

Expanding the Critique: A Collaboration



Coming from a liberal arts institution, studio arts faculty often engage in collaboration with other disciplines, on a personal or instructional basis. For me, it may include trekking over to the science building, snooping around, looking at all the cool stuff, you know, frieze dried cats, tiny guillotines used to end the lives of the lab mice, or even the teeny tiny instrument used to encourage the male frog to do his job. Yes, things like this happen every day in the science labs. And, yes, I do love animals.



Lily and Bean Garmon

When asked by “suspicious doctors” my intentions, I reply, “I’m looking for metaphor!” For the student, his/her research may involve working with me on the sculptural end of a work in progress and a geologist for the sedimentary formation of a particular mineral, or it may be collaborating with a creative writing project, the form and structure of a poem, all wonderful opportunities indeed.

However, considering the fruitful exchange of knowledge I have described, this isn’t always the case within our own department. Studio faculty (at least at my institution) are too stretched, maybe too insular, and sometimes too uninterested in what each other are doing. Having recently designed a more “open” studio art major, many students matriculate through discipline specific areas and oftentimes may not study with all studio faculty. For example, students may go up to painting, lovingly referred to as “heaven”, and become puti (a tag given by fellow students) or go “down” to sculpture, (you can imagine it’s endearing reference) and become the sinners. While I admire the ownership and pride these students take on, I must recognize that this reveals a potential problem for the program and our students.



After much discussion and brainstorming, the studio art faculty are exploring new ways of teaching and collaborating. This coming mid-term, we will be cancelling our upper-level studio art courses (for faculty only) and will visit the studios as a group and engage in discussion about the work coming out of each studio. All majors are encouraged to attend and our hope is to expose our students to a broader reading of work and process. We are a small enough unit that this seems to be a feasible endeavor...we'll see.

Things we have had to consider:

Scheduling upper-level art courses requires much more attention to make this work.

All faculty need to buy in.

All agree this venue is more discussion-based and less formal analysis.

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