

Special Problems In Painting

Title: Special Problems In Painting

Course Section: PNTG 4341

Location: Fox Fine Arts, Room A455

Time: M/W 4:30 - 7:20 pm

Instructor Contact Information

Name: Tom Birkner

Office Hours: M/W 11am - 12pm (130 Prospect Hall) or phone T/TH 11 am - 12 pm

Email: tabirkner@utep.edu

Phone: 917-902-2059 (mobile)

Communication

Your Miners email and Blackboard are vital necessities for this course. Check your email daily. Please respond when a response is warranted. Blackboard will contain course content that will be updated each week.

Instructor's Introduction

Tom Birkner, B.A. Rutgers University, M.F.A. The Pennsylvania State University, is in his sixth year as a member of the Department of Art faculty. Tom previously taught at Drew University, Madison, NJ and at Parsons The New School for Design in NY and Paris. His work is widely exhibited and he is represented by Paul Thiebaud Gallery, San Francisco, and Gerald Peters Contemporary, Santa Fe.

Course Description

Great painters create a cosmos of painted imagery that revolves around a core of convictions. The intention of *Special Problems* is to help define, and most importantly, to depict those convictions in a great series of paintings. It is a course determined by the student's interests and instincts. They will define what their work is about. One fundamental difference between the fine and applied arts is the freedom of the artist to determine content. *Special Problems* directs students through this challenge so their paintings are no mere accident, but the result of a passionate, philosophical pursuit.

Special Problems In Painting is the third of a three-semester drive toward a senior thesis exhibition.

Expect to work 10 hours per week outside of class time to meet basic requirements.

PNTG on Blackboard

New this semester will be weekly content on Blackboard. This online supplement will be a more structured, and interesting replacement for the Monday Gallery Walks. Each week will have a

variety of videos, imagery and helpful tips, all related to the world of painting. **Of particular importance are the readings, which will focus on a single book, *Heaven and Hell in Western Art*, by Robert Hughes** (the book is not required as it's hard to find). The Committee will also weigh in on Blackboard with their well-known and cherished commentary known as *The Thought of The Week*. And finally, there will be practical video demonstrations on many topics. Here is the weekly outline of the course on Blackboard:

- Week 1 - Basic Advice on Set-up, Clean Up and Mediums
- Week 2 - Technological Tools: Photoshop, copiers, news sources, photo stock house
- Week 3 - Building Images
- Week 4 - Visual Communication
- Week 5 - Focal Points & Diversions
- Week 6 - Epic vs Ordinary Pose
- Week 7 - Epic vs Ordinary Space
- Week 8 - Epic vs. Ordinary Scale
- Week 9 - Crude vs. Refined Painting
- Week 10 - Transformation of the Real/Reduction Of Form (monks before anime)
- Week 11 - Transformation of the Real/Symbolic Form
- Week 12 - Desegno (the subtlety of style)
- Week 13 - Expression/Intention
- Week 14 - Mystery
- Week 15 - Style From Necessity

This list sometimes goes well past the shallow basics into deep waters. For more fundamental refreshers, I can also make the following videos, made for PNTG II & III available to you.

- Starting A Painting/Drawing With Brushes
- Finding and Developing Ideas
- Painting Faces and Hands
- The Importance of Place
- Background/Foreground
- Thoughts On Color
- Painting Wet On Wet & Wet On Dry
- Composition/Placing Things In A Space
- Contrast and the Illusion of Depth
- Color, Contrast and the Illusion of Light
- Painting Details

All video demos will attempt to be worthy substitutes for the inability to help with your paintings directly if we go back to fully online teaching. Requests for demos of interest to you are welcomed.

Course Material Is Subject To Change

Official statement:_Course syllabus supersedes catalog descriptions.

Teacher's statement: Adapting to changing circumstances supersedes syllabus. The syllabus is a guideline. Changes will occur. Improvisation will be necessary. All changes will be attempts to make the class better given variable conditions.

Course Requirements That Will Not Change

10 paintings equaling 130 hours of effort

Written statement (1-2 paragraphs) on what you want to accomplish this semester
Hand-written sentence from the weekly Blackboard reading (the sentence you like most)
A fully-developed artist statement

More On Course Requirements

A total of ten paintings will be due at semester's end. **These are, by far, the most important part of this course and they will count for 90% of your grade.** The writings will count for the rest. As always, independence is strongly encouraged and **these 10 paintings should have the coherence of a series.**

IMPORTANT NOTE: Your total semester production should equate to 130 hours of work. You are free to dedicate more time to some pieces than to others. For instance, you can do 4-6 small studies that might take 2 hours each. Then dedicate more time to more important paintings.

Another IMPORTANT NOTE: If/when classes become fully online, and for those opting to work at home, you are required to submit images of your progress by 8 pm each Friday.

All images will be submitted on Blackboard and be no larger than 500 KB and no smaller than 250 KB. Please learn how to reduce file sizes on your respective device. If you have trouble with this, just do a google search or contact helpdesk@utep.edu

Further info on tech is below and will be discussed as needed through the semester.

Class Critiques

Critiques are going to be highly variable. If we are on campus all semester, there will be three critiques. Individual critiques will occur at Week 4, peer critiques will occur at Week 8, final critiques will occur before Thanksgiving break. The remaining portion of the semester will be time you can use improving your work for final grades.

For those of you working at home, it is expected that you come to campus for critiques, at least on an individual basis. These may occur in the PNTG studios or in my Prospect Hall studio. Alternative approaches can be discussed if your health or those of others close to you is of concern.

If we go fully online, the one image per week rule applies. Other options for online critique will be discussed.

You are expected to have new paintings for each critique. Paintings must show enough progress to be discussed and taken seriously. Also, to encourage you to develop paintings throughout the

semester, all grading will be informal until your final grade. However, any student may privately ask for a verbal assessment, which will also be given during the Week 8 critiques.

Course Goal and Objectives

1. To explore the interrelationships of meaning and painterly style. 2. To turn the nuances of painterly style and independent themes into a distinctive, painted iconography. 3. To build that iconography into a world of paintings with visual flair and either personal or social relevance. 4. To recognize and critique one's own work from the viewer's standpoint. 5. Write a clear and interesting artist statement. 6. Finish your senior exhibition and show it in the Glass Gallery.

Objectives toward these goals include:

- Standing by your core values and convictions
- Directing your painting skills toward the depiction of those convictions
- Knowing painting's history the way a dedicated painter knows it
- Working the way a dedicated painter works
- Pushing your paintings to a higher level of visual awesomeness

The ultimate goal is to create a series of paintings that stops people in their tracks and makes them pay attention to what you are doing.

Grading Guidelines

Grading will be based on cumulative effort, improvement and quality. Because skill levels vary, evaluation will be influenced by improvement on an individual basis. Here's a basic outline of grading priorities:

10 series-based paintings	90%
Required writings (see Course Requirements)	10%

Grading Standards

- F - Failure
- D - Below Average
- C - Average
- B - Good
- A - Excellent

If a more detailed explanation of these standards is needed, just ask and I'll be happy to supply it. For info on attendance and its relationship to grading, please see **Attendance Policy** below.

UTEP Policies On Covid

UTEP has established policies to help protect the health of our community and make our campus safe. All instructors must know and understand these policies when preparing and offering courses. The UTEP [Temporary Health and Safety Policy](#) requires all faculty, staff, and students to follow these guidelines:

- **Stay at home** if you (1) have been diagnosed with COVID-19, (2) are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, or (3) have had recent contact with a person who has received a positive coronavirus test.
- **Report** (screening.utep.edu) if you (1) have been diagnosed with COVID-19, (2) are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, or (3) have had recent contact with a person who has received a positive coronavirus test.
- **Complete screening questions** (screening.utep.edu) every day before coming to campus and follow instructions provided.
- While on campus: **wear face coverings** when in common areas or when others are present; maintain a minimum **separation of six (6)** feet between yourself and others when possible, and arrange spaces to make this possible in almost all circumstances; **adhere to room/space limitations** on number of occupants; and **wash and/or sanitize hands** frequently.

MORE COVID 19 PRECAUTIONS:

Under no circumstances should anyone come to class when feeling ill or exhibiting any of the known COVID-19 symptoms. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, and alternative instruction will be provided. Students are advised to minimize the number of encounters with others to avoid infection.

Wear face coverings when in common areas of campus or when others are present. You must wear a face covering over your nose and mouth at all times in this class. If you choose not to wear a face covering, you may not enter the classroom. If you remove your face covering, you will be asked to put it on or leave the classroom. Students who refuse to wear a face covering and follow preventive COVID-19 guidelines will be dismissed from the class and will be subject to disciplinary action according to Section 1.2.3 *Health and Safety* and Section 1.2.2.5 *Disruptions* in the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures.

Please note that if COVID-19 conditions deteriorate in the City of El Paso, all course and lab activities may be transitioned to remote delivery.

Technology Requirements

Much course content will be delivered through Blackboard. Ensure your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have access to the web and a stable web browser. Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox are the best browsers for Blackboard; other browsers may cause complications.

When having technical difficulties, update your browser (unless, of course, your friendly neighborhood tech monopoly won't let you), clear your cache, or try switching to another browser.

You will need to have access to a computer. We will be using Zoom on Blackboard for video meetings. Please log into Blackboard and open this new function to see if your computer is compatible with it. If not, check that your computer software is up-to-date. If it can't be updated, contact the Tech Center at helpdesk@utep.edu

If you do not have a word-processing software, you can download Word and other Microsoft Office programs (including Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and more) for free via UTEP's Microsoft Office Portal. Click the following link for more information about [Microsoft Office 365](#) and follow the instructions.

IMPORTANT: If you encounter technical difficulties beyond your scope of troubleshooting, please contact the UTEP [Help Desk](#) as they are trained specifically in assisting with technological needs of students. The Help Desk is much better equipped than I am to assist you!

Attendance Policy

Attendance, punctuality, participation and appropriate class conduct are crucial. Failure to perform to required standards will result in strong grade penalties and can cause failure of this course.

- Each student is permitted 3 absences during the semester without penalty. Students with more than 3 absences should consider dropping this course and retaking it at a time when the student can commit the proper attention to the course.
- Each unexcused absence after 3 will result in the final course grade being lowered by 1 full letter grade. Absences after the first 3 can be excused only if the first 3 absences are excused.
- Excused absences are defined as documented illness or serious illness or death in the immediate family.
- Coming to class late or leaving early is regarded and graded as being absent. All students are required to attend class on time and to remain in the class the entire time. Entering class late and leaving early is disruptive, disrespectful and sets an unacceptable standard for everyone.
- Coming to class unprepared or attending class and not working is regarded as absent.
- Information missed during an absence is the sole responsibility of the student.

COVID addendum: For those working from home, your weekly image submission is counted as attendance. If no image is submitted, it will be counted as an absence. Everyone will also be required to participate in potential video meetings. Failure to participate will also be counted as an absence.

Course Participation:

- Participation in all discussions, critiques and class days is required for this course.
- Development and execution of class projects must be done utilizing all class meetings.
- Projects executed solely out of class will not be accepted.
- Participation in the collaborative group environment of the studio is essential to the successful completion of this course.

Class Conduct (for those attending on campus):

- Sick Policy - **If you are not feeling well, or if you are sick, then you should not come to this class under any circumstances.** You should instead seek medical care, and/or recuperate at home. Email me or call me when you are able and let me know the circumstances, and I will help you to catch up in class when you are feeling better. . If you are pregnant, or have other physical issues such as allergies to dust, respiratory issues, anything that I should be aware of, please inform me of this immediately, and we will work to make you safe and comfortable. If a family member is ill, and you need to care for that person, please email me or call and let me know what your situation is.
- Guests - **Guests are not permitted at any time during class.** You are expected to remain in class at all times, and may not step-out to visit with guests during class. There will be one warning. After that, you will be asked to leave class and you will be counted absent.
- Cell phones and tablets - **USE OF PHONES DURING CLASS IS NOT ALLOWED.** If there is some reason you must use your phone, please notify me BEFORE class, and or use your phone during break.
- Music - Ear phones are permitted in one ear, and not during class discussion.
- Studio Hours - The studios will be open only during scheduled class times until further notice.
- Studio Safety - Some aspects of painting can be hazardous if proper precautions are not taken. All safety procedures will be explained to you throughout the semester, and every consideration has been taken to create a safe environment for you to work in. If you are pregnant, or have other physical issues such as allergies to dust, respiratory issues, anything that I should be aware of, please inform me of this immediately, and we will work to make you safe and comfortable.
- Cleanliness - You are required to clean up your work area when you are finished working in the studio. Please put all of your tools, materials, etc. away in your lockers, and wipe down tables, easels and sinks. Do not leave paint or mineral spirits on the floor. **Close all jars containing mineral spirits and put them in the flame retardant cabinet in Studio A457. Put all rags with solvent on them on the red, flame retardant trash cans with lids.** If you have difficulty cleaning up after yourself, then you will receive a special tutorial on how to clean up after class.
- Work Removal - Finished works must be removed at the end of the semester. UTEP will not be responsible for work left in the studio. All materials, canvases, etc. will become the property of UTEP Painting after the clean-up deadline. Exceptions to this rule must be discussed with me.

Late Assignments, Make-up Work and Exams

Late and make-up work are only afforded in the case of an excused absence by arrangement and approval of the instructor.

Incompletes, Withdrawals, Pass/Fail

- Incompletes or “I” grades will be considered for students completing satisfactory or better work and having serious legitimate situations beyond their control requiring additional time to complete the course requirements. All “I” grades are at the discretion of the instructor and the approval of the Department Chair.
- Students hold full responsibility for withdrawing from this course if that procedure is elected. Withdrawals must be completed on or before the final date to drop a course with a “W”. Students missing this deadline will be issued a grade for the performance in the course.
- PTNG 4341 is a grade-based course and is not available for audit or pass/fail options.

University Policy Statements

Cheating/Plagiarism: Cheating is unethical and not acceptable. Plagiarism is using information or original wording in a paper without giving credit to the source of that information or wording: it is also not acceptable. Do not submit work under your name that you did not do yourself. You may not submit work for this class that you did for another class. If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing, you will be subject to disciplinary action, per UTEP catalog policy. Refer to <http://www.utep.edu/dos/acadintg.htm> for further information.

Disabilities: I will make any reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities, including learning disabilities. Please see me personally before or after class in the first two weeks or make an appointment, to discuss any special needs you might have. If you have a documented disability and require specific accommodations, you will need to contact the Disabled Student Services Office in the East Union Bldg., Room 106 within the first two weeks of classes. The Disabled Student Services Office can also be reached in the following ways:

Web: <http://www.utep.edu/dsso>

Phone: 915-747-5148