

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Though art is not always beautiful, it is always powerful in some way. I want to help others uncover and appreciate that power. To do so requires learning to look at art, to understand the conditions of its manufacture, and to think about who would see it and how they might react to it. Observing this process unfold across millennia shows us the remarkable similarities of civilizations as well as the critical innovations, appropriations, and rejections of prior practices.

Whether in an introductory survey course designed to meet a core requirement or in an advanced art history seminar, I believe students bring a basic curiosity about art. I try to build on that fundamental interest to get students to think more deeply and critically about art and its place in society. I use a wide range of tools to stimulate both content-knowledge and skills. In art history, content knowledge includes not only names, dates, and media, but also the contextual details that explain the social currents that affect the artists' decisions. This information can be very dry, but much of it also lends itself to gamification, so mastering the material can be much more engaging through, for example, an online time trial to match the image to the artist.

Art history also provides ample opportunities for skill development in analysis, critical reading, and writing. Since I am passionate about well-crafted essays, I typically use iterative writing assignments that help students dissect a problem and tackle it one piece at a time, incorporating class reading as well as independent research when appropriate. With the iterative approach, students receive feedback early and often, producing a much stronger final result. For example, a visual analysis assignment might consist of four parts: first, a short paragraph describing the subject matter; next, building on the first and incorporating feedback, another

paragraph on composition; third, as confidence builds, a couple of pages on light, color, line, figure style, etc; and, finally, a five-page essay adding context to the formal analysis.

In the classroom, I try to focus less on imparting material that can be gleaned from reading assignments and spend the majority of the time mining the “so what.” I encourage conversation and divergent opinions to stimulate critical thinking and robust questioning. I will often use art-historical methodological debates to structure the conversation, or build it around social arguments relevant to the time period, like considering a painting from the point of view of *both* the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation.

No matter the size of the class, students are individuals with unique interests, skills, and learning and thinking styles. I try to find ways to appeal to all of their diversity to help engage them and make the material stick. Art history lends itself to interdisciplinary approaches, so if I have a class with a lot of science or math majors, we might spend extra time on mathematical perspective or the complexities of paint chemistry. Alternatively, my assignments may offer a choice of questions all related to the material but designed to provoke different thinking styles. I also try to include multi-sensory experiences, letting students feel the weight of an engraving plate, smell the clay that might be used for a bronze cast, or play with oils to understand how revolutionary the invention was. Art should involve the whole body and the whole person.

My teaching aims to take art beyond the visual, to engage all the senses and add dimension by layering in social, political, and cultural context as well as interdisciplinary perspectives.