Directed Studio Problems

Course Information
Course Title: Directed Studio Problems
Course Section PNTG 5350
Course location: Fox Fine Arts, Room A455
Course Meeting Times: TBD

Instructor Contact Information
Instructor’s Name: Tom Birkner
Instructor’s Office Hours: T/TH 11:00am-12:pm and by appointment
Instructor’s email: tabirkner@utep.edu
Instructor’s Phone: 747-7839 (office)

Instructor’s Introduction
Tom Birkner, B.A. Rutgers University, M.F.A. The Pennsylvania State University, is an Assistant Professor of Art and a new member of the Department of Art faculty. Joining UTEP from the San Francisco Bay Area and a long-time resident of New York City, Tom previously taught at Drew University, Madison, NJ and at Parsons: The New School for Design in NY and Paris. He has been painting and exhibiting both nationally and internationally for 25 years.

Course Description

Directed Studio Problems is a graduate-level painting course. As the course title implies, a significant focus is on studio practice with a clear direction and intention. A professional level of studio production is expected. Critiques and conversations regarding the direction of work will be considered more like a dialogue between peers than the typical student/teacher dynamic. These conversations will be directed by a steadfast focus on how, exactly, the paintings in question answer the particular challenges of painting today.

Course Goals and Objectives

1. To unite meaning and painterly style into a powerful visual presence. 2. To direct the nuances of painting 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 paint like a pro.

Objectives toward these goals include:
- Articulating an objective yet heartfelt sense of core values
- Directing your painting skills toward the depiction of those values
- Questioning and defining painting’s contemporary role
- Pushing your paintings to a higher level of visual awesomeness
- Painting a series that is exhibition-ready
**Course Outcomes /Requirements/Assignments**

At the successful completion of this course, you will have the confidence and capability to overcome the constant complexities of painting, produce great work and believe in what you are doing and why.

**Course Requirements/Assignments**

An outline of the semester's output will be determined on the first day of the course. Work will be equivalent to the studio hours of any studio course. However, this is a minimum requirement. To excel, students should show a commitment that far surpasses undergraduate studio courses.

Thematic direction will be self-determined. Excellence, not grades, should be the primary concern, but here are the grading guidelines.

**Grading Guidelines**

**F** - Failing grades are given for required work that is not submitted and for incomplete final projects. Make-up work or completion of projects after missed due dates may be permitted only with the approval of the instructor.

**D** - Projects loosely adhere to the class learning outcomes and the minimum terms of assignments. Work receiving a “D” grade displays a clear lack of effort. These kinds of projects will also put forward obviously minimal efforts in exploring ideas and visual possibilities.

**C** - These are average projects. They will demonstrate some success in engaging with the assigned material or subject. The project will show that the student can identify and work with key concepts and has a nominal grasp of class instruction and basic painting principles. Projects will display some effort in the area of critical thinking through attempts at developing the final image. Typical of a C project, however, is the project not succeeding in pushing beyond average notions of effort and visual acuity.

**B** - These are very good projects. The B project does everything a C project does, but offers a completed image that is visually interesting and displays clear effort. What also distinguishes a B project is the student’s ability to offer a unique insight and ask questions of themselves. There will be several possibilities explored in preparatory studies that lead to a final outcome. These projects are well-executed, creative versions of the class assignment.

**A** - These are exceptionally good projects that go above and beyond the expectations and requirements set forth in the requirements. They demonstrate substantial effort and achievement in the areas of critical thinking and art making. They also demonstrate
considerable technical skill, originality and present something vital to the viewer. In short, the A project is art.

Course Policies

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

Attendance Policy:

• 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 to the learning environment.

• 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.

Course Participation:

• Participation in all discussions, critiques and class days is required for this course.

• Utilization of class time is required and necessary

• Projects executed solely out of class will not be accepted.

• Participation in the collaborative environment of the studio is essential to the successful completion of this course. It’s also more fun.

Class Conduct:

• 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. Please tell your friends, family members, partners, that they may see you before or after class time. You are expected to
remain in class at all times, and may not step-out to visit with guests during class. You will be held responsible for adhering to this policy, and I will give you one warning. After that, I will ask you to leave class and you will be counted absent for that class period.

• Cell phones and tablets
Please turn off your phones during class time. You will be asked to leave if your phone goes off during class, and be counted absent for that class period. No texting.

• Music
Ear phones are allowed while working, but not during class discussions. Music systems in the form of a boom box are not permitted in class. Anyone caught listening to Justin Bieber will be considered absent.

• Monitored Studio Hours
The studios will be open for your general use during posted monitored hours. A schedule will be posted during the first week of class. The UTEP police will have your name and student ID number, and if the studio is closed, you may call them up and they will come over to the studio and let you into the building/class rooms. The UTEP police number is 747-5611.

• Studio Safety
Some aspects of painting can be hazardous if proper precautions are not taken. The most important thing to remember is to keep your hands clean. 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 on the flame retardant cabinet in Studio A457. Put all rags with solvent on them in 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.

• Personal Safety
For both spirit and safety, it is highly recommended that you come to the studios with others from your class. If you must work alone, late at night, please be sure to let someone know where you are, and please keep a cell phone with you. If you feel unsafe for any reason, you should call the UTEP police immediately (747-5611). If you would like an escort to your car at night, please call the UTEP Police department, and they
should accommodate your needs. Please inform me if there is a problem, and I will address it immediately with the proper authorities.

- Work Removal
Finished works must be removed by the date set by the instructor of this course. All works left in the studio after this date will be disposed of. All materials, canvases, etc. will become the property of the studio after this date.

Late Assignments, Make-up Work and Exams
Late assignments, make-up work, and make-up exams are only afforded in the case of an excused absence by arrangement and approval of the instructor.

Incomplete s, 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 4331 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