

## Philosophy of Teaching

"Teaching is a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom."

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*

I come from a family of teachers and educators. The critical and rigorous pursuit of knowledge has been a central part of my life experience from the very beginning. I thoroughly enjoy teaching and studying art as a critical, transformative, and visionary practice. My understanding of the depth and importance of such criticality, transformation, and vision is embedded in my own sense of history and genealogy. Because of this, I put a lot of conceptual pressure on my students. I ask them to consider themselves and their current place in the world, and relate this to the emergence of their artistic practice. This means that as a teacher it is my duty to emphasize a multi cultural approach and create a studio and classroom environment that is open and experimental. It also means that I stress the links between diverse fields and methods of inquiry, and that I value engaged scholarship and experiential learning as central components of the education process.

In *Why Art Cannot Be Taught*, James Elkins argues that there are types of art, which cannot be made in a semester. Elkins' book fascinates me, and like many of my colleagues, I agree and disagree with many of his arguments. But it is his point about work that transcends our academic boundaries that I find particularly interesting, especially considering the emergence and development of the Digital/New Media canon in Studio Art. Digital Media is often a double-edged sword for many students. On one hand it is liberating and empowering, there are so many software choices and new and interesting tools that can help a young artist enact their imagination and quickly build work that is exciting and innovative. Yet, it is these same principles that often stifle students' creativity. How do we keep up with hardware, software and technology when it moves so fast? How is it possible to develop all of these skills without just spending your time doing tutorials? And perhaps most important, how do we make work that lasts, that transcends our brief techno moments and holds its power in a place other than the technology itself?

These are tough questions that there are no simple answers for, but a new generation of students and professors of Digital/New Media Studio Art are working hard at answering them. From a teacher's point of view I insist that my students begin the difficult process of building what I call a Digital Studio Practice. I want students to learn the basic skills that will allow them to acquire more skills, independently and in a sovereign way. One of these skills is fearlessness—don't ever be afraid of the tools in your studio, even if the tools that a digital artist faces daily might be some of the most daunting that artists have seen in a thousand years. Don't ever be afraid and don't ever give up. Another one of these skills is how to be part of a successful collaboration or collective. Let's face it—the first thing you see when you open up Photoshop is all the names of the people who worked hard to make it a benchmark application in Digital Media. Working in a collaborative way is a foundational skill in Digital

Media, that's why the New Museum named their site for Digital/New Media *Rhizome*—based on Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. A collaboration can take Digital Artists to places and levels in their work that they could never do alone, and collaborations can often do this quickly—which is very important in the world of Digital Art. For example, students in my Advanced Digital Media course at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs built a text-messaging project together from start to finish in eight weeks.

These principles that make a Digital Studio Practice are not solely my ideas—although I have taken ownership of them and enacted them in my pedagogical approach—they come from professors that I have had and not had. These principles are a part of a genealogy of art faculty who have made creative survival for young artists one of their career goals. These basic skills speak through me, and I see myself as part of a long line of art educators working towards the life long success of young artists. Last year the New Media Caucus of the College Art Association published their recommended guidelines on professional studio practice for Digital/New Media faculty. It's a comprehensive and well-researched document that no doubt will empower a new generation of Digital/New Media faculty to grow and survive professionally in an academic environment that often does not understand their work and their goals. Sadly, we have not yet arrived at a point where these same concepts and approaches to Digital/New Media that are positively affecting faculty are made available to students. Digital/New Media in Studio Art is a new and exciting field. As such it is experiencing growing pains. My teaching philosophy insists that students insert themselves into the emerging canon of Digital/New Media in a fearless way, taking all the possibilities and all the challenges as an opportunity to build a critical, transformative, and visionary art practice that can impact the world and touch the lives of others.