

JIM MOTT – TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I approach teaching and art with the same essential aim: responsive engagement. In painting a landscape, for example, I may start with a vision, a guiding sense of the desired outcome. But – once the painting starts – the subject, the materials, and my own informed sensibility become equally important components in an open, interactive process. Interactivity is what generates meaning. And the balanced, respectful interaction that I (very broadly) define as dialogue is where I find the most meaning in life, or in art-making, or in a class.

The dialogue in a classroom may be more one-way. I usually expect to do most of the talking, I trust I have something to say that will expand the students' understanding and sense of the possible, I have experience and skill to share and a plan for encouraging students toward a useful set of skills and experiences of their own. But responsive engagement is the key value that I do my best to embody and model; it's what I most hope to encourage in my students. My courses are structured to lead effectively toward specific ends, but to some extent the ends are just the means for drawing students along in the process of self-development. I maintain receptivity and openness. Each student's response or initiative, in the classroom or in an assignment or personal project, is invited not only as a contribution to the class dynamic but as part of a much larger conversation, one that will be enriched by each student's background, personality and outlook

I bring sensitivity, intelligence, and empathy to my interactions with students. I'm happy to work extensively one-on-one or spend time outside class hours when that proves useful or necessary. I also have a breadth of knowledge – from cultural history and natural history to writing poetry and writing html code – and experience to draw on to help me connect with their lives and wherever they may be going with their studies. But the most important thing I can bring to the classroom may be my continued openness to the challenge, mystery and adventure of both art and life.

Note: Because my formal teaching experience is limited, I wish to address that issue. First, although the path I've followed has led me primarily outside academia I have tended to see it as a complementary path. And I think my work makes the fullest sense within the academic context, where it can become part of a creative interdisciplinary conversation. Thus I welcome the chance to participate more fully in that setting. Meanwhile, I have been a guest speaker in college classrooms on a fairly regular basis, at the invitation of art, philosophy, and communications departments. I also give public workshops and demos, radio and television interviews.

While earning my MFA I served as TA for introductory drawing and instructor of record for intermediate drawing. I devised a well-structured syllabus, was devoted to my students' development, and earned high ratings (which I could probably track down if necessary). Since then I have learned much more about my craft and about people, regularly interacting with individuals and groups from a wide range of backgrounds as part of my socially-engaged art projects and general civic activity. I have not, however, maintained a portfolio of student work and cannot therefore show one.