

## Steve Breerwood : Teaching Philosophy

Visual art is a form of communication. The artist presents a question, statement, or gesture and the viewer replies with some kind of cognitive or emotional response. If the art was successful, the viewer will take away a new experience from it. To teach a student to master this kind of visual language, a teacher must first endow students with the foundations of visual speech and the ability to see objectively.

Objectivity of the eye is the single most important skill an art student can learn. It is a skill learned in Drawing, but it is applied to any medium or style. If you can deconstruct a three dimensional object, forgetting any symbolic associations your mind carries for it, then you can deconstruct your own work visually. With an objective eye, the student can learn how to ignore his or her own preconceived notions and see the art work more the way a viewer would. Familiarity and sentiment are blinders that can limit an artist's vision.

Formalism is about more than compositional design. It is a language that delivers meaning through a literal connection to the eye. If you want the viewer to feel overwhelmed, overwhelm the viewer's eye. If you want the viewer to feel at ease, a more fluid design composed of curvilinear gestures might be a better approach. It is not necessarily *what* you choose to paint or draw that is important, but rather *how* you paint or draw it. However, before the student can intuitively respond to his or her own work, a thorough understanding of the materials and techniques of the medium is necessary.

My approach towards technique is to expose my students to the widest and most comprehensive range of processes possible. In Painting I, for example, we explore three fundamentally different ways to mix color: direct mixing, indirect mixing, and optical mixing. Demonstrating each technique introduced in the class is necessary to help the student's keep from getting lost. The goal of this comprehensive approach is two fold. First, students are empowered to choose the techniques that they have most success with. Secondly, this lays the foundation for a discussion on expressing ideas through the literal material qualities of the medium.

Concept is a subject I first introduce to my students through autobiography with assignments such as a nonfigurative self portrait and the "In Your Element" self portrait. Ultimately, I try to exercise my students' imagination in three different dimensions of meaning: descriptive language, formal language, and literal language. The critical thinking skills essential to developing concepts can not be taught through lecturing, but by discussing a student's ideas one-on-one, by encouraging discussion between the student and his or her peers, and by exposing the student to ideas in the contemporary dialog of the industry.