

Amy Baxter MacDonald
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

I teach because I enjoy sharing information gained through years of study and studio practice in painting, drawing, printmaking, animation, and mixed media. I am passionate about art, amazed by its power to reflect and influence the world, and eager to assist others in developing artistically. I strive to help each student develop his or her own system of seeing and thus, expressing. I encourage students to analyze what they see, ask pertinent questions, and respond both visually and verbally. My long-range goal as an instructor is to encourage confident expression and a strong work ethic among graduates. The more immediate goal is to build students' confidence by arming them with the information, skills and practices necessary for artists.

A successful Foundations program helps students recognize and develop their individual strengths through active engagement in the studio. I bombard Foundations students with as many mediums and working methods as time and facilities allow. They gain firsthand knowledge of the physical and expressive qualities of a wide array of creative processes and mediums, but are denied enough time to settle into any one way of working. I believe this approach makes it more likely that students will be exposed to something they are enthusiastic about, and they can look forward to focusing more intently on particular interests in future classes. I use traditional drawing and painting exercises, but often introduce nontraditional materials as a way of dispelling preconceived notions and breaking familiar habits. Failures in the studio often become building blocks for strong works of art later. A "terrible" sculpture, for instance, may find new power as the subject of a strong charcoal drawing.

When introducing students to a new medium, I explain the history, physical makeup, and archival considerations, and then I show work that was made using techniques and materials we're about to try. I then demonstrate how to achieve a broad range of effects by varying the way I manipulate the medium, and we practice together. Sometimes I introduce a second medium to show how one plays off another, but often the goal is to work within limitations. We discuss the resulting work as a class, and students are advised to either address imbalances in their work or move on to the next project.

My lessons are based on my experiences as a student, painter, teacher, and maker of moving images. Because I believe some of the most interesting work happens when several processes are involved, I encourage collaboration or revisiting earlier work. Though the syllabus may follow a linear format, we often return to concepts discussed early on. Design principles are discussed in every class, because we always need to balance light, dark, thick, thin, sharp, round, flat, glossy, stagnant and chaotic areas in our work. I show examples from different artistic genres in order to reinforce students' understanding of particular principles, characteristics and techniques. This encourages interdisciplinary experimentation. Can painters employ pen-and-inkers' methods of shading, or would that defeat the purpose of using paint? What are the parallels between organic shapes and organic sounds? What do they feel like, and how can a 2D image translate that feeling? These are the kind of questions they learn to ask themselves.

I hope that graduating students continue to ask questions of themselves and their world through their art. I believe that making art helps us to examine what really matters to us, and we evolve as our art evolves. I hope to assist student artists in finding their unique creative voices by teaching them the working methods of artists before them, and then encouraging them to experiment, reflect, and present their own work professionally.