

The Fall of the Studio (And Others)

These exercises have been recommended for Art Students studying at Bachelor level

The Fall of the Studio

Meet the students outside their studios for a full day and produce a work on site. For example: meet the students at the Botanic Gardens, arrange a meeting with the gardener and make a work about the politics of caring and dedication; meet the students in a museum and make a work about participation and display; meet the students in a library and make a work about systems of knowledge and associative thought...the options are endless. In my experience, it is important to focus for a whole day on the activity, having the students meet several times during the day to talk about their methodologies and strategies for the work they are producing. You might hear a student complaining: "But how can I make a work with only a pen and paper?"; or, "How to make a work only in a day?". Help them by introducing them to different artistic practices and getting them to question their participation in every context they are in.

You can also use this exercise in a studio visit scenario. If a student has been working more in the library, in the school's cafeteria, or in the public sphere, propose to meet them there rather than meeting them in the studio.

*Thanks to Edward Clydesdale Thomson for sharing his experiences with gardeners and art students

Your Work is so 15th Century!

Tell a student his/her work is so 15th century and ask the student to research what that means. My experience is that students can easily relate contemporary issues to contemporary artists and usually have a broad perspective. What lacks is an awareness that similar issues have been in discussion for much longer. This exercise is to help the student connect and feel empathetic to different artistic practices of different eras that share preoccupations and similarities with contemporary issues and practices. The thought of one artist is the foundation of another artist.

Let's Have Breakfast Together

This exercise is completely different from "The Fall of the Studio", but the combination of both is all the more productive. Start the day by inviting all students to have breakfast together in a shared space in the studio. Talk about the plans for the day, what they are going to do, projects they are going to research or work on. Have several meetings during the day, gathering the group to discuss individual developments.

It All Looks Like Ikea Stuff to Me

If a student is shocked after seeing an exhibition about the ZERO movement, or work by Liam Gillick, and says, pejoratively, “it all looks like Ikea stuff”, make him/her write a report or have a group discussion with other students about it. Usually the most “shocking” exhibitions the student sees are the ones that will challenge him/her the most. Even if the practices of the artist and the student are entirely different (my experience says they are not), discussion is always a good ground for the development of thinking and critique.

Drawing Lessons

If you are inviting students for an observational drawing lesson outside the school, ask the students not only to draw but also to write about what they see and hear, the ambiance of the place, or the conversations of people passing by. This was one of the most productive exercises for me when I was a student, and one that I constantly use in my own artistic practice.

Group Critiques

Invite a student to make an exhibition in the Project Room, and gather the whole group of students for viewing and discussion of the work. This should take around 1 hour 45 minutes. Start first by asking the students about what they see, the formal elements of the exhibitions, the context, and then move towards how the work is performing, what is it communicating. The student presenting the work should only take notes and never intervene in the conversation. After the session, ask the student to write a report on the comments and discussion topics of the group critique.