Teaching Philosophy

Animation as Contemporary Fine Art Practice

I approach the teaching of animation as a rigorous contemporary fine art practice. My pedagogy is rooted in the understanding that animation's lineage predates cinema, originating with early artists who sought to introduce time into traditional media. I teach through clear sequences of foundational skills that position animation as a medium for investigating the same conceptual territories as any other fine art discipline. This establishes a shared foundation from which students move beyond technical benchmarks into deeper creative risk.

Contemporary knowledge today is often oral and decentralized. Many students unfortunately believe that high follower numbers = expertise. This is one reason they arrive so confused about what art is, they don't encounter fine art on their timeline even if they believe they are surround by it. At the beginning of the course, students have to be exposed to the contemporary art world through trips to the museum and a list of space online where they can educate themselves. This is why I developed the Research Resources document. It contains lists of artists using animations, podcasts, interviews, magazines, substacks, online archives, informal publishing, and pdfs. They write reviews of animations they admire and reject, and class discussions foreground differing interpretations and debate. It is a living document that I add to that they use for homework, responses and project research. I also make intro assignments when I see a trend in student misconceptions around topics like AI, fan art, the difference between art and commercial art, animation and commercial animation and the "standard" human body.

Animation in my courses does not belong exclusively in the computer lab. I emphasize mobility because changing environments alters how students observe, gather material, and consider audience. I secured thirty iPads for the program so students could work across spaces including galleries and art institutions. Students collect images, audio, text, and scans from their surroundings and build work from these materials.

I design creative projects that resist visual uniformity, prioritizing artistic agency over displays of "traditional" animation techniques. While I do teach core fundamentals including frame by frame, pose to pose, timing, spacing, keyframes, rigging, rotoscoping, and composition across 2D, 3D,

and physical environments, I do not present these as neutral rules or singular paths. Questions such as whether an animatic is required are secondary. The central concern is why a student is making a particular type of work, what in their research and concepts leads them to specific material or software choices, and whether other structures might better serve the idea.

In all of my courses, I use a repeated structure of short skill-based exercises, typically one to two weeks, followed by longer three to four week projects that allow students to explore creative processes and platforms for animation such as abstraction, video-based, net art, world building and music inspired. I change projects often depending on what I'm seeing happen in the contemporary art world. Students create their own concepts through research and ideation exercises. Homework is built around readings from our textbook, The Animation Studies Reader, which contains essays on animation theory and criticism. Critiques happen after the project is due and the cycle repeats 3-4 times per semester. Students are taught to give direct, specific, and useful feedback. Exposure to live critiques through Loop Art Critique reinforces the seriousness of sustained critique within artistic practice.

For Animation 4: Effects, the Final Project is a group of project called "Indie Studios" Concepts are pitched to me, the "Producer" and then groups are formed based on student preferences and who I feel would work well together, then the groups work like. Independent studios. This assignment consistently produces some of the strongest work and reinforces collaboration, authorship, and responsibility. Students tell me that they felt they learned the most during this assignment.

In all of my classes, I focus on building a studio culture where students learn by teaching and exchanging methods with one another. Peer learning allows skills to circulate quickly and reflects how artists develop within professional communities. Tech Tutorials (the "tech" stands for Technique and Technology) are central to my classes, with students teaching one another specific tools or techniques. This is supported by interdisciplinary collaborations, including projects with FIU Design faculty and ongoing work with Professor Jacob Sudol's Experimental Music class. In the future at FIU, with less classes to teach, I hope to create more collaborations including those with Architecture, Mathematics, the Sciences and more.

Self directed learning is fundamental to my teaching. I emphasize learning how to learn, showing students where to find documentation, submit bug reports, and engage with forums, Discord channels, and support networks. I minimize step by step tutorials and focus class time on concept and critique. Students are expected to attempt learning tools independently before seeking assistance. I summarize this approach with the motto LNSF Learn New Software Fast. In 3D courses, I selected Blender because its open source structure allows artists to alter tools for their own purposes.