RITES OF PASSAGE INTO CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE 2016 Gallatin: UG Arts 40.1420

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class meets Thursdays 330-610 in room 432
Ruhe’s office: Thursdays 1:00-3:15 in room 431 Gallatin.

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 artists’ musings in *Theories of Modern Art*, poet Federico Garcia Lorca on “Duende”, Anthropologist Victor Turner on the liminal, Mircea Eliade on *Shamanism*, Joan Halifax on *Shamanic Voices*, Jung’s *Man and is Symbols*, 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 pioneer 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 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’. The Right Brain seems to emphasize the chthonic nature of wo/man: heart, body, spirit engaging with spirits like the child whispering to fairy godmother. So we explore art making as a therapeutic way to wholeness, an integrating function. A life unexamined is not lived, we have to address our shadow side to bring out all the colors of our existence for our artmaking.

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. Your Learning Goal is to make your shift to flow as an artmaker. And, yes, to read carefully and reread the texts and make comments from deep reflection that suit your journey.

Grading: the final grade will take into account attendance (two absences creates a situation where extra writing rebalances, three drops the grade, four is possibly an incomplete). Participation for Gallatin students is de rigeur, this is 20% of the grade, your voice in sharing your art making moments and book reporting which enriches the learning of your confreres. Various papers are 40% of the grade, as we are Gallatin ‘artist scholars’, profusely quoting from our texts to ground your personal art quest historically and from the professor’s crits. Edit and reedit 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 exploring and process and the nature of the materials, 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))

(Dr. Ruhe encourages collaboration! And finds it more than a courtesy to refer to your collaborator when necessary. Red Grooms had a retrospective at the Whitney Museum and failed to reference Mimi Gross his co-collaborator for 15 years. “Where’s Mimi?” the front page title of my *Art/World* editorial.)

***art materials you buy*** at Dick Blick or the NYU bookstore::: two fat sketch pads –cold press paper or -9x12 inches, 4B pencils, chinese brush and black and/or coloredINK. A notepad. Gluestick. Scissors or exacto knife. soft charcoal sticks. two 18 inch foamboards. And any other materials you want to work with such as oil sticks, watercolor pencils, etc.

Readings must be done on time and with time to reflect and write in the margins and create your own dialogue with each author, then be prepared to discuss in class on the day the reading is due in circle. If not, the course threatens to make little sense, as much of the work of the class goes beyond Reason and Logic into Intuition and Archetypes for which our Enlightened Seniors have left you little prepared. This course is a big jump back to the work in the Right Hemisphere of the Neo Cortex, the dark side of the moon, the place of dreams and poetry and magic. “The Magic Garden For Madmen Only”- Hermann Hesse alerted us. Or for the artist.
Books to buy: 1. Frida Kahlo Journal (due Sep29). 2. Theories of Modern Art Artists musings (due Oct27) 3. Shamanism by Mircea Eliade, (due Nov3): an anthropological compendium across cultures. All three books are expected to be **read in their entirety** and available for quoting in your final paper and during book report discussions and at the time the readings are due. This is critical since the course flows from the grounding of these books, since artists stand on the shoulders of past artists, and since the purpose of art can be guided by the shaman’s way: the traditions that birthed theater, music, dance, visual art and psychotherapy.

Handout excerpts:

Due September 15: handout Carl Jung’s chapter 1 of *Man and His Symbols*. focus on Archetype and Symbol/Sign.


Due Oct6: handout From Ritual to Theater by Turner, ‘from liminal to liminoid’ excerpted. Key on Threshold Drama, the Liminal, Symbol, and Flow.


Due Oct 20; Halifax’s *Shamanic Voices* extracts.

DADA Manifesto. found online. Due Oct 27 along with Chipp.

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. And take thoughtful margin notes as you read, to aid in your sharing circle as we discuss each book. 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. Ongoing homework due: 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. Doodling is de rigueur. A hastily sketched MANDALA each day will keep morphing across the semester in Jung’s drive to Integration.

CLASS 1. September 8: Visiting Artist: Jon Singer, GATHER Collages MATERIALS: Scraps. Street finds worthy of your random act of cutting and gluing. See the Surreal everywhere. Bring magazines to cutout, scissors, glue sticks, and an illustration board. We critique chaos theory, the method in the madness. This ‘sink or swim’ trance art action of Free Association with found images collating into a glued vortex of dreaming, is your Initiation into the Liminal Zone and into Flow, no explanation necessary.

Bring Credit Card or Cash to first class: Bluestocking Bookstore sells you 3 books: Shamanism, Frida Kahlo Diary and Theories of Modern Art.

CLASS 2. September 15;

Handout reading due 10 September: first chapter of Man and His Symbols by Carl Jung. Reflect upon your own ‘archetypes’ you have encountered, dreamed up, experienced. And what is the difference between a ‘sign’ and a ‘symbol’ for Carl, and have we lost our ‘symbols?’ and lost our ‘gods’? Have you ever had a glimpse of a godhead (Dershan)? Can you draw a (new) symbol-one you create? Try drawing one at home. Show me.
Class in rotation in circle - each presents their margin notes reflections while reading *Man and His Symbols* Chapter One.

Charette with circle discussion. In what way are you an artist? What is genius? What is art, ritual, symbol versus sign, and what is the Sacred. (Jung reading touches on these) We establish normative posits to launch our ritual journey.

*Classroom exercise:* Draw a circle. The second circle is where we meet your ‘other’ with your left hand at work. What shift here.

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.

In the class: Automatic drawing exercises. Watch the placement of pencil in hand. “Floating hand. Killer fist.” Ten abstract ‘runs’ are clocked. Critique. Draw a chair with mood. Draw a jacket ten times from different attitudes. Speed, repetition, the left hand potentially coming from ‘right brain’. Draw your left hand with your right, then switch. Draw a self portrait without looking with your left hand. One hour of sprint drawing and review.

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

Class number 3. On Sept 22. homework due for Sept 22: 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. read the handouts: Federico Garcia Lorca’s ‘duende’ from his Columbia U lecture “Poeta en Nueva York”. Bertrand Russell’s Mysticism and Logic. These inform your “2 Circles” essay. See the voice of reason and logic in Berty, and the voice of mayhem and dark duende in Federico.

Quick homework due: At home before Sept 17 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’.

In class: 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.

4. September 24. 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.’ Reading the Dada Manifesto online, reading the handout on “Duende” can prepare you for your edgy project. Note that as a ritual, engaging the entire group in circle is essential.

CHARETTE. 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”.

**Homework due:** read Kahlo Diary, entire: while 25-29 embraces her methodology to adapt as your own in your ongoing liminal journal.

5. October 6 **big Homework due:** first read Turner handout excerpt from Ritual to Theater “from Liminal to Liminoid” to get a sense of a threshold drama, then 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: a partner reads and reflects on your experience to discover the underbelly of the tale, what really happened. Feedback may stay between partners. This is informal depth Gestalt. We continue this thread across the semester, personalizing our art quest thus.

In class: 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.

6. October 13 . Homework Due Buffie Johnson’s handout artist’s insights on Lady of the Fishes in her Lady of the Beasts. Reread, and write comments, sentence by sentence, in the margin, or in a notepad, to reflect your own thinking on the matter.

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. What is the vision quest, and when is it philosophy?
Classroom exercise: ten speed runs, drawing objects in the room. How does speed affect your art style. Shorthand is compression as genius. We draw a symbol for our new age like Buffy’s artists.

7. October 20, **DUE:** read handouts from: Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices.*

**BE PREPARED to** Discuss Turner on the liminal and see where the shamanic voices of Halifax are liminal. How could a primitive ritual process relate to contemporary art making? When did van Gennep’s ‘ritual process’ happen in your own experience? Where is the liminal voice in Halifax’s shaman’s narratives.

**In class:** Offer the class a declassified excerpt from your ongoing daily liminal journal.

SLIDES OF 20,000 YEARS OF ART HISTORY. Where does the unconscious upwell within each picture. 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 27 ***the class moves to a new location at Theatre for the New City, 1st Ave at 10th St, SW corner.

**Homework due:** your Freedom and Control essay based on personal reflections and from Dada readings from **due:** Chipp pp. 364-395 and the Dada Manifesto you can read online. **and** Read: Chipp pp. 155-174 by artists Kandinsky and Kokoshka. Write: **a formal four 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.
Forming a compelling argument and driving it home artfully will be appreciated. Gallatin Arts Workshops engage scholarship and disciplined writing. Be brilliant, since you are.

We Paint: Teacher provides 4x4 foot panels: We break up into threes, and body trace then paint that segue into abstraction and utilize a great deal of paint. Panels will be hung as props for TNC’s upcoming Halloween festival. Wear clothes you can get paint on.

: Voluntary: Halloween parade in NYC. Join Dr. Ruhe in his eleventh 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 of a pressure cooker. What art you can make that is parietal, on the go. How-to, you may have to invent your way while walking.

9. November3. Due: READ from Eliade’s compendium ‘SHAMANISM, Techniques of Ecstasy’. Reread and reflect upon one chapter of your choosing for group discussion. Consider your thoughts on what you read. Take the book personally as you have resonances with shaman experiences, such as in the chapter on ‘initiation’. Across the semester the entire book is expected to be read, and this book will be a traveling companion your entire life. Share your margin notes, questions, and “AHA moments” in circle in rotation today. What does Eliade say ‘ecstasy’ means for understanding shamans, and do we urban moderns have this experience in common? “Shamanista” is Dr. Ruhe’s suspicion that we all carry shamanic propensities into what we already do as we employ elements of our culture to effect change in the world.

Due: a rough 3 page paper simply commenting on examples of commonalities, and breaks, between Eliade’s reports on shamans and YOUR threshold drama narrative. Eliade writes cross-culturally, so he might have included you inside yours.
half hour- 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 called it. Deconstruct and shift intentionality through liminal attack. What is a resolution of an abstract painting, when is it ever ‘finished’? Abstract Expressionists heatedly debated that question at ‘The Club’ on University Place and 11*street* back in the 50’s.

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

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

10. November 10. AT THE MET. COME WAY EARLY IF YOU CAN: Pay 25 cents, 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. 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 to your ongoing personal Threshold Drama essay. 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. Will the doll answer
questions regarding our threshold drama, even inadvertently.

When the museum guards kick us out at 515, we assemble down
the stairs at the Roman edge of the African, and critique there and
on the grass outside. We wonder what intersection with your
threshold drama your dialogue with a fetish may have had.

11. November 17.  **Due: Independent Research in Bobst
Library**- your own personal liminal question for a 4 page paper on
“the liminal in art.” **Examples:** Your choice. 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’. 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 life
changing, if you strike your personal nerve. Tracey Emms, Marina
Abramovic, Carolee Schneemann, Joan Mitchell, Nicole
Eisemann, Sue Coe, are possible artist subjects for your research-
adopt her!

Each details a liminal aspect of their artist, in a circle discussion.

Discussion: CAN WE BORROW ARCHETYPICAL THEMES OF
RITUAL OBJECTS IN OUR OWN RITUAL INVENTION. CAN
WE REINVENT A PERSONALIZED SMALL MOMENT OF RITUAL?

No Class November 24 for Thanksgiving Break.

12. December 1. 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 that Pollock painted those big drippers in a trance-dance step-in strategy. BRING SKETCH PAD.

13. December 08: ****DUE: Concluding essay (submitted on time: no delays. we are counting on a classroom discussion overviewing the Fall)

Write: seven 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. Where and how did you reach Turner’s “flow”. 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 your artistic evolution. The grader here wants many quotes that serve your thinking, with reflection on the trajectory of the course: surprises you received from other students and the professor, a critique of the art world as you know it, your place in culture as potential avant garde, your place in the 30,000 year continuum of art making. Did your threshold drama change based on your partner’s feedback and the shamanic readings.
December 15. Last Class. Overview and ritual closing of circle.

Threshold dramas resolutions (due: 3 page paper: A page of feedback written by your partner -plus a revision and resolution to your drama, what script rewrite was finally possible. Bonus: add the dialogue from your MET fetish, how that statue responded to what question you had from your threshold drama).

In circle we revisit all your papers, including revelations from your liminal journal. Bring your papers and share your best moment, or the one that your professor circled in enthusiasm.

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. Reflect and analyze when backed off from the immediacy of your art attack to re-situate your academic persona and your ‘separate reality’ into conventional terms. The prophet comes back from the ‘wilderness’ with a map for the people. Jack came down from the beanstalk with that golden egg.