

## Three-Dimensional Design – Intro to Sculptural Form and Space – Syllabus

**Note:** This syllabus and the handouts you will receive are in lieu of a required text, and you'll use them throughout the semester. The syllabus contains essential fundamental information and the class schedule. We will try to adhere closely to the schedule, and you are responsible for meeting all specified requirements and due dates unless I notify you in class or via email of a change. As you review this syllabus, consult the design vocabulary handout for definitions of terms. The same vocabulary can be found on my website.

### Course Objectives - To build in the student:

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- A comfortable familiarity with sculptural form and space.
- An understanding of three-dimensional design theory, enabling manipulation of the formal elements and attributes of three-dimensional work to accomplish individual objectives.
- An increasing familiarity with the language of design in the fine arts.
- Greater awareness of sculptural form in art around the world through history.
- Enhanced confidence in creative visualization and self-expression in visual art.

### Course Description

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The 3-D Design course is an introduction to sculpture focusing on exploration of three-dimensional form and space. We will investigate how the attributes of 3-D form and surface affect us objectively and subjectively, and how we manipulate sculptural form and space to achieve individual goals as artists.

Today the word *art* encompasses a wide range of fine and applied arts, with crossover between media that were traditionally separate. Distinctions are blurred between architecture, furniture, photography, sculpture, painting, print media, functional craft, digital media, video games, product design, political propaganda, advertising, performance art, theater, music, dance, and social media. Such a broad spectrum of choices presents special challenges while offering a universe of possibility where media intersect, inform, and energize each other, and where there is no clearly defined category of *art media*. That can seem daunting, but we must avoid ever restricting or defining what art can be, and instead remain open to infinite possibility. When you define what something is, you limit what it can be, and we must avoid that in art. Artists today have the freedom to use whatever media and materials are most appropriate to their concept and intent.

The scope of this course may surprise you. We encounter designed sculptural form every day, in architecture, appliances, utensils, furniture, jewelry, shoes, automobiles, and bathroom fixtures, and naturally-occurring sculptural form in fruits, vegetables, flowers, rocks, animals, people, clouds, and trees, so you have been looking at sculpture all your life. Most of those things become familiar and we take their physical attributes for granted and don't spend much time thinking about sculptural form when we see them. But the design theory and language that explain human perceptual responses to form and imagery in art will clarify our understanding of all form and imagery we encounter in our surroundings every day. In other words, our exploration of three-dimensional form and space in art will enhance your perception of the physical world - the way you see things - and this heightened perception will last for the rest of your life.

Two-dimensional design deals with illusion - the perception of visual space created on a flat picture plane like a drawing, painting, or photograph. 2-D art is isolated from its surroundings by the picture plane and often a physical frame. If we choose to ignore a 2-D artwork, it becomes part of the wall. 3-D artwork extends into its environment, interacting with and activating the surrounding space in ways we cannot ignore. When we find ourselves in the same physical space as a 3-D artwork, we must negotiate our way around it and are forced to confront it in more direct terms, and this affects our perception in ways you may not have considered.

Through a series of assigned projects we will investigate the physical attributes of 3-D form and space. The primary elements or building blocks are **line, plane, volume** and **space**. We will deal with surface, which involves attributes common to both 2-D and 3-D design, including **pattern, texture, color**, and **value**. In arranging and organizing these building blocks and attributes we will encounter the physical phenomena of 3-D form: **mass, balance, potential energy, visual radiation, movement, gesture**, and **time**. We will use unifying principles common to all design, including **proportion, emphasis, variety, repetition**, and **rhythm**.

In art and design we strive for overall **unity**. In every design venture we seek to create a unified composition, but this concept is easily misunderstood. Before the 20th century, most works of art were carefully balanced and visually ordered to achieve a unified, aesthetically-pleasing composition. That's still a noble venture, but the prime objective of art must always be to communicate the intent or message of the artist, whether or not the result is aesthetically pleasing or visually balanced in a classical sense. An artist's concept may require a chaotic, off-balance assault on the senses designed to confuse or even offend. If all aspects of the work function towards that goal, then the work is unified.

### **Individual Interpretation of the Assignments**

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***Each assignment involves specific concepts and guidelines that must be incorporated into the finished piece.*** At the same time, art and design generally suffer from absolute rules. There is never a single clear-cut solution to any design problem. Always remain open to possibilities outside the accepted or expected solution, and look within yourself for new ideas and creative solutions. I strongly encourage you to personalize your work with original content. Think about your own interests and concerns, likes and dislikes, contemporary events, and your background and family history. When appropriate, allow this information to impact your work. That's how we come up with original style and direction. At the same time, ***make sure you carefully incorporate the concepts and guidelines specified in each assignment handout.***

### **Formulating a Concept/Creating an Object**

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The studio artist or craftsperson starts with a concept or idea, and then figures out how to create something physical or digital as a visible manifestation of that concept or idea – a work of art that can be shared with others. In this class, the concept or idea may be as simple as a particular principle of 3-D design addressed in an assignment handout, and your solution might be a completely abstract sculpture exploring that principle. In other cases, you might decide to incorporate personal content and concerns. Either is valid, but this course will be a lot more interesting for all of us if you design your projects to incorporate concepts or ideas that are personally important to you. In all cases, try to think of the unexpected. The very best artwork always catches a bit off-guard, surprising us with something new and unusual.

The terms **conceptual art** and **conceptual artist** are ubiquitous in contemporary art, referring to work where the intellectual concept driving the work is considered to be far more important than the physical creation of a traditional art object. A conceptual sculpture might be an enormous pile of redwood sawdust addressing the decimation of America's old-growth forests. That won't work in this course. We have to maintain a realistic balance between concept and object, because we are studying the intentional and purposeful design of 3-D form and space. In other words, whenever possible come up with a concept that is meaningful to you, but always remember that you will be graded on design considerations specified in assignment handouts and incorporated into the physical artwork resulting from your concept.

### **Rendering, Realism, and Abstraction**

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This course has little to do with ability in pictorial rendering, although you will submit preparatory sketches for most assignments. Rendering refers to the act of drawing or sculpting where you accurately copy what you see before you. Rendering is a valuable skill, but in itself has little to do with the potential for effective art-making. All young children make art freely and openly, abstracting what they see around them. Unfortunately, well-meaning but misinformed teachers, parents, and peers usually direct kids towards pictorial realism, which frustrates the artistic inclination in most of us. There's nothing wrong with realistic representation, but it's just one of many choices in art. Personal artistic inclination should evolve naturally with a minimum of external interference and imposed ideology. When it does, the artist finds his or her way honestly and intuitively, and the result is far greater personal commitment to a stronger body of work.

Consider that realistic pictorial rendering is the least original and often least effective way to interpret your surroundings in art. We're interested in what you think and feel about the world around you. Effectively accomplishing that in art depends on your willingness to be steered by personal psychological and emotional content and the knowledge and experience that belong to you alone. Those things makes you an individual, and they must guide any development of original style and direction.

Artists always respond to the time and place in which they live, reacting to both the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. Much of our world is positive and uplifting, but artists tend to address and interpret the things that concern them. Edgar Degas was attracted to the elegance of form in ballet dancers and represented them realistically in bronze. Anselm Kiefer addresses the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust in completely abstracted mixed-media assemblage sculptures that are incredibly powerful. In the contemporary world we are surrounded by much that is chaotic, disturbing, violent, and/or frightening, and many artists choose to address these difficult subjects. Is realistic rendering really the best way to capture and communicate anger, horror, violence, or fear?

In this class, the attempt to fulfill assignments while adhering to realistic representation will present major challenges that are best avoided. When the primary objective is exploration of 3-D form and space, realistic representation can actually be a serious handicap. We can discuss the concepts and principles of 3-D design in reference to any 3-D object, whether abstract or realistic. But when proactively exploring the principles of 3-D form and space as a learning experience, it becomes a significant challenge to impose those principles upon a realistic subject and still end up with anything interesting or original. Working with abstract sculpture gives complete freedom to explore the

phenomena of 3-D form and space, for the simple reason that you can make form and materials do whatever you want in service of the particular concepts and principles specified in an assignment without concern for pictorial accuracy. Remember that abstraction never precludes incorporating specific meaning or message. In fact, meaning and message communicated through abstraction are often far more experientially powerful than through realistic representation, as in the work of Anselm Kiefer. Realism is what we see around us all the time, whereas abstraction explores new territory invented in the artist's imagination. You're all capable of making adventurous and expressive abstract compositions, and the willingness to do so will make you a far better artist and designer, whether your ultimate objective as an artist is realism or abstraction.

### **Course Structure**

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Class time will be used for slide lectures, discussions, and critiques, and all projects will be completed outside of class. With the kind of mixed-media sculptural work we'll be doing, it makes no sense to transport your work back and forth to the studio any more than necessary. With that in mind, there will be times when I dismiss class early, sending you off to work on your own, with the understanding that you will use that time productively on projects for this class. When I do dismiss class early, I will always be available during the remaining class time to discuss your work, answer questions, and provide assistance. There may be times when you wish to bring in component parts and complete a project here in the design rooms. In that event the work can be stored in the design closet until the due date.

Every assignment requires that you obtain appropriate materials, and in most projects I allow a lot of flexibility to choose materials. Always think about the expressive quality of materials, and use the ones most appropriate to your concept or intent. You'll save a lot of money by using found materials, and that requires some searching and scrounging. Start accumulating materials right away.

### **Course Handouts**

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Purchase a good pocket folder to retain handouts for reference throughout the semester. This syllabus discusses many concepts basic to 3-D design, and a vocabulary list will help you become more fluent in the language of art and design. I will be listening for your use of this language when we talk about the projects and critique your work. Other handouts will discuss additional concepts of form and space, and will provide information about materials. For each project I will give out two handouts, one explaining 3-D phenomena and theory pertinent to the project, and the other clarifying the primary expectations.

### **Sketchbook and Preparatory Drawings**

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Purchase a sketchbook approximately 8" by 10", several drawing pencils, and a good plastic eraser. Most projects require preparatory sketches that will impact the assignment grade. These do not have to be great drawings, but must be done carefully as part of the creative process, and each image must be large and bold enough to be seen clearly when pinned to the wall. Each drawing must be isolated in uncluttered open space on the page, avoiding visual conflict with other images. Do not use lined paper and don't put more than two drawings on a single page. When it is appropriate for a particular assignment, you are welcome to produce digital drawings if you have the skills to do this effectively. With each new assignments we'll pin up the drawings and discuss them. For the first assignment I will be flexible if some drawings do not meet the above requirements, and I'll use it as an opportunity to stress those requirements. For all other assignments, drawings will not be accepted unless they meet these simple, minimal requirements.

In your day-to-day travels and activities keep your eyes open for interesting arrangements of visual form, and record them with your phone, camera, or sketch pad. They will appear in unexpected places - architectural details, landforms, construction or demolition sites, store displays, machinery, industrial structures, debris piles, anything that strikes you as interesting or unusual 3-D form. This archive of images can provide valuable visual information as you develop ideas for assigned projects.

### **Group Critiques**

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On the due date for each project we will have a group critique to evaluate your work. You've probably been involved in studio critiques, but perhaps not to the degree you'll experience in this course. Our purpose is to explore and understand the concepts and theories of 3-D design and to become more comfortable with the spoken language of art and design. In the critique we talk about what works and what doesn't both in terms of the specified requirements and in terms of overall success as a work of art. Your grade on each project will be based on, in order of priority, 1) effectiveness of the work in terms of assignment requirements, 2) effectiveness as a work of art, 3) whether and how much your project inspires your classmates to talk about it, and 4) your proactive participation in critiquing the work of other students. The critique represents an essential opportunity for me to gauge what you are learning, not only in the work itself, but in what you have to say about your work and the work of other students.

When we discuss the effectiveness of your work, the physical object serves as prop and catalyst for the important discussion and learning that takes place during critique. The sculptures you create provide the opportunity to talk about design issues relative to each piece. With that in mind, it is your responsibility to contribute to every critique in a constructive and proactive way and to listen carefully when others comment on your work. If necessary, I will call on you to draw you into the discussion, but it's far better if you participate voluntarily. Please approach this as an opportunity to voice your opinions and learn from others. You have nothing to fear except the outcome if you don't participate.

Whenever you comment on someone's work, try to offer useful information. Give them somewhere to go based on your comments. It does little good to say "this piece is interesting," or "I really like this work," unless you explain why. What makes the piece effective? What are its strengths and/or weaknesses? If you are critical of some aspect of the piece, explain why, and make suggestions about what might be done to improve the work. It's perfectly appropriate to say that some part of a piece or the whole piece doesn't work for you, but only if you can explain the reasons for your criticism. Before you criticize or compliment a piece, make sure you can articulate your reasons.

### **Contacting You via Email**

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I will regularly send messages via email. It is your responsibility to check email frequently. Make sure the email address you provided is one you are checking. You are responsible for all information sent to you via email.

### **Use of Electronic Devices During Class**

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No texting or cell usage during class. Do not answer phone calls during class under any circumstances unless you are expecting a genuinely important call, and in that event leave the room before answering.

## **Expectations and Grading**

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Prompt and regular attendance is mandatory. Discussions or critiques will begin at the start of class. Be on time and don't leave early without permission. If illness or other serious problems cause you to miss class, get in touch with me and we will do our best to work around it.

As mentioned, you are strongly encourage to seek interesting and unusual interpretations of the assignments and incorporate individual content. Originality will be generously rewarded, but your first priority must always be the careful and thoughtful incorporation of the specific concepts and principles stated in the assignment handout. In other words, a wonderful sculpture filled with expressive meaning and realized in brilliant fashion will impress us all, but if it doesn't address the concepts and principles identified in the particular assignment handout, it will receive no credit.

Due dates are specified on each assignment handout and you must be present in person at the critique with your completed assignment on the specified date except in the event of documented illness or emergency. An assignment which receives your best effort and is here on time may be improved or redone for a higher grade. Late assignments without a satisfactory reason drop one letter grade for each class meeting they are late and cannot be redone for an improved grade.

80% of the final grade is based on completion of assigned projects (including preparatory drawings), done with originality and good craftsmanship, purposefully addressing concepts/guidelines specified in the assignment handout, utilizing information from class handouts and discussions. 20% of your grade is determined by involvement in critiques/discussions, and this includes use of the language of art and design. The above percentages are flexible, at my discretion, in that frequent lateness, excessive absence, or poor class participation will seriously affect your grade, regardless of quantity and quality of work. I will take roll, and after three unexcused absences each additional unexcused absence will result in one letter grade reduction in your final grade.

There are seven projects, but essentially there are nine grades, because the seventh and final project counts double, and you are also graded for your level of participation during critiques. The final grade is normally determined by the average of all your project grades, but an improvement in grades through the semester will raise your final grade above your average, and of course the opposite is true as well.

### **Assignment of Grades** - Project grades will be assigned as follows:

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- "A" - Exceptional work, addressing all expectations specified in the assignment, showing very high standards of craftsmanship and finish and original/innovative design features. Student actively participated in critiques.
- "B" - Good work, addressing all expectations specified, showing good craftsmanship and finish, but with less-imaginative design and/or student's participation in critique was only adequate.
- "C" - Adequate work addressing all expectations specified, but with unimaginative design, and/or marginal craftsmanship, and/or student's participation in critique was marginal.
- "D" - Work only partially addresses the expectations specified, and/or design and craftsmanship are careless, and/or student's participation in critique was inadequate.
- "F" - Work fails to address expectations specified, and/or design and craftsmanship are very careless, and/or work is only partially completed, and/or student's participation in critique was inadequate.

## Required Materials

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Each assignment handout suggests possible materials. Below is a list of required tools and materials, and after that a list of local vendors. Other materials will be required as the semester progresses. You are encouraged to be inventive. You'll have abundant opportunities to use found objects, so review the handout on mixed-media and start collecting 2-D and 3-D found materials that appeal to you. In some cases, important contemporary sculptural works have been inspired by interesting found objects or materials, sometimes used in quantity. If you come up with a hoard of something good, bring it in and we'll stockpile it for everyone's use. Also, a good way to change the surface of a material like Styrofoam is to cover with found color, pattern, or narrative taken from newspapers, magazines, wrapping paper, wallpaper, etc., so collect those as well.

- Sketchbook (drawing paper) approximately 8" by 10"
- Pocket folder or 3-ring folder for syllabus and other handouts
- Drawing pencils, sharpener, gum eraser, ruler, scissors, compass
- Razor knife, supply of blades
- Pliers with wire cutters
- Hot glue gun and supply of glue sticks
- White glue
- 1 roll each: masking tape, cloth-base duct tape, black plastic electrical tape
- Box of toothpicks
- Small roll each of approximately 16 ga. and 24 ga. steel wire (Potter's Ace Home Center, DeKalb True Value, Lowe's, Wal-Mart)
- 1-quart tub of vinyl-base spackling compound - not dry-mix spackle (Lowe's, DeKalb True Value, Potter's Ace Home Center)
- As needed: paint, matboard, foam-core, construction foam-board, dowels, wood scraps, string, rope, other materials, found objects (Builder's Hardware, Hobby-Lobby, DeKalb True Value, Potter's Ace Home Center, Lowe's, Wal-Mart, etc.)

## Course Schedule – 3-D Design

This is an approximate schedule, and there may be minor changes as the semester proceeds.

**First Week** - Introduction to the course, discussion of syllabus. Slide discussion – “Introduction to 3-D Form – Coming off the Picture Plane - Positive and Negative Space” – assignment #1 – “Form and Space” – sculptural assemblage addressing positive and negative space in both two and three dimensions. Work on drawings for #1-F&S. Discuss drawings for #1-F&S. Discussion of info handouts. Work on #1-F&S.

**Second Week** – Slide discussion “Rhythm and Repetition” - assignment #2 – “Rhythm and Repetition” - assemblage sculpture emphasizing these concepts. Discussion of sculptural form in space. Work on drawings for #2-R&R. Discuss drawings for #2-R&R. Work on #1-F&S, #2-R&R

**Third Week** – #1-F&S due. Work on #2-R&R

**Fourth Week** – Continue critique of #1-F&S. Slide discussion “Visual Radiation and Gesture” – assignment #3 – “Radiation and Gesture” – sculpture emphasizing these concepts. Work on #2-R&R, drawings for #3-R&G.

**Fifth Week** – **#2-R&R due**. Discuss drawings for #3-R&G sculpture. Continue critique of #2-R&R. Work on #3-R&G.

**Sixth Week** – Slide discussion "Mass, Balance, and Gravity" - assignment #4 – “Mass, Balance, and Gravity” – sculpture emphasizing these concepts. Work on drawings for #4-MB&G. Discuss drawings for #4-MB&G. Work on #3-R&G and #4-MB&G.

**Seventh Week** – **#3-R&G due**. Continue critique of #3-R&G. Work on #4-MB&G.

**Eighth Week** – Slide discussion – “Light, Motion, and Time in Art and Design” – assignment #5 - "Light, Motion, and Time" – sculpture exploring static/dynamic form in space through the use of light motion, and/or passage of time. Work on #4-MB&G and drawings for #5-LM&T.

**Ninth Week** – **#4-MB&G due**. Discuss drawings/concepts for #5-LM&T. Continue critique of #4-MB&G. Work on #5-LM&T.

**Tenth Week** – Slide discussion on "Narrative Collections" – assignment. #6 - "Narrative Collection" - sculptural presentation of narrative collection of objects. Work on #5-LM&T, proposals for #6-NC.

**Eleventh Week** – **#5-LM&T due**. **Proposals for #6-NC due via email**. Slide discussion "Installation Art" - assignment #7 - final project - "Sculptural Installation" Continue critique of #5-L&M. Work on #6-NC, concepts for #7-SI.

**Twelfth Week** – Discuss concepts for #7-SI. Work on #6-NC and #7-SI. **Proposal for #7-SI due via email**.

**Thirteenth Week** – **#6-NC due**. Further discussion of concepts for #7-SI. Continue critique of #6-NC. Work on #7-SI.

**Fourteenth Week** – Progress reports on #7-SI. Work on #7-SI.

**Fifteenth Week** – **#7-SI due – Critique of Sculptural Installations, Rain or Shine!**