

Teaching Philosophy

Mastery is not only about perfecting the execution of skills, but includes having the curiosity and strength to continue to learn, both by challenging ourselves and by helping others to identify and emphasize their strengths and gain insights into addressing their areas of weakness. I create environments where we challenge each other to think in different ways. An environment where students are comfortable exploring the unknown, where failing is a success because it is learning.

Leading a corporate design team with college interns was my impetus for entering the collegiate teaching world. I was struck by how, semester after semester, I had interns that didn't know their strengths, were afraid to fail, and spent copious amounts of time on rote tasks where the effort far outweighed the output. I began to really enjoy helping them identify their strengths, push boundaries and learn where time and effort were best spent. It was different for each and every intern but what I found to be universal was using my own learning mistakes and successes as examples, creating a safe place to take risks, encouraging exploration and helping them to understand that asking questions and having conversations were how we grew.

Learning is about thinking and growing in your understanding. A successful student improves their ability to recognize and grow their unique talents and also to help others do the same. Collaborative support from the community is what allows for each of us to grow and emphasize the skills that make us unique.

A combination of individual and group projects that emphasize different artistic skills as well as communication provides the atmosphere and opportunity for students to learn from others and develop their own focus. Sophomore majors begin their exploration of the material in group projects. By working together to build a large scale sculpture, almost always, there is someone with the skills of planning, and one who will want to adapt as they move forward; there will be obsession with perfection and one that doesn't mind if fingerprints show, someone very practical and someone with delusions of grandeur. By working together in the chaos they learn from each other and begin to develop the rhythm and balance of their peer group that they will be part of over the next three years. They will see skills that they want to emulate and characteristics they want to avoid. This will serve them well as they move toward individual projects.

Understanding the need for a practical timeline and to adapt as new hurdles are discovered. Exploring different ways of making that are not intuitive but they have seen be successful.

Beginning to develop their own way of making that speaks to them. In Junior year, after establishing a comfort with clay in their sophomore year, students are challenged to push the boundaries of what's possible in the medium. Developing a methodology to pursue new goals in clay making, building and/or glazing, Junior's will be working on projects that teeter on the edge of failing, but are supported to find success. Seniors start off their final year with a group project to remind them that although they are developing their own voices, that there is much to be gained by collaborating. During the rest of the fall semester they will begin work on their final project/thesis. Identifying what they will be doing, how they want to showcase/exhibit it and what supporting writing will accompany it. The spring semester gives them the time and space to create their work, write about it and develop a final presentation for it.

Students will have a criterion-referenced grading system that rewards effort in projects, participation in class and growth throughout the semester. Teaching art is not about rewarding the student who has the best natural talent but also about acknowledging the students who stretch themselves and helping them to develop so that they leave the class with new skills not only in the crafting of fine art but in the arts of communication and critical thinking.

Course Title: “Objects That Make You Smile” - IND 2100

Course Description: We've all been there, picked up a new widget and in the act of using it realized how poorly designed its predecessors were. This course will help us better understand what transforms a product from functional to fabulous and to grow the skills necessary to create new products that stand out, stand better. In the first third of the semester we will look into our own lives to identify some of these objects. Each student will choose one, compare and contrast it to the rest of the market; research other users needs and pain points; and learn how to quantify that information into a successful presentation that will feed into discussions of the different ways that a product can connect with us. The middle of the semester will focus on current manufacturing process and new technologies. We will disassemble products, identify materials and manufacturing processes used and begin to understand the rough costs associated. Looking to emerging technology each student will choose a newly published technology and through in-class exercises, brainstorm ideas of potential future applications. The culmination of the semester will be to identify a ho hum user experience and transform it into one that captures that moment of WOW! Using the skills previously developed throughout the semester you will do market research, user research, identify the opportunity, ideate solutions through thumbnail sketches and mockups and learn how to create a final model that is the best choice for your solution. The final crit will include a digital presentation summarizing the work that was done that led to this insight and solution.

Goals:

- Will develop a consciousness of differentiation in products
- Will develop ideation and brainstorming skills
- Will develop drawing, model making and presentation skills

Outcomes:

- A solid comprehension of the techniques employed to differentiate products
- A sketchbook that captures daily insights of how products ingratiate themselves into our lives and ideations of new products
- A final presentation consisting of a stated problem product, identified areas of weakness, new solutions and appropriate models and renderings to support insight.

Term: Fall

Location: TBD

Day/Time: Mondays 1:10-6:10pm

Faculty: Sarah O'Brien, sobrien@risd.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 10:00am - noon

Credits: 3

Undergraduate and or Graduate: Undergraduate

Non-major elective or Major elective: Major

Estimated Cost of Materials: \$50

Capacity: 18

Course Title: "Translating with Clay" - CER 1530

Course Description: Each of us sees, processes, translates and expresses data in different ways. Some of our differences are subtle some are strikingly unique. As we develop our understanding of ourselves as artists and designers we can grow by looking at the way we (and others) work through metacognition, which is simply thinking about how we think. Multidisciplinary projects and active in-class conversations about the similarities and differences in how each of us think can help us to understand:

- what makes us as individual artists unique
- how other artists think
- new ways of thinking/working that we can incorporate into our practice.

In class exercises, explorations and tutorials along with 3 multiphase multidisciplinary studio projects will culminate with a final project over the last two weeks of the semester. Ceramics will be the primary (50%) medium used and will be accompanied with various 2D and 3D mediums. Additionally, there will be a few brief writing assignments. Pinch pots, coil making and slab making in clay will be taught along with an overview of glazing.

Goals:

- Will develop a greater awareness of strengths and weaknesses and how to focus abilities for maximized effect.
- Will improve skills translating between the written word, 2D and 3D modes of communication.
- Will develop skills to navigate in ceramics comfortably.

Outcomes

- A solid comprehension of clay building techniques including pinch pots, coil and slab building.
- The ability to critically discuss one's own work and others work with positivity.
- A final project that shows growth of understanding and skill from the beginning of the semester.

Term: Wintersession

Location: Metcalf - 312

Day/Time: Mon, Tues, Wed / 1:10-6:10pm

Faculty: Sarah O'Brien, sobrien@risd.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 10:00am - noon

Credits: 3

Undergraduate and or Graduate: Undergraduate and Graduate

Non-major elective or Major elective: Non-major

Estimated Cost of Materials: \$50

Capacity: 18

Course Title: "Playing in the Dirt" - CER 3100

Course Description: It's dirty work but it's oh so fun. Ceramics is one of the few creative mediums where you can easily control your material at the molecular level. Jewelers don't tend to make their sterling silver, design students don't often make the composites they build their models out of but in ceramics we can relatively easily make every single part of our final product from bags of raw material. First we will take those bags of material and learn how to combine it into clay. In the first third of the semester, using slab rolling, and coil building, we will morph the clay into forms that push boundaries and expectations in small scale sculptural explorations. In the middle of the semester, after understanding the material that best fits your needs you will create a large scale sculptural objects that embraces the capabilities of the material. In the final third of the semester we will explore making glazes. First through experiments with test tiles, then through glaze experiments on your small scale explorations and finally making and applying glaze to your final large scale piece. You will leave this class with the confidence and knowledge to successfully keep pushing boundaries both of your mind and of the material.

Goals:

- To develop a confidence in problem solving
- To develop an intuition with the material and its behavior
- To understand the abilities and limits of the material and how to push them.

Outcomes

- A solid understanding of how the proportions of ingredients affect the characteristics of the clay
- The ability to build forms that reflect your vision and successfully navigate the necessary steps of ceramics including building, drying, firing and glazing.
- A final large scale glazed piece that is started from bags of minerals, transformed into clay and glaze and then into an object that is successfully built to the original goal utilizing learnings of clay materiality and building techniques and firing temperatures.

Term: Spring

Location: Metcalf - 312

Day/Time: Wednesday / 1:10-6:10pm

Faculty: Sarah O'Brien, sobrien@risd.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 10:00am - noon

Credits: 3

Undergraduate and or Graduate: Junior, Senior and Graduate

Non-major elective or Major elective: Major and non-major w/Permission of instructor

Estimated Cost of Materials: \$150

Prerequisites: One previous ceramics class required

Capacity: 18

Rhode Island School of Design Ceramics Department

Course Information:

Translating - Understanding Different Ways

Wintersession 2020 Schedule A

3 Credits

Class meeting time: 1:10 - 6:10

Location: TBD

Instructor: Sarah O'Brien; TA: TBD

Instructor's office location: 316, meetings available by appointment

Contact Information: sobrien@risd.edu, www.sarahkathrynobrien.com

Course Description:

Each of us sees, processes, translates and expresses data in different ways. Some of our differences are subtle some are strikingly unique. As we develop our understanding of ourselves as artists and designers we can grow by looking at the way we work through metacognition. Metacognition is simply thinking about how we think. Multidisciplinary projects and active in-class conversations about the similarities and differences in how each of us think can help us to understand:

- what makes us as individual artists unique
- how other artists think
- new ways of thinking that we can incorporate into our practice

In class exercises, explorations and tutorials along with 3 multiphase multidisciplinary studio projects will culminate with a final project over the last two weeks of the semester. Ceramics will be the primary (50%) medium used and will be accompanied with various 2D and 3D mediums. Additionally, there will be a few brief writing assignments. Pinch pots, coil making and slab making in clay will be taught along with an overview of glazing.

Course Goals/Course Objectives:

- To understand the way you as a student receive information, interpret and utilize it.
- To understand the ways other people may differ in how they receive information
- To discover how the ways other people may differ in how they interpret information
- To develop new ways of thinking and making that incorporate observations from peers processes.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Construction of a pinch pot
- Building of a coil form
- Build a slab form
- Use glazes

- Successfully translate between mediums and dimensions
- Recognize different ways of communicating
- Recognize different ways of processing ideas
- Holistic Thinking
- Integration of new ways of communicating and processing

Course Organization/Method of Instruction:

Group critiques will follow a variety of structures including:

Critiques where all the students look at all of the work and write anonymous questions about any work or works he/she would like, then these are collected and used as discussion points for the group.

Critiques where one student describes and talks about the work of another student to the group and then asks the maker to speak about his/her work to the group.

Critique where the student leads the conversation about their work and asks for the areas of feedback they would like.

Final critiques will allow the student to showcase their work for the semester. The first half of the critique the artist will listen while others share insights. The second half will allow for the artist to be part of the conversation.

One-on-one reviews/updates will occur often and informally during work-time.

Grading Policy/Evaluation Criteria:

Active participation during class discussions	35%
Translating from Clay	15%
Reflecting Your Space	15%
Translating A Moment	15%
Final Project 1D-2D-3D	20%

Projects will be graded with the following criteria:

- 25% Fulfillment of assignment objectives
- 25% Technical execution/craftsmanship/aesthetics
- 25% Physical investment of time
- 25% Conceptual depth of your finished work

The course grade will be averaged as reflected above. You must prepare for class, use your class time effectively, and be able to be an active participant in class discussions. An evaluation of your class participation is particularly important in borderline grades. I will do my best to communicate grades in a timely manner. If at any point you have questions about how you are doing in the class or why you received a particular grade please don't hesitate to ask.

Course Plan:

Week 1 - Metacognition - Becoming more conscious of the way your brain uniquely works.

Monday, January 6th - Class Introduction, student introductions,

- Fill out survey form to be reexamined on the last day of class.
 - What is your preferred Medium?
 - How would you describe your work?
 - How would others describe your work?
 - What are your strengths?
 - What are your weaknesses?
 - What do you want to get better at?
- Introductory Exercise: Share with the class about your work and/or self; method of delivery can be projected computer presentation, speech to the class, written (w/copies for class) or any other form of presentation that successfully communicates something about your work or self to the rest of the class. (2-5 minutes) (The goal of this exercise is to utilize a method that feels organic to you while successfully communicates with the rest of the class)
- Review of Syllabus
- RISD Museum - What I see Assignment, begin individually
-break-
- RISD Museum - What I see Assignment, complete as group
- Studio Discussion: What is metacognition?
- Studio Exercise: Drawing what you feel, literally.
- Assignment: Final evolution of the drawing what you feel exercise.

Tuesday, January 7th

- Review of assignment, group discussion.
- General clay studio review of material properties and tools.
- Pinch/coil pot demo
-break-

Translating from Clay project begins with final group critique on Monday January 13th @ 1:10pm - 15% of overall grade

- Studio Exercise: Create at least 3 unique forms
- Assignment: Complete in class exercise.

Wednesday, January 8th

- Review of assignment, group discussion.
- In class: Create wire form sculpture translated from one of the clay forms
-break-
- In class: Create 2-D (pencil/ink/marker/illustrator/etc.) translated from wire form sculpture

- Assignment: Complete in class translation exercises and create a new translation in medium and dimension of your choice.

Week 2 - Space

Monday, January 13th

- Group Critique
- break-
- Slab Demonstration
Reflecting Your Space project begins with final group critique on Tuesday January 21st @1:10pm - 15% of overall grade
- In class exercise: writing about space.
- Artists & Architects think & talk differently about space
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7dsVjWRitI>
- Assignment: identify a space important to you and write 300-500 words about it.

Tuesday, January 14th

- *Reflecting Your Space* - Create 3-5 ideations (sketch or mini clay mock-ups) interpreting your space into clay using words and phrases from your text as inspiration.
- Choose 1 ideation to create 'full-size' in clay
- Assignment: finish clay form

EMERGING LEARNING OUTCOMES: Construction of a pinch pot, coil form, slab form

Week 3 - Communicating

Tuesday, January 21st

- Group Critique
- break-
- Glaze demonstration
Translating a Moment project begins with final group critique Monday January 27th @1:10pm - 15% of overall grade
- Translating from one mind to another, how we communicate differently
- In class exercise sculpting words. (One person describes object, another creates it)
- Assignment: 3-5 sentences describing a memorable event/moment in your life. (emailed to instructor at least 30 minutes before tomorrow's class)
- Plan how you want to glaze your fired clay pieces (sketches)

Wednesday, January 22nd

- *Translating A Moment* - Anonymously trade (via instructor) memorable moment paragraph. Pull 3 emotions, Describe 3 images, determine your best interpretation to represent this moment. Create 3 sketches/ideations.
- break-
- Select final idea and begin fabrication.

- Assignment: Finish clay form. Use underglaze on green clay if necessary for Monday's critique.
- *Clay pieces from week 1 and 2 should be bisque fired by Friday, January 24th and should be glazed by end of day Monday, January 27th. -*

DEVELOPING LEARNING OUTCOMES: Glazing, Successful translation between mediums and dimensions, recognize different ways of communicating and different ways of processing ideas.

Week 4 - Insights

Monday January 27th

- Group Critique (artists interpretation, authors intentions, viewers reactions)
-break-
- 'More' exercise- As we have worked together over the last few weeks we have seen slivers of how each others minds work. This is an opportunity to identify and find out more about those unique aspects.
1D-2D-3D project begins with final group critique Wednesday February 5th @1:10pm - 20% of overall grade
- Discussion of Final Project - 1D-2D-3D
- Assignment: create 2-3 outline/mockup proposals for final project

Tuesday January 28th

- One-on-one review and decision on direction.
- Project schedule exercise - plan out week for completion of tasks by February 5th Final Critique
- In class studio time
- Assignment: Final Project to 90%
- *Glazed ceramic pieces completed by 1/27 - should be out of the kiln by 1/29 -
- Ceramic pieces for final project that need to be bisque fired before Final Critique should be kiln ready by Saturday, February 1st @ 6pm -*

Week 5 - Final Project

Monday, February 3rd

- One-on-ones as needed and work day

Tuesday, February 4th

- One-on-ones as needed and work day

Wednesday, February 5th

- Final Critique
-break-
- Fill out Survey and then compare to answers from Day 1
 - What is your preferred Medium?

- How would you describe your work?
- How would others describe your work?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What do you want to get better at?
- Photo booth

ADVANCED LEARNING OUTCOMES: Holistic Thinking and Integration of new ways of communicating and processing.

- *Any pieces needing additional firing should be placed on appropriate shelf by Friday, February 7th and should be picked up by the end of the first week of spring semester.*

Course Requirements:

Major Assignments

Translating from Clay
Reflecting Your Space
Translating A Moment
Final Project 1D-2D-3D

Due

Monday, January 13th 1:10pm
Tuesday, January 21st 1:10pm
Monday, January 27th 1:10pm
Wednesday, February 5th 1:10pm

All major assignments will be capped with a discussion/critique in class

Course Policies and Expectations:

Absence: Unexcused, uncommunicated absence on the first day of class or two days total will result in you being withdrawn from the class w/ a grade of -W- or -F- depending on the timing. Arriving after 1:40 or leaving before 6:10 unexcused will be considered an absence.

Cell Phones: No cell phones in class.

Communication: If you are having problems understanding aspects of the class I expect you to reach out to me for assistance. I am available to meet in person, via email (sobrien@risd.edu) and via text (504.623.5390).

Health & Safety: It is very important for our health and working environment to maintain a tidy studio. You are expected to thoroughly clean up after yourself every time you use the studio. When cleaning, mixing materials or sanding you must wear an approved dust mask. Dust inhalation can lead to respiratory issues, some of which are irreversible and serious. We will conclude class 10 minutes before the end of period for cleaning.

Materials and Tools: Most required materials will be provided for you. Please provide a sketchbook along with a metal rib, pin tool, fettling knife, wooden knife, small sponge, spray bottle and bucket.

Estimated Cost of Materials:

Students can expect to spend less than \$50 to successfully complete the course as assigned. Students may choose to work in alternative mediums than those provided and may therefore incur additional expenses.

Disability Statement:

Rhode Island School of Design is committed to providing equal opportunity for all students. If you are a student with a disability that may require accommodations to complete the requirements of this class, I encourage you to discuss your learning needs with me during the first day of the term. Once an approval letter from the Office of Disability Support Services is submitted, accommodations will be provided as needed. For more information on how to receive accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services at 401 709-8460 or disabilitysupportservices@risd.edu.

Diversity/Civility Statement:

In order to learn, we must be open to the views of people different than ourselves. In this time we share together over the semester, please honor the uniqueness of your fellow classmates and appreciate the opportunity we have to learn from one another. Please respect each other's opinions and refrain from personal attacks or demeaning comments of any kind. Finally, remember to keep confidential all issues of a personal or professional nature that are discussed in class.

Translating in Clay

Assignment: What I See - RISD Art Museum

Week 1, Day 1

The goal of this project is to begin to understand the many different ways we process information. Each student will go to the museum and individually choose one piece that they are drawn to. The student will take a photo of the work and write a paragraph (3-8 sentences or phrases, not 20) about what they see, why they are drawn to it (it is important to clarify that the students do not try to say everything that can be said about a piece but instead everything they see and connect with). The picture will be promptly emailed to the faculty. (This portion of the assignment should take up to 1 hour and includes a 15 minute break. The photo of the work and text should be emailed within the first 45 minutes) Upon return, the class will move through the images via overhead projector. The class will make notes about the different kinds of descriptions, feelings, stories, colors, craftsmanship, patterns etc. How does the person that wrote this see? Are they a story teller? Have a unique appreciation for color? A connection to a certain school of work? Assignment: Reapproach your chosen work and rewrite your paragraph. It is important NOT to include EVERYTHING but instead include things you now see in a meaningful way after our class discussion.

Goals:

- Explore the art museum
- Begin to learn how to express what connects you to art
- Will understand the differences in how we see and create
- Will understand that we can learn from how each other sees and that there are some qualities that are wholly unique

Learning Outcomes:

- Recognize the different ways of communicating about art
- Describe something in the truest way to your eyes/mind
- Have active positive group discussions about each others way of thinking.

Competency

Basic: complete museum assignment, describe selected work rewrite using one or two facets, participate occasionally in class description.

Advanced: complete museum assignment, describe selected work rewrite using three or more facets, participate actively in class description.

Course Rubric

<p style="text-align: center;">B +/-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your own work is improving, you are gaining new skills for your craft but you are not actively participating with group discussions and subsequently helping your peer group.• Your work is often complete and finished on-time.• You attend most classes and arrive on time.	<p style="text-align: center;">A +/-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your own work is improving, you are gaining new skills for your craft. You are sharing with others and helping them to improve themselves• Your work is always complete and finished on-time.• You attend all classes and arrive on time.
<p style="text-align: center;">C +/-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You are showing little effort in your work or in class conversations.• Your work is rarely finished on-time, but is completed by agreed upon extensions.• You attend most classes but arrive late.	<p style="text-align: center;">B +/-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You are sharing with others and helping them to improve themselves but you are not showing growth in your work• Your work is often complete and finished on-time.• You attend most classes and arrive on time.

A few of the things that put you at risk for a D, F, or Incomplete: missing 3 or more classes per school guidelines, not completing assignments, being disruptive to the class.

Translating With Clay - Mid Term Course Assessment

Course Goals:

- To develop a greater awareness of strengths and weaknesses and how to focus for maximized effect.
- To improve skills translating between the written word, 2D and 3D modes of communication.
- To develop skills to navigate in ceramics comfortably.

On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the following:
(1= Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree)

I find class time engaging.

1 2 3 4 5

I have a clear sense of what I need to do in order to do well in this course.

1 2 3 4 5

The instructor responds helpfully when students are having difficulties.

1 2 3 4 5

The instructor teaches in ways that allow students like me to succeed in this class

1 2 3 4 5

This course has helped me improve my ability to analyze, solve problems and/or think critically.

1 2 3 4 5

I have found discussions in this class engaging.

1 2 3 4 5

How does the professor help you understand what are the most important points within class?
Could he or she do anything differently?

Evaluate your own work in this course. What have you done well? What could you do to improve your learning?

Inclusivity Statement

Welcoming Atmosphere:

From the first time the student enters into my classroom I want them to feel like they have a voice. That begins by reaching out via email before the first class introducing myself and asking their preferred name/pronoun. Asking if there is anything they want me to know that might help me teach them better. And asking if they have any questions for me. In addition to asking them about themselves I will let them know what will be happening on the first day of class so they know what to expect. On that first day emphasizing that communication and participation are integral but that can happen in many ways. Do you not like speaking in public, write a note and pass it to the front or email me your thoughts after class, we are all different and our best ways of learning and communicating may prove to be very different from each other. But we do need to find and utilize those successful means of communication.

Cultural and Learning Range:

Assignments are designed to allow a breadth of interpretations. In class discussions will emphasize students unique ways of thinking/seeing and the developed skill sets that enable them to approach the idea from different perspectives. Examples given in class purposefully show that range both in origin and execution of idea. One class may have a student who interprets with their emotions forefront, while another student approaches the same assignment with a formalist perspective, and yet another focuses on the capabilities of what the material can do. We all grow by recognizing these differences and understanding how each students individual approach can allow for successful execution of ideas.

Cultural diversity is also fundamentally important. Through visiting artists such as Nicole Eisenman, Shannon Gross, Glenn Ligon and Nicholas Oh, we learn how artist's individually express their cultural and gender identity through their art. We will examine the different ways that cultures interpret colors, patterns and form. Students are encouraged to share their cultural insights as well as suggestions for visiting artists.

We will have a weekly reading assignment curated (anonymously) by the students. In the first week each student will submit an article or website about an artist, culture, political issues, etc. that they think the class would benefit from reading. The readings will be assigned weekly and each student will submit a paragraph summarizing their thoughts on the reading, and we will begin our class each week with a discussion on the subject.