Environmental Extractions: Art, Place, and Identity

Sophomore Seminar Course Description

How do environments influence art, and how can we extract imagery, sound and ideas from these places to create work and develop our artistic voices? Through location exploration, image/sound/object collection, experimentation, research and writing we can discover connections between ourselves, our environment, and the artmaking that will shape our creative practices.

What are the concerns that drive one’s creative practice? How does one set the terms for its future development? Sophomore Seminar offers interdisciplinary strategies for the evaluation and communication of students’ individual practice as artists, designers, and/or scholars. Through essential readings, studio projects, and writing, students will generate narratives about how and why they make art. Works by video artists, visual artists, and filmmakers are also viewed and discussed.

Instructor Information

Mikey Peterson, Lecturer

Course Texts

Catching The Big Fish, David Lynch
The Painter of Modern Life, Charles Baudelaire
seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees, Robert Irwin / Larwence Weshler

Major Assignments and Activities

Image/Sound/Object Hunt: Place Exploration, Content Extraction, and Experimentation

Find a neighborhood in the city (one that you do not live in and not the Loop), explore this environment and collect ten images/sounds/objects from this place. You may use the method of your choosing to collect these images (video, photo, drawing, object excavation, sound recording). For each image/sound/object write a short statement stating why you collected it and write a sentence/phrase describing the image/sound/object using metaphor. You will present and display these images/sounds/objects together with your statements in class. Think about the order of these findings. How are they reacting to each other? Are new ideas and concepts developing? Is there a common aesthetic? What do these selections tell us about you and the place?

Artistic Process Presentation: The Spark, The Path, The Art

Present a finished artwork that you created from conception to completion. What was the initial spark? Was it an image, an idea, a concept, a memory, a word? Tell us how this spark evolved into the artwork that you’re presenting. Fully detail your thought process, research, artmaking process, failures and successes. Create a report through writing and visuals that you’ll present to the class.
Artist/Project Statement: Discovering Your Intent Through Research, Brainstorming and Writing

Develop an artist/project statement for your art piece that balances your process and concepts. Be careful not to give away too much information to the reader/viewer, as their personal interpretations are as important as the information that you reveal in your statement.

1. Simplify what you see/hear through writing. Through a formal lens, describe in the simplest terms what we are looking at and hearing. Next, through a poetic lens, describe what we are seeing and hearing. This can be in any format that you’d like (paragraphs, lists, flow-charts)

2. Look for commonalities with the words that you wrote. List these words and create a flowchart if this helps. What are the connections? Are there overarching themes and concepts?

3. How did you make this artwork? List the steps of your process from the idea to the final piece. This includes successes and failures.

4. Using steps 1-3 as a guide, write your artist/project statement. What is your work telling us? How did you make the work? Don’t give too much away - give room for the viewer/reader to interpret your work. Stay away from first-person - don’t use “I.” Let the art speak, not the artist. Be concise.