RITES OF PASSAGE INTO CONTEMPORARY ART
PRACTICE 2011 ARTS-UG 1420

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class meets Thursdays 330-610

Ruhe’s office hours Thursdays 1:00-3:00 in room 431Gallatin
office phone 212 992 7772 I have a mail drop off at 4th floor
Gallatin across from reception.

1. September 8: Charette with circle discussion. In what way are
you an artist? What is genius? What is art, Ritual, Symbol, the
Sacred, and Sign. We establish normative posits to launch our
ritual journey.

Draw a circle. Later we meet your ‘other’ with your left hand at
work. The liminal journal dream book is announced. The Course
overview outlines techniques of ecstasy, “ground zero” in collages,
a step-in technique of the Abstract Expressionists, Surrealist Free
Association in Automatic Writing, and Frottages.

The ritual process has a liminal middle phase. Both shaman and
artist are the lightning rod of culture. The liminal at art is a
threshold experience engaging anti structure, chance, accident, and
imbalance; and where momentarily Process trumps Product. An
artifact is after the fact. How do we paint in the moment.

***materials you buy at Utrecht art store at 4th Ave and 12th
street: or at Pearl Paint on Canal at Mercer, or NYCentral on 10th
and 3rd ave. ::: two sketch pads 9x12 inches, 4B pencil, chinese
Scissors or exacto knife. two soft charcoal sticks. two 18 inch
foamboards. And any other materials you yearn to muck with.

Handouts ..excerpts from:; 5. joan Halifax  shamanic voices


7. ”liminal to liminoid” chapter in *From Ritual to Theater* by Turner. 8. Carl Jung’s Red Book.

**read Kahlo** throughout the whole course and figure her methods into your own liminal journal.

**Take notes** during class, typically. Ruhe’s discourses are in the liminal spirit of this course, reflecting ten years of research on his doctoral thesis on shamanism and art. Assiduously read texts at precisely the time they are due. Watch out for that pop quiz. And being called on. This is Gallatin and you are the top student who got here to engage in philosophy in art.

2. September 15;  A - read Turner’s *Ritual Process* Intro and Chapters 3, 4 and 5, and begin your liminal journal, recording your dreams and musings each morning as you awake, forming ideas situating you in the art world and in the world of becoming.

B-**due:** and write a two page poetical essay on your ‘two circles’. Write about one circle from your linear logical scientific voice, and the second circle from the ‘other’ poetical voice.  

C- **BRING MATERIALS:** Gather lots of weird and ordinary scraps-magazine cutouts, for today’s collage work: scissors, glue sticks, and an illustration board. We critique chaos theory, the method in the madness.

B-. Liminal journal writing to the drumbeat for 15 minutes of guided imagery. Find just one sentence that grabs you and rewrite to expand that sentence for five minutes. Without pause write from your critics voice for five minutes, then cross it out!

C-. Circle discussion session about the liminal in your life, your clash of contraries, extreme ironies, and threshold dramas.

Class number 3. On Sept 22. Circle Seminar on the nature of art and the sacred, art and healing, art out of the box, art and narrative, art and the sublime, art and outrage, art and politics. If art is a box, what are you going to put in it?

DUE: read handout ‘from liminal to liminoid’ and be ready to share a liminoid moment or project in your life. BE PREPARED TO Discuss Turner on liminal. how could a primitive ritual process relate to contemporary art making? When did van Gennep’s ‘ritual process’ happen in your own experience? Ever joined a sorority?

4. September 29. **due:** write a four page essay on a ‘threshold drama’ from your life. Where you changed or changed someone, evolved, snagged, were surprised. Reread and reflect on the experience to discover the underbelly of the tale, what really happened. Depth psychology. We pair up for feedback.

How does collaging open a trap door of free associations? The historical advent in 1905 of collages and psychotherapy, no coincidence. Die Brucke art group is discussed.
5. October 6. **Due:** Read Chipp pp. 155-174 by Kandinsky and Kokoshka, and 364-395. Rorschatz inkblot readings in groups of three. What then is the role of the viewer of art? Does s/he contribute to the meaning of the artwork? Is it through universals, archetypes, or through something else. Recall Kandinsky. What is the vision quest. When is it philosophy?

exercise: ten speed runs, drawing objects in the room. how does speed affect your art style. shorthand is compression as genius.

6. October 13. **Due:** read all of Kahlo Diary keying on 25-29 and scan her entire diary art pictures to embrace her methodology as your own in your ongoing liminal journal. At home, paste together a very simple collages in your journal. Extremely simple. See how you can get an ‘edge’ a ‘conflict’ a ‘question’ with the simplest juxtaposition. Sharing with the class 5 pages of your liminal journal you paint/write just now, that directly reflect, emulate, resonate with the Kahlo method of words lists, historical contexting of you in the political ambient or in the cosmic flow, the zeitgeist. **DUE:** Offer the class an unclassified excerpt from your liminal journal as above.

7. October 20, Read Intro and scan then slowly absorb your favorite chapters of all of WHAT PAINTING IS, ART AS ALCHEMY, for discussion! Doodle by the telephone as you talk.

SLIDES OF 20,000 YEARS OF ARTHISTORY. Where does the unconscious upwell within the pictures. How did that happen. And why. An overview with a single frame of reference: liminalia. What non ordinary reality is lurking in the paintings. Art history you were never taught in school. This is a liminal shout down. Come with lungs. And don’t think. Just react. Ruhe can probably answer your basic arthistory questions about the artists and artworks, having taught 16,000 years of art history at the USNA, but this exercise is an attempt to place you within the art work
subliminally.

8. October 27 ***the class moves to a guerrilla location at **Theatre for the New City**, 1st Ave at 10th St.

**due:** three page essay on ‘freedom versus control in artmaking’: exploring the relevance of this paradox in creativity, yours and others. Chipp readings inform your essay, use quotes! Go to the book index and find your favorite painters and read their statements. Scan Chipp to see which artist struck the right balance between freedom and control and what they said about it. Realize that you are not alone, the art revolution is us. Rushed essays with typos and garbled syntax will be returned for revisions, forming a compelling argument and driving it home artfully will be appreciated. So an arts workshop nonetheless, at Gallatin, engages proper scholarship and disciplined writing. Be brilliant, since you are.

We break up into threes, and body trace 4x4 foot paintings that segue into abstraction and utilize a great deal of paint. These are Halloween props for TNC’s upcoming festival. Wear awful clothes.

9. November 3. **Due:** Independently Research in Bobst Library your own personal liminal question for a 3 page paper on “the liminal in art.” Look up your topic under the theme of your choice. Ex: ‘grotesque’ ‘child art’ ‘psychodynamics of art therapy’ ‘chance in the dance of Merce Cunningham’, ‘taboo’, ‘amulets and talismans’, ‘african fetish dolls.’ ‘fluxus’ ‘Joseph Beuys’. You name it. Even a library has an underbelly. **your ability to engage in primary research material outside of my textbooks, is liberating and a premonition of your Masters and Doctoral research, and connects you to libraries as a life style choice for the rest of your life. Please deeply consider a theme that is burning for you. This research project can be quite compelling and life
changing, if you strike a nerve within yourself. Tracey Emin, Marina Abramovic, Joan Mitchell, Nicole Eisenmann, Sue Coe, are possible subjects for your research, adopt them!

Cadavres Exquises game of the Surrealists: we make a drawing and fold it to hide it and pass it on to the next- head, then body, then legs, with two lines below as a clue to the width. We will write a haiku poetry chain in like fashion. Synergies are in the air.

**Due:** More dream book revelations from your luminal journals, please share.

10. November 10. **Due:** READ ‘SHAMANISM’ ((you’ll have to start at the beginning of the school year and gulp down as much each week as possible. Really get one chapter you prefer nailed down, for a Group discussion and crit of the Met experience. Can we reach back to prehistory in dialogue with African fetish dolls? What psychic realities are the fetishes addressing, what commonalities.

CAN WE BORROW ARCHETYPICAL THEMES OF THESE RITUAL OBJECTS IN OUR OWN RITUAL INVENTION. CAN WE REINVENT A PERSONALIZED SMALL MOMENT OF RITUAL FOR NEXT WEEK BASED ON HARNER’S THINKING?

Step-in 8x8 foot group mural marathon. Dress in your worst clothes. We strategize an approach to gang painting an abstract mural. What rough design opens us up to painting in the moment. Attack. Fall back to ‘time two’ analysis. Reenter the painting boldly. ‘One more shot of the revolver’ my art teacher Sal Scarpitta used to shout. Deconstruct and shift intentionality through liminal attack. Resolve the painting. What is a resolution of an abstract painting, when is it ever ‘finished’? the Abstract Expressionists debated that question at ‘The Club’ on University
and 11th! Back in the 50’s.

As per van Gennep's Ritual Process of 1905, we could organize the work normatively, then break into liminal antistructure, then resolve the gorgeous contradictions. In a three step ritual process.

11. November 11. (Make up class for upcoming Thanksgiving break) **FRIDAY NIGHT, 5-830pm AT THE MET, 82ND AND 5TH AVE.** go up the steps, enter the lobby and turn left. Pay 25 cents or more if you wish, and walk to the very end of the Greek statues and turn right and you enter the African wing. Wander about and find a fetish doll or an African mask that is ‘talking to you.’ Something you can relate to. A favorite ‘primitive’ sculpture. Our exercise is to make an extended drawing that captures the ‘mojo’ from the spirit object, literally pulls the magic onto your sketchpad. Work on it till you feel the resonance.

Techniques: write words around the space of the sketch pad that are your dialogue with the fetish. What does it say back to you? What question do you want to ask it. Your script can be faked. Enjoy yourself. Make it up. Later we may be surprised to find your dialogue nonetheless relevant. Aha. Draw lots of scribbly abstract energy lines that you sense are emanating from the sculpture, maybe an aura in color. Redraw the statue a number of times really fast to see it transform and shapeshift into different images right before your eyes. Add yourself into the picture. Find your own technique to heighten the palpable weirdness of your drawing. Regard, rendering an exact likeness of a magic doll isn’t going to get you to the edge of the experience the doll promises. Feel what is empowering your doll, draw that feeling. Somehow.

Later we can wander the Met and find a perfectly civilized European painting and draw out the mojo from that one too.

12. November 17. Presentation of liminal performances by groups. A four minute Dada art event you are perpetrating. Off the grid.
Over the edge. Culture clash. Curious. Bizarre. Art. Pre-order projector or boombox. If someone in your group is the polar opposite in intentionality, work that clash into your performance. Think of presenting us with a glimpse of your own personal ‘non ordinary reality.’ Food catered.

No Class November 24 for Thanksgiving Break.

13. December 1, we meet in a dance studio (not our usual classroom!!) with visiting artist LAURA GATES of Lar Lubovich Modern Dance Company, to dance. To discover ‘body knowing’ that predates ‘the mind body split’ so we can lunge into ‘bound flow’ in ‘the moment’. Dress to move. GATES’ method draws out the beast. Can access to latent powers in your body give you new tools for making paintings? Note Pollock painted those big drippers in a trance dance. Bring sketch pad.

****DUE: DECEMBER 1. Concluding essay, 8+pages. On your liminal journey in this course, what you broke from, what liminalia, what resolution. Where did you go inside of yourself. What ‘techniques of ecstasy’ did you employ in making or viewing art, in your liminal journal. Cite examples. QUOTE PROFUSELY FROM all five of OUR AUTHORS including ALL handouts. to ground your free flow evolution within a broader construct. Footnotes are a splendid shape to an essay page, such that the free flow is uninterrupted and the disrupting annotation is below. This is scholarship and reflection around an artistic evolution. Include notes from class from Ruhe quotes and other students’ remarks and other art historical associations. You are reflecting upon your journey across the semester, interfacing art with your personal access to non ordinary reality through the alchemy of art via anthropological shamanic models of ritual actions. Can we combine these disciplines and world views within an art framework.
14. December 8, last class, review of papers. Public confessions of aberrations in your art making and life journey revealed in your liminal journal. CHARETTE 2. What transformations are possible in life through art. Where genius. How can ritual inform process. How does the material used affect the art process- e.g. using charcoal rather than a Koh-I-nor rapidograph pen. Does the brain change its message, then. What choices can we make in art. And how do we access deep zones inside the ‘right’ brain that might reflect ancient bloodlines, to reintegrate the dancer philosopher artist poet queen from the time before the split. All in one.

Overview: there are traditional aspects to grading like attendance and scholarly footnotes reflecting readings and loud participation in discussion. We are on a journey, Looking for all the right edges. One can anchor one’s musings in solid scholarship, one can improvise one’s art with a pre structure that can be undermined while working, and still serve its first purpose.

All your effort is on your own behalf, on your own impulse, as an arts workshop aiming inward. My job is to lay a cultural foundation and set triggering mechanisms. Others have taken a heroine’s journey into the collective unconscious. Your work is ‘letting go’. Control may not be your only strategy. But then, there is labor- writing down dreams each morning- reading ON TIME- where others found doors to perception. Reflection and written analysis, when backed off from the immediacy of the art attack, re-situates your academic persona and your ‘separate reality’ into conventional terms.