

Painting in the Age of Internet Memes



COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an intermediate study at the intersection of contemporary painting, internet memes, and other popular media. This course will explore the historiography of Millennial and Gen Z artists—such as Laura Owens, Sasha Gordon, Adam Alessi, Calvin Marcus, and Devan Shimoyama—, early 2000's geopolitical issues, and the immensely effective power of humor in memes. Students will design oil paintings on digital applications, such as MS paint and Paint 3D, and grapple with a wide array of textures, techniques, and forms of *image making* (not meaning in images)—including color fields, the figure, and abstraction. Prerequisite(s): any 1 beginning painting course and any 1 beginning drawing course.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course students will:

- Understand the relationship between meme culture and contemporary themes in art
- Incorporate traditional paintings techniques (alla prima, sfumato, and glazing) with contemporary imagery
- Utilize digital paint softwares in the creation and design process
- develop a powerful visual language as a narrative device

MATERIAL LIST:

- Oil Paint: blick 200ml student grade: burnt sienna, cadmium red, alizarin crimson, yellow ochre, cadmium yellow medium, ultramarine blue, phthalo blue, titanium white (2)
- Brushes: flat wash brushes: (2) ¼", (2) ½", (2) 1", (2) 2"
- Palette knife
- Glass palette (picture frame 11 x 14" or 16 x 20") **palette paper is not allowed in class**
- 8 stretched canvases (varying sizes TBD in class)
- 11x14" 10 sheets of canvas paper
- Silicoil
- Odorless mineral spirits (½ gal)
- paint scraper

Reading List:

Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions, Abbott (free PDF)

The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus (free PDF)

The Uncanny, Freud (free PDF)

Watch List (links in Canvas):

Courage the Cowardly Dog S1E7a: King Ramses Curse

Courage the Cowardly Dog S2E12The House of Discontent

[Every Spongebob Gross-Up](#) YT

Bear in the Big Blue House (any 1 episode)

We Gotta Get Spongebob Back YT

Jimmy Neutron Happy Family Happy Hour YT

JOJ YTP

Billy Mays (suite of YouTube poops)

Slap Chop YTP

Tribute to Django Reinhardt 100th Anniversary

All Star But They Don't Stop Coming YTP

All I want for Christmas is to Hit Those Notes YTP

Shrek is love Shrek is life (parts 1,2,3) YT

Dog of Wisdom YT

Pamtri (YouTuber, suite of videos)



Some Artists to ponder:

Sasha Gordon

Devan Shimoyama

Adam Alessi

Calvin Marcus

Laura Owens

Jake Troyli

Armanoro Niles

Robin F. Williams

Kehinde Wiley



SCHEDULE (depending on unavoidable circumstances, such as school closures due to weather, the schedule on the syllabus can be flexible)

Week #1 INTRODUCTION

Day 1- Syllabus Overview

Lecture: What is Meme

Watch: *Courage the Cowardly Dog* S1E7a: King Ramses Curse

Homework: Read *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (**chapters:** 1, 2, 3, 13 - 22)

Watch *Courage the Cowardly Dog* S2E12 The House of Discontent

Day 2- Lecture: 3D Paint and Digital Softwares

Studio exercise: 3D Paint crash course

Homework: Acquire Materials on Material list and READ *Flatland*, ect.

Homework: create 5 Paint 3D files using the 3D object database (see canvas assignment)

Week #2 Rendering

Day 1- Lecture: Flatland, Power, and Rendering

work day: Rendering

Day 2- work day: Rendering

Week #3 Rendering

Day 1- work day: Rendering

Homework: Read *The Uncanny*, Freud (**pages** 1 - 21)

Memes: stonks, enslaved water

Watch: *We Gotta Get Spongebob Back*

Day 2- work day: Rendering

Homework: Create 5 digital sketches for THE UNCANNY

Week #4 The Uncanny / Replacement / The Generic

Day 1- Lecture: The Uncanny and Liminal Spaces

work day: Fake Things That Seem Real

Day 2- work day: Fake Things That Seem Real

Week #5 The Uncanny / Replacement / The Generic

Day 1- work day: Fake Things That Seem Real

Homework: read *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus

Day 2- work day: Fake Things That Seem Real

Week #6 The Absurd

Day 1- Critique

Day 2- Studio Exercise: Technique Painting

Lecture: Absurdism

Homework: 5 3D Paint Sketches

Week #7 The Absurd

Day 1- work day: Real Things that Should be Fake

Day 2- work day: Real Things that Should be Fake

Week #8 The Absurd

Day 1- work day: Real Things that Should be Fake

Day 2- work day: Real Things that Should be Fake

Lecture: Technique Painting

Homework: 5, 3D Paint Sketches (technique painting)

Week #9 Technique Painting #2

Day 1- work day

Day 2- work day

Week #10 Technique Painting #2

Day 1- Lecture: Creepy Portraits

work day

Homework: using photography, create several compositions for a narrative self portrait

Day 2- work day

Week #11 Creepy Portrait

Day 1- work day

Day 2- work day

Introduce Final Project

Week #12 Creepy Portrait

Day 1- work day

Day 2- work day

Week #13 Final Project

Day 1- work day

Day 2- work day

Week #14 Final Project

Day 1- work day

Day 2- work day

Week #15 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Day 1 - work day

Day 2 - No class (Holiday)

Week #16 TEST FREE WEEK- FINAL CRITIQUE

Day 1 - Final Critique Group A

Day 2 - Final Critique Group B

Project 1: Rendering: *Flatland*

Consider this section from *Flatland* whereas our Square gains the ability to see in 3 dimensions for the first time:

Awestruck at the sight of the mysteries of the earth, thus unveiled before my unworthy eye, I said to my companion, ``Behold, I am become as a God. For the wise men in our country say that to see all things, or as they express it, omnividence, is the attribute of God alone." There was something of scorn in the voice of my Teacher as he made answer: ``Is it so indeed? Then the very pick-pockets and cut-throats of my country are to be worshiped by your wise men as being Gods; for there is not one of them that does not see as much as you see now. But trust me, your wise men are wrong."

Imagine how easy it would be for you to pay your rent if you could instantaneously travel anywhere in the universe with the same ease as crossing the street...you could plunder every bank vault that has ever existed or you could live in empty penthouses for free—vanishing whenever you heard the owner approach the front door. Now imagine if “pick-pockets” and “cut-throats” had access to an extra dimension—a disembodied hand manifesting in your pocket, grabbing your wallet, and vanishing within seconds: the common criminal does become a *de facto* omnipotent deity to anyone without that extra dimension.

The monsters in *Courage the Cowardly Dog* are 3D computer renderings compared to the flat, 2D depictions of everything else in the show, implying they have such otherworldly abilities due to their extra, +1 dimension. Relying on our suspension of disbelief, this extra dimension implies godliness and ultimate power: the conscious access to an extra dimension. This form of comparison is common in many cartoons via the gross-up and is the conceptual back-bone of increasingly verbose memes.

You will create a painting featuring such a moment: to show some *terrible* omnipotent force by means of rendering differences. One subject will be highly rendered/volumetric and the rest of your painting will be flat, graphic, and 2D.

Courage the Cowardly Dog,
King Ramsey's Curse



Spongebob Squarepants
Gross-Up of
the Strangler



Increasingly Verbose Memes

You like jazz?



Do you particularly enjoy jazz music?



I would like to inquire about your opinion regarding the combination of improvisation, swing notes, and ragtime rhythms in musical form.



In regards to your personal opinion on topics relating to certain matters, do the musical patterns which feature such known manners as swing notes, improvisation, call and response vocals, and other such similar techniques of musical art under the influence of previously commonly used musical patterns such as blues, folk, and tribal African and European musical combinations, create a joyful emotion that you experience as you listen to this particular style of musical work?



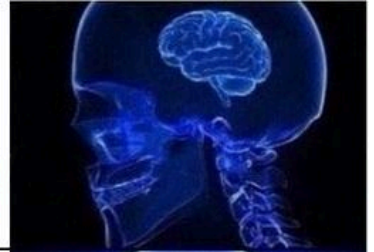
**Houston,
we have
a problem**

**A city in
Texas, we possess
a predicament**

**One of the largest
cities in the state of
Texas, I am afraid to say
this, but we have found
ourselves in quite a quandary**

**A very large
city in the U.S. state
of Texas, we are
currently in possession
of a serious situation**

imgflip.com



Rendering: *Flatland* Project Checklist

This project explores the different pictorial language. Projects will contain one 3D rendered living thing existing inside of a flat, 2D world.

Checklist:

- 18 x 24 canvas
- Must use all of the following pictorial languages
 - 3D rendering
 - Flat color fields / flat imagery
 - Outlines
- Must contain a **Minimum** of 2 subjects with different pictorial languages (check 2)
 - 1 subject 1 living thing: person, personified object, animal, monster, ect.
 - Must be 3D rendered
 - 1 object (may living or nonliving)
 - Must be rendered in 2D
 - Background must be in 2D also
- You must use a **MINIMUM** of 3 references in your work not discussed in class (check both categories) **Do not explicitly copy from your references, just use them to get ideas.**
 - Artists / artworks
 - Memes / Cartoon moments

Materials to be Turned in

1. The Painting

- a. Submit image online in assignments on canvas
- b. Physically bring it to class for Critique

2. Citation (3 influences)

- a. comment your three references when you turn in your assignment on canvas.
You can include links, ect.
- b. Be prepared to casually talk about references during your critique
- c. Reference 1 _____
- d. Reference 2 _____
- e. Reference 3 _____

3. Sketches

- a. 5 Digital Sketches
 - i. Upload images in the discussion board in canvas

***references are moments of inspiration, not things you copy and put in your painting.**

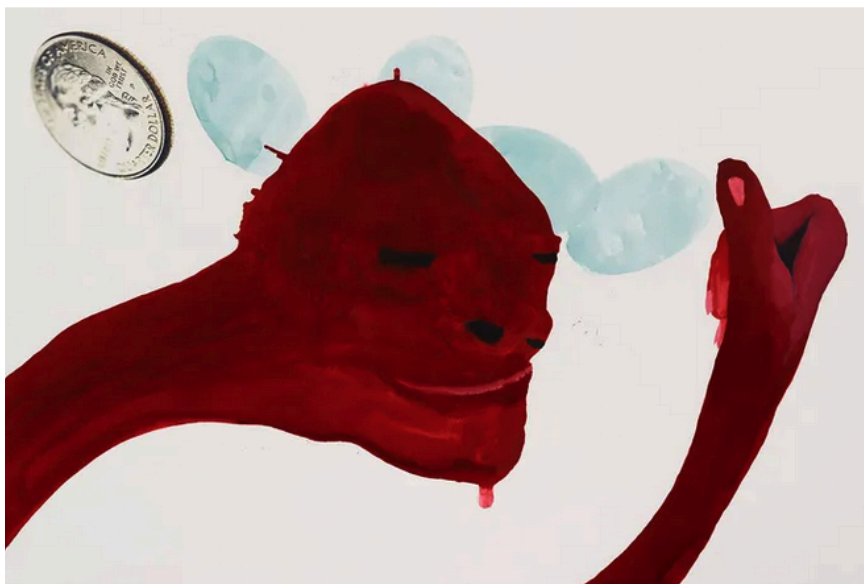
Project 2: The Absurd: Real Things that Should be Fake

The absurd is described by Albert Camus in his famous work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, as the difference between the expected and reality.

$$\text{Magnitude of Absurdity} = \frac{\text{Probability of Expectation}}{\text{Probability of Reality}}$$

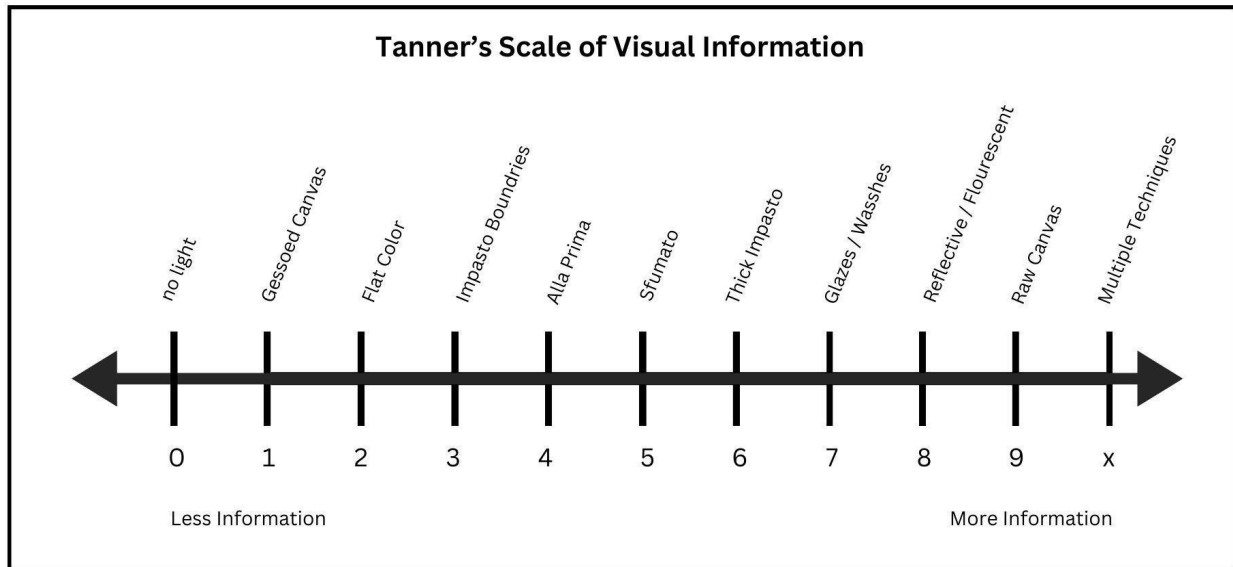
This assignment explores the notion that current, contemporary art is shaped by societal contradictions, such as repeated and frequent economic crises whose underlying problems are never resolved despite solutions being obvious, and manifests through escapist absurdism as a coping mechanism. Contemporary artists are influenced by the media they consume, including childhood cartoons and, of course, internet memes. These memes utilize Camus' theory of expectation over reality to create absolutely striking images that may or may not convey anything (current memes and Gen Z tik toks increasingly and intentionally do not have an intended meaning). This absurdity is inherently imbued in art and society by society itself.

Through the use of varying physical surfaces and “pictorial” imagery—imagery that is about visual information and not what it symbolically conveys—, this assignment investigates both the importance and unimportance of meaning in the age of the internet meme; the age of endless advertisements; the age of endless, commodified “information.”



Calvin Marcus, *No Need Here*, 80 x 100 inches, Oil and Screen Printing on Canvas, 2019 (Whitney Biennial)

Visual information relates to density of visual “information,” such as the textual and reflective differences of thick, juicy paint compared to a dry, lean (paint and mineral spirits), thin layer of paint. Note the scale for possible combinations of techniques.



The Absurd Project Checklist

This project explores the technical aspects of painting by utilizing 3 techniques. Projects will contain one realistic element, one flat or abstracted element, one living element, and one non living element.

Checklist:

- 18 x 24 canvas
- Must use a **MINIMUM** of 3 different techniques (check 3)
 - Alla Prima
 - Sfumato
 - Glazing
 - Raw Canvas
 - Gessoed Canvas
 - Flat Color
 - Scraping
 - Impasto
- Must contain an absurd composition (check 2)
 - An element of realism (well rendered, volumetric subject with correct sighting and proportions)
 - **AND** an element of design / invention
 - Flat color field
 - Design / pattern or
 - Line drawing
 - Abstraction
- Must contain a **Minimum** of 2 subjects (check 2)
 - 1 subject 1 living thing: person, personified object, animal, monster, ect.
 - 1 object (may living or nonliving)
 - Example: man flipping a coin
 - Cat existing in a liminal space with a ball of yarn
 - Cat being acted upon by the subject cat (show power imbalance)
 - Extra subject or object
- You must use a **MINIMUM** of 3 references in your work (check 2)
 - Artists / artworks
 - Memes / Cartoon moments

Materials to be Turned in

1. The Painting

- a. Submit image online in assignments on canvas
- b. Physically bring it to class for Critique

2. Citation (3 influences)

- a. comment your three references when you turn in your assignment on canvas.
You can include links
- b. Be prepared to talk about references during your critique
- c. Reference 1 _____
- d. Reference 2 _____
- e. Reference 3 _____

3. Sketches

- a. 5 Digital Sketches
 - i. Upload images in the discussion board in canvas

***references are moments of inspiration, not things you copy and put in your painting.**

Additional Policies

GROUP CRITIQUES POLICY

Critiques are subjective but not personal. We will discuss and give feedback about all classwork we've done through group and individual critiques. Everyone is to participate and aim for a balance between being supportive and honest with one another. Critique etiquette will be reviewed prior to critiques.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

It is the responsibility of every student to be in class on time every day, ready to work. Students who skip the class are responsible for completing any work missed during their absence and for obtaining pertinent notes and materials.

1. A maximum of 3 excused or unexcused absences will be allowed without consequence. More than 3 absences will result in the lowering of the final grade by one letter grade per additional absence. (i.e. from A- to B+ for 4 absences, from A- to B for 5, etc)
2. 6 or more absences equal automatic failure
3. 3 tardies equal one absence
4. Critiques are important and participation is graded. It is not recommended to use one of your three absences on a critique day.
5. If you know that you will be absent on a given date you should notify the professor ahead of time.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Studio assignments will be evaluated on multiple levels including 1) Evidence of effort; 2) Technical skill; 3) Presentation and craftsmanship 4) participation and attendance in class

Final Grade = 100%

Assignments = 50%

Homework = 20%

Attendance = 20%

Participation = 10%

GRADING SCALE

A+: 100 – 96.5 points A: 96.4 – 92.5 A-: 92.4 – 89.5

You have to reserve for outstanding bodies of work and to complete all assignments beyond expectations. You should show a very professional manner in class discussions, presentations, and critiques. No more than 3 absences and 3 tardies.

B+: 89.4 – 86.5 points B: 86.4 – 82.5 B-: 82.4 – 79.5

You should thoughtfully and carefully complete all projects and assignments. You have to show significant improvements in your techniques and in understanding concepts.

C+: 79.4 – 76.5 points C: 76.4 – 72.5 C-: 72.4 – 69.5

You should complete all projects and assignments.

D+: 69.4– 66.5 points D: 66.4– 62.5 D-: 62.4 –59.5

Poor works and attitude, without much improvement by the time the course ends

F: 6 absences or more, Academic Dishonesty.

I: incomplete

For details of the policy, go to <http://www.ugs.usf.edu/catalogs/9900/gradetc.htm>

[Links to an external site.](#)

ASSIGNMENTS POLICY

If you miss class, you are responsible for getting the assignment from your classmates. You spend roughly 6 hours per week outside of class time on assignments for this course. If you fail to do the assignment, it will result in a lower grade and your possible failure of the class. If you are absent on a day when an assignment is due, the assignment must be in the classroom by your classmates or submitted online before the due date. Exceptions include excused absences and pre-approvals.

Late homework submissions receive a one letter grade demotion. Late homework submissions are not accepted one week beyond the due date without pre-approval.