

Dear Applicants,

I have not followed a single path in my ongoing education. I have worked across media as a writer, artist, educator, and activist. Throughout my career I have maintained an abiding devotion to art, both as a maker and a viewer.

For me, art is the realm of the impossible made tangible. Its role is to formulate and reformulate descriptions of objects and encounters in the world, a world that we will never fully grasp. For me, art is mysterious and spellbinding. I may not understand what stands in front of me, but I can experience it—straining the limits of my senses to imagine a completely new order of things. The strange, peculiar, queer, and baffling features of art demand my life's dedication.

I am inspired to contemplate the conditions for imagining this new order of things. How do we focus on what is important? What attracts us to particular formations? How can we reflect upon the ways we observe phenomena? Do our reflections shape our decisions?

This course is structured around three fundamental categories—Attention, Sensation, and Perception—allowing us to consider some of our most urgent issues.

Attention is one of the single most important concerns of the contemporary artist. Studies and anecdotal evidence show that the average viewer—or reader—pays little attention to works that demand contemplation. The job of the artist is to fascinate. We compete with the considerable surrounding noise of modern life, which now presumes a constant connectedness to a virtual world through digital communication. Our ability to capture the attention of a viewer depends on the way we mobilize their senses in the construction of our objects. Disassembling the attention of the viewer is also an important historical feature of modern art. The tension between fascination and repulsion is a significant feature of art that we will examine.

All is sensation. Our thoughts, moods, and actions originate in our faculties of sense. Memory is derived from sensations, stirred by associations, or willed by the commands of consciousness. We can choose to recall facts like "which artist painted this canvas in what year"? Or we are compelled beyond our will to recall moments from our life through smell or touch. These examples illustrate the difference between voluntary memory and involuntary memory. Both determine the crafts of our own making and the perceptions of works we create.

Theories of perception have a long history. They involve ideas concerning the relations between subjects and objects. Some theories attempt to nullify the distinction between a viewing subject and the object of its perception. Each emerges at the point of contact. Other theories attempt to remove the ground entirely from the field of perception by situating all encounters in a constantly cosmos—like a shifting pool of water swirling in a rainstorm altered drop by drop.

This course considers all three notions of Attention, Sensation, and Perception to place emphasis on Poetics. The common definition of Poetics limits the plural noun to poetry, but the methods of writing poetry can be applied to any discipline. Just as drawing can be a form of thinking, writing is a method that transcends communication. We write the world we inhabit. The way we author our world is a matter of Poetics.

I invite you to participate in an exciting inquiry into the mystery of making art. The challenge for every artist is to understand how we can make art that resonates with our own inner necessity to create. We are and we are not aware of the many forces shaping our efforts to embody our desires in forms. The features of our work that entice spectators to embrace them—as objects worthy of attention—often remain obscure.

I hope you will join us in a course to make discoveries about our art and ourselves together. We will face tough questions and research alternative histories of thought. We will foster an atmosphere of fearless experimentation grounded in a shared commitment to constructive, generative methods and principles. Art is a special laboratory for fabulous conjecture about the very real problems of governance that shape our daily lives.

I take this all very seriously. I laugh a lot, and sometimes art makes me cry. I've devoted my life to it. And I approach my role as an educator with all the energy I expend in the labor of my art.

Sincerely,

Gregg Bordowitz