

## **Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

Melissa Cowper-Smith

My passion for making art fuels my teaching. Enthusiasm is contagious and teachers who love their subject inspire students to learn. Teaching offers me the opportunity to step out of my studio and into dialogue with aspiring young artists. My art-work represents the construction of personal identities through the depiction of private domestic interiors. I have an interest in understanding identity and my teaching enables me to inquire about diverse individuals. I share my knowledge, skills and experiences both through my art-making and through my teaching. I seek to inspire others, whether my audience is the art-world or a class of students, just as my own teachers and the work of other artists have inspired me.

I teach my students that art making is a serious, complex and ancient discipline. I demonstrate connections between students' art-making and the fields of art history and art theory. Students need positive re-enforcement and the freedom to play with materials and ideas without fear of failure. In the initial years of art exploration, it is best for students to experiment with various materials to find the materials with which they are most confident. Throughout this process, I give them tools to establish and maintain a healthy studio practice and teach them to self-inspire. It is my goal that each student develops a diverse set of skills, practices and interests that will lead to a unique approach and style of art-making.

I design flexible assignment and express an open attitude, allowing the student to inform the lesson and actively direct his or her own learning. Workshops explore techniques and tools that are related to what the student is exploring conceptually. I allow for departure from intended or imagined outcomes and teach the student to explore their ideas independent from my expectations. The works created by the class reflect the uniqueness of the individual students rather than the initial assignment.

In critiques, students should feel safe to express themselves without excessive criticism from either me or the other students. This is especially important in art classes where students will often share personal subject matter. I take the role of a leader and referee. I am responsible for enabling continuous conversations where students seek to involve themselves and others in the conversation, rather than making remarks directed towards quieting or defeating others. Helpful, progressive, and fertile debate can only occur when mutual respect is established within the class. I lead by example: listening and responding to each student with respect and raising questions to further the scope of the debate.

Because art participates in a dialogue with our culture, I offer students a variety of influences and learning resources. Outside of the studio, my students write research papers, participate in critiques, debates and dialogues (written, oral, both peer to peer and peer to teacher), and attend lectures and presentations. They read articles, journals, theory and literary pieces, visit museums, galleries and professional artists' studios. I help to filter these resources and give them opportunities to discover and focus their attention on the most meaningful and significant connections between the art world and their own work. I want my students to realize that art-making functions in the larger arena than their school, their families and their communities. I want them gain a global awareness. Finally, I help my students to grasp future possibilities and to apply what they have learned to opportunities in the art world.