RITES OF PASSAGE INTO CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE  2013  Gallatin:  UG Arts 40.1420

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class meets Thursdays 330-610  in room 432

Ruhe’s office: Thursdays 1:00-3:00 in room 431Gallatin.

Course description: Modern art has been a balancing act between control and letting go. This course focuses on the psychological interface between the two, the “liminal” zone. We will survey modern artists’ techniques for tapping sources of creativity, including Dada collagists’ free-associations; Surrealists’ automatic writing, and “cadavres exquises”; and Abstract Expressionists’ embrace of painterly chaos. We will engage in simple exercises: speed drawing, painting an abstract mural as a group, keeping a liminal journal, collaging, and exploring ritualistic techniques. We will follow up with discussions, take a trip to the Met, and conclude the course reexamining modern art in light of the inner journey each of us has taken during the course. Readings include Chipp's *Theories of Modern Art*, Federico Garcia Lorca on duende, Victor Turner on liminal, Mircea Eliade, Halifax on ‘shamanic voices’, and Frida Kahlo’s journal.

Course objectives/Learning goals: Rites of Passage is an arts workshop but with an ‘artist/scholar’ bent. We read and reflect upon other artists as the ‘lightning rod of culture’ as well as upon ourselves as nascent artist creators. Can we create a symbol. Can we create a ritual. Can we work our art in a sacred manner. Our present culture may not have prepared us for such a shift BACK to what was ordinary thinking 20,000 years ago in the age of the Pleistocene Era of the Hunter Gatherer cave painters. And yet it is still in our genes, Darwin would insist, such ritual thinking. We are
learning to paint naturally, like the seven year old, again. We are gaining access to the Right Hemisphere of the Neo Cortex of our brain, an unconscious territory where, as Jung said, ‘dreams have a reconstitutive function’. So we explore at artmaking a therapeutic way to wholeness, an integrating function. How to draw a face, a figure, we do that, while asking how the line itself is expressive, without considering form. The goal of the course is to produce artists, not student artists. Creators. Edgewomen. Lightning rods of culture.

**Grading:** the final grade will take into account attendance (two absences creates a situation, three drops the grade, four is possibly an incomplete). Participation for Gallatin students is de rigueur, this is 20% of the grade, your voice in, sharing your art making moments and book reporting. Various papers are 40% of the grade, as we are Gallatin ‘artist scholars’, profusely quoting from texts to ground your personal art quest historically and from the professor’s crits. Edit and re edit your papers, as Dr. Ruhe was Senior Editor for *Art/World* newspaper. Your art making in class comprises 40% of the grade. Your art is not judged by quality nor by ‘labor intensive’ but rather by your bold engagement with the process as you evolve as an artist and creator.

**Academic Integrity:** As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website ([http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html](http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html))
***materials you buy** at Utrecht art store at 4th Ave and 12th street: or at Pearl Paint on Canal at Mercer, or NY Central on 10th and 3rd Ave. ::: two sketch pads 9x12 inches, 4B pencil, chinese brush and INK. A notepad. A newsprint sketchpad. Gluestick. Scissors or exacto knife. two soft charcoal sticks. two 18 inch foamboards. And any other materials you want to work with.


Due October 3: Carl Jung’s chapter 1 of *Man and His Symbols*. And Buffie Johnson’s chapter on Lady of the Fishes in her *Lady of the Beasts*.

Due October 17: Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices*. From Ritual to Theater by Turner, ‘from liminal to liminoid’ excerpted.

**Take notes** during class. 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.

1. September 5: 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. Next 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; where momentarily Process trumps Product. An artifact is after the fact. How do we paint in the moment.

2. September 12; Begin your liminal journal, a half hour each day, recording your dreams and musings each morning as you awaken, forming ideas situating your individuation in the art world.

**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


**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!
circle discussion session about the liminal in your life, your
clash of contraries, extreme ironies, and threshold dramas.

Class number 3. On Sept 19. DUE: At home before this
class, paste together a very simple collages in your journal.
Extremely simple geste. See how you can get an ‘edge’ a ‘conflict’
a ‘question’ with the simplest juxtaposition of two ‘uninteresting
shapes’.

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? How does logic serve?

DUE: read the handouts: Federico Garcia Lorca’s ‘duende’ from
his Columbia U lecture “Poeta en Nueva York”. DADA
Manifesto. Bertrand Russell’s Mysticism and Logic. These
inform our discussion, and work our spirit.

To Jon Singer Studio, we will walk to his Studio across the street,
leaving from our classroom. BRING MATERIALS: Gather
scraps- Bring collages materials. Street finds. See the Surreal
everywhere. Magazine cutouts, scissors, glue sticks, and an
illustration board. We critique chaos theory, the method in the
madness.

4. September 26. **due: write a four page essay on a ‘threshold
drama’ from your life; where you changed or changed someone,
evolved, snagged, or were surprised. In class we read and reflect
on the experience to discover the underbelly of the tale, what really
happened. This is an informal depth psychology. We pair up for
feedback.

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

5. October 3. **Due:** Read Chipp pp. 155-174 by artists Kandinsky and Kokoshka. And handouts: Carl Jung’s chapter 1 of *Man and His Symbols*. And Buffie Johnson’s chapter on Lady of the Fishes in her *Lady of the Beasts*.

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, and when is it philosophy?

eexercise: ten speed runs, drawing objects in the room. How does speed affect your art style. Shorthand is compression as genius.

6. October 10. visiting artist LAURA GATES of Lar Lubovich Modern Dance Company. 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:** read handout Kahlo Diary 25-29 to embrace her methodology as your own in your ongoing liminal journal. We will be discussing Dada readings from **due:** Chipp pp. 364-395.

**DUE:** Offer the class an unclassified excerpt from your liminal journal.

7. October 17, **DUE:** read Turner *Ritual Process* chapters 3, 4, and 5 for discussion! Alternative handouts from: Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices*. *From Ritual to Theater* by Turner, ‘from liminal to liminoid’ excerpted. **BE PREPARED to**
Discuss Turner on the liminal. How could a primitive ritual process relate to contemporary art making? When did van Gennep’s ‘ritual process’ happen in your own experience?

SLIDES OF 20,000 YEARS OF ARTHISTORY. Where does the unconscious upwell within the pictures. An overview with a single frame of reference: liminalia. What non ordinary reality is hidden in the paintings. Dr. Ruhe taught 16,000 years of art history, but this exercise is instead an attempt to place you experientially within the art work, in liminal ‘call and response’.

8. October 24 ***the class moves to a new location at Theatre for the New City, 1st Ave at 10th St.

due: a three page essay on ‘freedom versus control in artmaking’: Chipp readings inform your essay, and use many 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 on your shoulders. 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. They will be hung as props for TNC’s upcoming Halloween festival. Wear clothes you can get paint on.

9. October 31: Halloween parade in NYC. Join Dr. Ruhe in his ninth year impersonating historic artists, from Pollock to Warhol to Haring. We march up 6th Avenue, , all of us making art, with a
million viewers. What does the parade’s capacitor energy field feel like, and what art comes out of it as a result.

10. November 7. **Due:** READ from Eliade’s compendium ‘*SHAMANISM*’. (you will need to buy this book or find it in the library or share with one who has it) Reread and reflect upon one chapter of your choosing for Group discussion.

**CAN WE BORROW ARCHETYPICAL THEMES OF RITUAL OBJECTS IN OUR OWN RITUAL INVENTION. CAN WE REINVENT A PERSONALIZED SMALL MOMENT OF RITUAL FOR NEXT WEEK?**

Step-in 8x8 foot group mural marathon. Dress in your worst clothes. We strategize an approach to group painting an abstract mural. What design opens us up to painting in the moment. Next, we fall back for ‘time two’ analysis. Then we reenter the painting boldly. ‘One more shot of the revolver’, my art teacher Sal Scarpitta used to say. 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 Place and 11th back in the 50’s.

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

**Due:** More dream book revelations from your liminal journals.

11. November 8 **FRIDAY NIGHT**, 5-8:30pm 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,’ that you can relate to. Pick your favorite
‘primitive’ sculpture. Our simple Gestalt exercise is to make an extended drawing that captures the ‘mojo’ from the spirit object, that literally pulls the “magic” onto your sketchpad. Work on it until you feel a resonance. Techniques: write words around the edges of the sketch as a dialogue with the fetish. What does it say back to you? What question do you want to ask it. Enjoy yourself. Make it up. Later we may be surprised to find your dialogue nonetheless relevant. This is Gestalt. Draw abstract energy lines that you sense are emanating from the sculpture, maybe paint an aura in color. Redraw the statue a number of times quickly to see it transform and shapeshift into different images. Add yourself into the picture. Find your own technique to heighten the palpable energy of your drawing. Rendering an exact likeness of a magic doll isn’t going to get you to the edge of the experience that the doll promises. Feel what is empowering your doll, draw that feeling. You may need colors and agitated lines to evoke the feeling. Can we reach back to prehistory in dialogue with African fetish dolls? What psychic realities are the fetishes addressing, what commonalities we can relate to.

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

12. November 14. Presentation of liminal performances by groups. A four minute Dada art event you are perpetrating. Off the grid. Over the edge. Culture clash. Art. Think of presenting us with a glimpse of your own personal ‘non ordinary reality.’

**Due:** Independent Research in Bobst Library- your own personal liminal question for a 3 page paper on “the liminal in art.” Ex: the ‘grotesque’ in art; ‘child art’; ‘psychodynamics of art therapy’; ‘chance in the dance of Merce Cunningham’; ‘taboo’; ‘amulets and talismans’; ‘African fetish dolls’; ‘fluxus’;‘Joseph Beuys gallery performance with a live coyote’. Your choice. Even a library has an underbelly. **Your ability to engage in primary and secondary**
research material outside of our 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. Tracey Emens, Marina Abramovic, Carolee
Schneemann, Joan Mitchell, Nicole Eisenmann, Sue Coe, are
possible subjects for your research- adopt her!

No Class November 28 for Thanksgiving Break.

14. December 5. ****DUE: DECEMBER 6. Concluding essay of
five pages, on your liminal journey in this course, what you broke
from, what liminalia you encountered, and what resolution. How
was this a ‘ritual process’. 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 OUR AUTHORS including ALL
handouts, to ground your free flow evolution. 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.

15. December 12, last class: review of papers, and revelations from
your liminal journal.

CHARETTE 2. What transformations are possible in life through
art, and where is genius located in artmaking. 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. 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.
Overview: there are traditional aspects to grading like attendance and scholarly footnotes reflecting readings and participation in discussions. We are on a journey, looking for all the right edges. One can anchor one’s musings in solid scholarship, one can improvise at art making with a plan that can be undermined and still serve its first purpose.

All your effort is on your own impulse, as an arts workshop aiming inward. My job is to lay a cultural foundation and set techniques as 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. Writing down dreams each morning, and keeping up with the readings where others have found doors to perception, may stimulate your creativity. 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.