

Affairs under Dr. Tom Keene.

Before going to Oaxaca, we spend three days in Mexico City. Our hotel is in the heart of the historical zone of the city. From the hotel restaurant we see the zócalo, a huge square, bounded by the National Palace, two almost identical city halls, the Metropolitan Cathedral, and the National Pondshop. The zócalo has seen everything: protests, revolutions, celebrations, coronations, and even Mexico City's first bullfight.

Next to the zócalo, archeologists have recently uncovered the site of the Great Temple of the Aztecs (the Templo Mayor), once the holiest shrine of the Aztec Empire.

For their first assignment, the students will head out in groups of two with a list of questions they must answer. Part of this exercise will be two brief interviews of people they find along the way.

*Teaching offers the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences with students and allows the teacher to continuously learn from the student-teacher interaction*

— Jayne Bruno

In the evening we will compare the answers and experiences of the students.

The next morning the group will set out to visit the pyramids of Teotihuacán, built between 400 and 800 A.D. They are located 35 miles north of Mexico City. On the way, we will visit the shrine of the Virgin Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico. The shrine was built on the spot where in 1531, the Virgin Mary was said to appear to an Indian farmer, Juan Diego.

Students will have free time to discover Mexico on their own. On Sunday they may want to attend mass in the Metropolitan Cathe-

dral or go shopping in one of the many markets. The national Museum of Anthropology would also be a good choice.

After the weekend, our classroom changes to the lovely city of Oaxaca whose inhabitants are mainly descendants of the Zapotec and Mixtec civilizations. When the students arrive at the airport, their Oaxacan "parents" will be there to take them home. Each family pins the name of the KSC student to their clothing so all the students have to do is look for their own names.

(See *LAVAL*, page4)

## Visual Culture in Context: Teaching Visual Literacy

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**NOTE:** Adapted from a February 1995 presentation at the College Art Association's annual meeting, San Antonio, Texas; an expanded version will be published as "Visual Literacy and Interdisciplinary Studies in College Art History Courses," in the *Teacher's Guide to Advanced Placement Art History*, Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1996.

The Parthenon frieze, Maya Ying Lin's Vietnam Memorial, a Washo basket by Dat So La Lee, Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling, Islamic calligraphy, the Bauhaus, Georgia O'Keeffe's flower paintings, Hokusai's The Great Wave, Van Gogh's Starry Night, the tomb treasure of Tutankhamen, the stained glass of Chartres Cathedral, a Dogon mask, a Oaxacan bowl. These and dozens of other examples of architecture, craft, drawing, painting, photography, printmaking, and sculp-

ture form part of a canon, more or less official, of late somewhat expanded, to which students are exposed in college art appreciation and art history classes. Besides learning to identify objects and monuments, students typically absorb information about dates, places of origin, medium and materials, and acquire skills for discussing such works in terms of style, function, and meaning. Surely students thus immersed in imagery are visually literate — or are they? What is visual literacy, and how is it achieved?

In its most basic form, visual literacy can be defined as the ability to describe, analyze, and understand things seen. As such, it differs relatively little from traditional practice in learning to look provided by traditional art appreciation and art history classes. The canonical, or semi-canonical, works listed above have by no

means departed from the syllabus or the texts. They have, however, been joined by examples of and approaches to visual culture (and the phrase is used advisedly) seldom enframed by museum walls and not often illustrated in textbooks. Just as the range of materials, images, objects, and experiences, studied has widened, so have the ways in which such things are presented to students.

An excellent beginning can be made without turning on the slide projectors or pulling down the screen. Ask students — and this works as well in a class of 100 plus as it does in a group of thirty — to describe the classroom in which they sit. They will have read about the principles of formal analysis, and about ways of applying such vocabulary and concepts to architecture. Although they may be collectively nonplussed for a mo-

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ment — architecture is, after all, the Parthenon in Athens, or Michael Graves's Portland Public Service Building, both shown in their text, isn't it? — observations on shape, color, furnishings, structure, and function will fill the air, and the room. Just as Moliere's Monsieur Jourdain was delighted to learn that he spoke prose, so many college students revel in the discovery that their own dwellings, Kennesaw's campus, the city of Atlanta, or Nashville's version of the Parthenon, can be discussed in the same ways one would talk about Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater or Baron Haussmann's Paris. By the time the projectors have been fired up, and these, or other, slides are on the screen, students will be more comfortable with art-historical vocabulary and prepared to see their environment as a part of the story.

Much now introduced in art appreciation and art history classes differs from canonical works only in kind. Material, formal elements, means for engaging viewers are the same in, for example, magazine advertisements and billboards and "major" paintings, prints, or posters.

Instructors tend to feel, quite reasonably, the difficulty of incorporating new topics, fresh points of view, recent scholarship, into an already crowded curriculum. The benefits of even a week thus spent are clear and immediate. Students refresh and refocus their visual skills, learning to scrutinize and

dissect works of art famous and unknown, global and local. They are encouraged to cite such works in the larger contexts of culture, beliefs, visual practice. Finally, they have the thrill of seeing that they possess the skills to elicit information of importance from images and objects, and the vocabulary and concepts necessary to render such materials relevant and resonant for themselves and their colleagues. Visually literate folk take more pleasure in the world around them, and have the potential to make great contributions to their environments, local and global, natural and built.

*I teach because it is my vocation and to share skills, knowledge and experiences that have enriched my life.*

— Lynn Fedeli

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## *From Teaching at Duquesne University:* **Ideas for effective teaching in large classes.**

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**D**efining large classes may be subjective, but a sure sign that classes have gotten large, according to Dr Dorothy Frayer of Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, is when classroom discussions become unwieldy, or when students hesitate to ask questions because of the sea of faces staring back, or when instructors limit writing assignments because grading may become problematic.

Reece McGee of Purdue offers a few suggestions that may help. Knowing students names is a good start. For those who may fear having to memorize 50-plus names on the first day of class, some strategies might be instructing students to introduce themselves each time they ask a question or using a seating chart. Although many faculty prefer the more traditional "Mr." or "Ms." approach, it may be easier to remember first names only.

Using a few minutes before and after class to chat with students may help diminish the impersonal nature of large classes. In addition, you may want to make yourself more "real"—and therefore less distanced because of class size—by letting students know more about your interests, research, activities outside class.

Moving from behind the desk or lectern—getting out into the classroom—cuts down on the size factor. It also makes students more participants than observers if you are standing beside them.

Increase your daily assessment activities to be sure students are getting the information. It is easy for students to "hide" in the crowd. Make them tell you what they learned each class period. Better, require each student to ask, on paper, a question or two from that day's lecture. Answer these the

next period, making sure not to reference the individual asking.

Discussion groups and cooperative learning may allow you to break large classes into more manageable groups. Give an assignment, let the groups work on it during class, and you rotate from group to group answering questions and giving advice.

Obviously, the large class will not have the same comfort level as smaller classes, but with some personalizing, students will feel as though they are getting the one-to-one teaching we all want to achieve.

*I teach because I like to learn, and I like people who like to learn.*

— Alan LaBaron