Art writing isn't only a forum for one's ideas, it's also a process for discovering them.

Mel Bochner
ART 906 – Workshop: Writing in/as/for the Arts

Semester: Fall 2018
Dates: 09/04-12/21
Days: Tuesday
Hours: 14:00-16:10
Venue: Mit 363
Lecturer: Nicole Ridgway
Contact: ridgwayn@uwm.edu
Office Hours: By appointment.

Workshop Description and Learning Objectives:

In this workshop participants will be introduced to writing as a key component of visual arts practice. This workshop is premised on the understanding that writing is a mode of thinking, and that writing is fundamental to creativity, as well as that it is an essential part of the material, conceptual and professional practice of artists today. Writing enables us to deepen our perceptual acuity; to engage with and internalize ideas; to immerse ourselves in process; to facilitate problem solving; it helps engender critical reflection and an awareness of audience; it attunes us to context, style and address; and, it hones our skills of selection, ordering and structuring.

This workshop will introduce participants to a number of games, exercises and activities geared to getting words on paper and to becoming more comfortable with textual expression; to using writing to access creativity and deepen the discipline of attentiveness; to developing descriptive writing skills; to refining drafts; to becoming better readers of our own and other’s work; to expanding our vocabulary for critique; to incorporating feedback and critically reflecting on process and product; and, to broadly exploring writing as part of visual arts practice.

The workshop will focus on writing as a process; on creating surprises and taking risks; on increasing range and flexibility; on focusing our seeing and engaging sense, memory, and research to generate new possibilities; and to crafting, refining and writing for specific audiences. While the exercises and forms that we will explore will be focused on creative and professional practice, the skills acquired should provide a good foundation for other writing, such as, critical and scholarly writing.

Each week we will write together as a group, we will share writing, reading and research done at home, and we will respond to and comment on short assignments posted on D2L. Participation and peer review both in-class and online are a key component of the class. In addition to the writing we share, participants are encouraged to write everyday and these writings, as well as those done in or for class, will form the basis of the “portfolio” to be submitted later in the semester with a “metatext.” This text, that stands back from the writing you have done and reflects on the pieces you have chosen to submit, will address the process of your writing over the semester: what you have learnt, what blocks you have encountered, what experiments you have undertaken, what risks you have taken, and where you think you need/want to explore further.

Each participant will also undertake a “final project.” While the exercises and assignments for the portfolio are directed or guided writings, the final project will be a self-directed work-in-progress in any genre, format or medium that includes writing, words or text. This may be a “think piece” towards a creative or scholarly project, or an artist book, a video poem, a graphic novel, an installation with a statement, or a substantial grant proposal, for example. These will be discussed in both proposal and draft form prior to submission. Along with the final project, all participants will submit a letter in which they evaluate their final project and provide a global assessment of their work through this workshop.

In order to promote risk-taking and experimentation, the grading structure for this class attempts to recognize that we all start the course and finish at different places, while ensuring that the key learning outcomes are met as well. The details for weekly assignments, the portfolio, and final project will be discussed in class and will be posted online, and examples will be provided where relevant.

In a fairly simple art, such as making pie crust, there are certain teachable “secrets” of method that lead almost infallibly to good results; but in any complex art, such as housekeeping, piano-playing, clothes-making, or story-writing, there are so many techniques, skills, choices of method, so many variables, so many “secrets,” some teachable and some not, that you can learn them only by methodical, repeated, long-continued practice — in other words, by work. Ursula Le Guin

Catalogue Description:

906 Graduate Workshop: (Subtitled). 3 cr. G.
A special topic workshop for graduate students including reading, research, writing and studio practice. Retakable w/ chg in topic to 9 cr max. Prereq: grad st.
Workload Statement:

This class meets once a week for 175 minutes for a total of 43.75 hours of required lecture time. You should expect to take at least 30 hours over the course of the semester reading the required texts and your peers submissions. There are weekly assignments which you should expect to require at least 35 hours over the semester, and two large assignments that you should expect to require between 15-20 hours each. All told, this class is likely to take 143.5 hours of your time.

Attendance:

All students are expected to come to class on time and having done their assignments/readings, and they are expected to participate both in-class and in the online discussion threads. If for any reason you are not able to attend class, please be sure to contact me. If you will be missing more than two classes it is vital that you contact the department and myself in a timely manner.

Grading:

Graduate students are required to earn a grade of B or higher for any graduate level course to count towards their MA or MFA. Student’s grades will be based on the completion of assignments; their meeting of the expectations laid out for class assignments and peer review, as well as the quality of the work submitted.

Grading Scale:

The alpha-numerical scale I am working with is as follows:

A (95-100); A- (90-94); B+ (85-89); B (80-84); B- (75-79); C+ (70-74); C (65-79); C- (60-64); D+ (55-59); D (50-54); D- (45-49); F (0-44).

Mark Breakdown:

Participation and Short Assignments (through October 16) 15%
Participation and Short Assignments (through November 20) 15%
Participation and Short Assignments (through December 11) 10%
Portfolio and Meta-Text 30%
Final Project 20%
Self-Assessment 10%

Consultations:

I will be available every week for individual consultations (or studio visits). I ask that you email me at least 24 hours in advance to make an appointment, or grab me before/after class to schedule a time for the following week.

Please Note the Following Important Information:

UWM Policies and Procedures

The Policies and Procedures for academic misconduct, special accommodations for students with disabilities, accommodations due to religious observances, and for those called to active military duty; as well as for the policies on incompletes, discriminatory conduct, complaint procedures, and grade appeals can be found here: https://uwm.edu/secu/wp-content/uploads/sites/122/2016/12/Syllabus-Links.pdf

UWM strongly encourages its students to report any instance of sex discrimination, and employees who witness or receive any report of sex discrimination should report it to UWM’s Title IX Coordinator (titleix@uwm.edu, uwm.edu/report, 414-229-7012).

Health Insurance

It is strongly recommended that all students have health insurance that includes emergency room and hospitalization coverage. Currently the UW system does not offer health insurance for domestic students. International Students can find coverage here: https://uwm.edu/cie/wp-content/uploads/sites/107/2018/08/UW-Milwaukee-Plan-Brochure2018-9.pdf

Mental Health Resources are available here: https://uwm.edu/mentalhealth/ and here: https://uwm.edu/norris/
Copyright
Copyright is a form of protection provided by the laws of the United States (title 17, U.S. Code) to the authors of “original works of authorship,” including literary, dramatic, musical, artistic, and certain other intellectual works. This protection is available to both published and unpublished works. Section 106 of the 1976 Copyright Act generally gives the owner of copyright the exclusive right to do and to authorize others to use their materials. You must get permission to use copyrighted original works of authorship if you plan to make your project available to the public in any way. For more on gaining permission: http://guides.library.uwm.edu/c.php?g=817256&p=5833184

UWM Help on Avoiding Plagiarism and Citation Styles can be found here: http://guides.library.uwm.edu/citationstyles

D2L Help
https://uwm.edu/cetl/services/learning-tech-commons/uwm-help-desk-d2l-support-request/

Readings:
All required readings will be made are available via D2L. As a good resource, I recommend, Writing for the Visual Arts, Mashey Bernstein and George Yatchcisin (2001, Prentice Hall).

Resources for Artist-Writers/Residencies/Grant Writing
http://www.chicagoartistsresource.org/home
http://students.colum.edu/learning-studio/Writing/writing-center-resources.php
https://blog.creative-capital.org/category/tips-tools/
https://nmwa.org/advocate/your-region/artist-resources
http://www.artistcommunities.org/residencies/tipsforartists
https://www.amazon.com/Artists-Guide-Grant-Writing-Performing/dp/0823000702
http://www.amazon.com/Only-Grant-Writing-Book-Youll-Ever/dp/0465018696/ref=pd_sim_b_8

Help with Teaching Statements (More on this and Artist Statements to Follow)
http://www.crit.umich.edu/tstrategies/tstpts
Class and Deadline Schedule

— Try again. Fail again. Fail better. Samuel Beckett
— One doesn’t arrive — in words or in art — by necessarily knowing where one is going. Ann Hamilton

Tuesday 4 September  Introductions, Workshop Overview, Expectations
                    Bad Writing Workshop

— Writing is about learning to pay attention and to communicate what is going on. There is ecstasy in both. Anne Lamott
— Here [in poetry], as elsewhere in life, attentiveness only deepens what it regards.
  Jane Hirshfield

Monday 10 September  DUE: Inanimate Portraits (9:00am, D2L)

Tuesday 11 September  Animating Objects

— One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time. Andre Gide
— The moment an object appears in a narrative, it is charged with a special force and becomes like the pole of a magnetic field, a knot in the network of invisible relationships. The symbolism of an object may be more or less explicit, but it is always there. We might even say that in a narrative any object is always magic. Italo Calvino


Assignments: All assignments due for the week in class are posted on D2L under the name of the class. Finders Keepers; Inanimate Portrait; Comments Online for this week, for example.

Tuesday 18 September  Seeing Again

— The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.
  Marcel Proust


Assignments: Williams Burroughs Walk; From the Inside Out; Comments Online

Tuesday 25 September  Engaging the Senses/Engaging Memory

— Nobody sees a flower – really – it is so small – we haven’t time – and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time. Georgia O’Keefe
— Before writers are writers they are readers, living in books, through books, in the lives of others that are also the heads of others, in that act that is so intimate and yet so alone.
  Rebecca Solnit

Readings: Opening from “Cider with Rosie,” Laurie Lee; Selections from The Devil’s Larder, Jim Crace; “Grauballe Man,” Seamus Heaney (if possible also look at “Punishment,” “The Tollund Man,” and “Bog Queen” all from North); “No Name Woman,” Maxine Hong Kingston; “My Struggle,” Art Speigelman; “The Stories People Tell,” Bruce Jackson; “Girl,” Jamaica Kincaid

Assignments: Seeing Anew; Silence; Family Stories: Comment Online

Tuesday 1 October  Visualizing Text

— I don’t try to be inspired; I just try to work very regularly … I think most artists feel that being inspired is a myth. Simply put, out of the work, comes the work.
  John Cage

Reading: Joanna Drucker, Selection from The Century of Artist’s Books

Assignments: Short Presentation; Artist Statement Research
Notes to myself on beginning a painting.

1. Attempt what is not certain. Certainty may or may not come later. It may then be a valuable delusion.

2. The pretty, initial position which falls short of completeness is not to be valued—except as a stimulus for further moves.

3. Do search. But in order to find other than what is searched for.

4. Use and respond to the initial fresh qualities but consider them absolutely expendable.

5. Don’t “discover” a subject—of any kind.

6. Somehow don’t be bored—but if you must, use it in action. Use its destructive potential.

7. Mistakes can’t be erased but they move you from your present position.

8. Keep thinking about Pollyanna.


10. Be careful only in a perverse way.

— Richard Diebenkorn

Tuesday 9 October

Ekphrasis

— To be surprised, to wonder, is to begin to understand. Jose Ortega Y Gasset
— We’re only here for a short while. And I think it’s such a lucky accident, having been born, that we’re almost obliged to pay attention. Mark Strand

Readings: Handout on Ekphrasis; Hirsch on Hopper

Assignments: Be the Tree/Indulge the Senses/Tasty Tales; Comments on and Examples of Ekphrasis on D2L; Images for Class Today

Monday 15 October
DUE: Artist Statements on D2L, 9:00 am

Tuesday 17 October Statements/Proposals Workshop

— We learn to do something by doing it. There is no other way. John Holt
— Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life, and it is the main obstacle between you and a shitty first draft. Anne Lamott

Assignments: Artist Statement; Read Statements; Research Statements, Grants, Residencies etc.
Tuesday 23 October Manifestoes

— I merely took the energy it takes to pout and wrote some blues. Duke Ellington

Readings: Various Manifestoes in D2L folder.

Assignments: Post Examples Online; Draft a Manifesto; In-Depth Research

Writing Groups Formed (please read ahead for the Revising Assignments)

Tuesday 30 October Writing in the Margins

— Artists who seek perfection in everything are those who cannot attain it in anything. Eugene Delacroix


Assignments: The Dark Side of Childhood Tales

Tuesday 6 November Counter-Narratives

— Creativity oscillates between what is given and what can be discovered. Deena Metzger

Readings: Reading and Critiquing Works in Progress Handout; Counter Narrative/Ur Narrative Handout

Assignment: A Counter Narrative of Your Own

Portfolio and Metatext Discussion
Writing Group Meeting

**Tuesday 13 November**  
Re-Envisioning and Revising 1

— The essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shock-proof shit detector. Ernest Hemingway  
— Remember: when people tell you something’s wrong or doesn’t work for them, they are almost always right. When they tell you exactly what they think is wrong and how to fix it, they are almost always wrong. Neil Gaiman

Assignments: Revised Piece and Feedback to Writing Group

Sign Up for Work-in-Progress Presentations

**Monday 20 November:**  
DUE: Revised Statement or Teaching Statement etc; 9:00 am.

**Tuesday 21 November**  
Re-Envisioning and Revising 2

— I think I did pretty well, considering I started out with nothing but a bunch of blank paper. Steve Martin

Assignments: Revised Statement/Teaching Statement and Feedback to Group etc.

**21-25 November**  
THANKSGIVING RECESS

**Tuesday 27 November**  
Work Day/Writing Group Meetings/Individual Consultations

**Wednesday 28 November**  
DUE: Portfolio and Metatext, 9:00 am.

**Monday 3 December**  
DUE: Draft/ Outline of Final Project Posted to D2L for Tuesday Discussion, 9:00 am.

**Tuesday 4 December**  
Final Project: Work-in-Progress Discussion

**Tuesday 11 December**  
Final Project: Work in Progress Presentations

**Monday 17 December**  
DUE: Final Project/Self-Grade Letter, 9:00am