learn new skills and remain current with what is happening in the world and to share information on the different techniques and theories of art with their students.

This study has enabled me to become more aware of the successful organizational and personal qualities that contribute to the essence of good teaching. It has helped me to construct a solid foundation from which to build my philosophies of art education.

By observing Susan teach this course and by reflecting on myself as a learner, my notions of good teaching and my current teaching practice I feel I have gained greater competence in my teaching practice thereby bringing it to another level. However, further exploration of other teaching styles and approaches is necessary in order to uncover some definitive implications for higher level studio art education.

Suggestions for Further Research

I find it remarkable, and sometimes unnerving when people assume I want to study /teach child art when they hear I am in art education. I feel there is a need to broaden the current literature being published in art education; much writing has been done on the subjects of child art, interdisciplinary art, postmodernism and modernism but very little has addressed the education of artists and the role of artists-teachers, their work, methods and contributions to the field of art education especially at higher education levels.

During casual conversations with teachers at Concordia, I have come to understand that some studio art departments are defined as learner centered

which “attempts to meet the individual needs of a broad range of learners who have different ways of knowing, skill and background”⁴. The students start off with very broad choices and slowly, through their academic career, they narrow down their interests into more specific areas of study. It is a very learner centered philosophy. The teachers are hired for their practice and the way they create art is usually what drives their class.

Other Fine Arts departments are structured in such a way that their studio programs start off with very rigid fundamental courses in technique and theory and then allow the students to move in their own individualized and creative direction.

It is these different curriculum structures and philosophies towards the art education of artists that makes me want to continue to research different approaches to designing and teaching University studio art classes across Canada and to understand what the theories are behind how a studio art department is structured academically. Further research needs to be done on how artists are educated, where and by whom and the successes and/or inefficiencies of current studio teaching and studio classrooms in higher education.

⁴ Arizona Board of Regents. Leadership in Higher Education 2004. www.abor.asu.edu
Link: Learner Centered Education

Susan's confidence in what she is doing and her belief in the importance of art and art education has helped me to find purpose in what I am doing. Susan once said that society needs the artist and the artist needs society. Art can help us to understand society and make sense of what is happening in the world and artists' work can be a powerful tool for communicating this. Susan's goals as a teacher and artist are not only to form professional artist but to develop in all her students a committed engagement to all areas of the arts and culture. Even if only two percent of art students become professional artists, they will all hopefully develop an understanding and appreciation for the arts. These students will develop a set of standards thus becoming informed viewers and critical thinkers.

In my professional career as an art educator I hope that students will complete my course feeling as inspired as I did after completing the Materials and Methods of the Artist course. If they do then I have successfully done my job.

The goal for my research has been for personal development as a teacher but it has also been my intention to make a valid contribution to the on going dialogue within the field of art education. My aim has been to shed light on specific aspects of art education in order to be used as a guide for other studio art teachers and curriculum developers in higher education and hopefully will inspire others to continue research in the area of artist's education.

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25. Interview with Susan G. Scott. Conducted March 2004, Montreal.

APPENDICES

Course Outline

Art 420/ 3A (Materials & Methods) fri 9-1pm
2003/04
Professor: Susan G. Scott

Concordia University

Aims: To develop painting and drawing skills in traditional and contemporary mediums, and to understand the composition and application of those mediums.

Objectives: By the end of the course, the students will have a basic understanding of materials and techniques used in watercolour, encaustic, egg tempera, fresco secco, distemper, egg-oil emulsion and silverpoint techniques. As well they will understand the properties of materials other than “off the shelf” art supplies.

Content: Although this course is named materials and methods, it should be stressed that equal focus is on the creation of paintings and drawings that show the formal and aesthetic sophistication required of a 400 level student.

Aside from looking at paint materials we will also make grounds other than acrylic “gesso”. Both in class and extra class paintings will be assigned.

Each student will purchase her own set of powdered pigments (which will be available in class for approximately \$70.00 per person) from which to make the colours for encaustic, distemper, and egg tempera and watercolour.

Methodology: In class work, lectures, demonstrations, class discussions and field trips will be held. The first semester there will be 2-4 week sessions working with different mediums and grounds. First semester will cover gesso, egg tempera, fresco secco and time permitting, encaustic. This is an intense period in which students must keep up with the demands of a constant change of methods and materials.

In the second semester we will do some oil glazing. Then, students will focus on 2 methods that they were most interested in during the first semester. They will be expected to write a coherent proposal or work plan outlining the subject matter and techniques that they wish to explore and work on their own in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of those techniques in relation to their own vision.

A work/ sketchbook will be a critical element in this course. This work book will be used the way a lab book would be used in a science course: to copy down formulae and note the results of the experiments. Also drawings of ideas for projects should be included.

Evaluation: Students will be evaluated on:	Projects, participation	45%
	Class Work	50%
	Workbook/attendance	5%

A Midterm Evaluation at Christmas will account for 50% of your grade at the end of the year.

(Marks A-A+ Outstanding; A- B+ Excellent; B – C + Good; C Average; C-D Bellow Average; D-D- Barely Passing)

Attendance : will be taken at the beginning of class 3 lates = 1 absence
4 absence in a year = ½ point off final grade (exception with doctors note)

Required Texts:

1/ The Artist's Handbook by Ray Smith, Knopf Inc. (Approx. \$56.) will be available at bookstore.

Suggested texts:

1/ Formulas for Painters by Robert Massey, Gupta Publications (Approx. \$27.50) at bookstore.

2/ The Luminous Brush, by Altoon Sultan at bookstore. (\$31.95)

3/ The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques by Ralph Mayer, Viking Press

(The library offers a "buy – back" service for these books.)

Please read the following pages in Ray Smith covering glazing and grounds:
p.190, 191,192,201,202,205 and 206.

The glazing techniques covered are;

p.191 - mid tones imprimatura w/ slightly darker under painting, plus white
and then glazes.

p.192 - light colour on dark ground, then glazes.

p.193 - partially toning a ground, underpainting with mid tone plus white
and adding glazing.

p.205 – monochromatic underpainting on white ground, then adding semi
opaque flesh tone.

P. 206 – opaque underpainting in tones of grey then glazing

p. 206- underpainting in colour.

I would like you to use class time to complete 3 small paintings using any
combination of glazing techniques that you have read about.

These paintings could be abstract, and should measure about 18 inches in
one direction.

These may be done on heavy, gessoed paper.

I would like you to keep notes on which techniques and/or combinations that
you use.

Jan 30- week 1 – oil on paper

Bring image of copy

Feb 6 week 2 Start copy

Feb 13, 20, work on copy

March 5 Crit oils

The following work is due for critique:

3 small oils on gessoed paper (18 inches in any direction,) using 3 technique
listed above.

1 copy of an oil painting, or fragment of a painting- please ok your choice of image to copy with me before you begin. (2 feet in any direction, on stretched canvas)

1 painting of your choice – at least (3 feet in any direction, on stretched canvas) using a combination of techniques.

Also for the first class:

Prepare papers, with tinted imprimatura (see above),

Bring in charcoal and paper

Palette of oil paints, or acrylic, palette, brushes

Share these materials with your group

Medium mixture:

1/3 damar varnish ****this must be soaked & prepared before the first class

1/3 linseed oil

1/3 odorless turpentine (available at school)

Basic Palette

1 Cadmium Yellow

6 Titanium White

2 Cadmium Orange

7 Burnt Sienna

3 Cadmium Red light

8 Yellow Ochre

4 Alizarin Crimson

9 French Ultramarine

5 Permanent Green

10 Viridian

11 Cerulean Blue

Extra Palette

1 Naples Yellow

4 Paynes Grey

2 Windsor Violet

3 Burnt Sienna