

PROS PECT .2 NEW ORLE ANS

**Critical Writing Initiative
October 22, 2011 to January 29, 2012**



Prospect New Orleans Education
<http://www.prospectneworleans.org/prospect2-education/>

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Cover Image:

Keith Duncan

Down By the River Side

2010

The Critical Writing Initiative

The Critical Writing Initiative (CWI) was conceived and created by Ylva Rouse, Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs for Prospect.2. She created the program with the aim of promoting thoughtful analysis, reasoned debate and a knowledgeable evaluation of the arts, through critical writing. The CWI for Prospect.2 will concentrate on building students' abilities to critically evaluate the art and artists in the second biennial and help students think effectively about this subject matter through writing. They will also have the opportunity to learn from professional critics about the craft and profession of Visual Art Criticism.

The CWI is based on the belief that learning to think about art, understanding the context wherein it was created, and learning to express your thoughts in a constructive manner, is vital to the growth of the community in all its components: artists, arts professionals and public. The CWI will strive to develop in its participants the literary and intellectual skills required for arts criticism, which not only involve principles of creative writing, but also lead to a deeper understanding and knowledge of the arts as an artistic, spiritual, social, cultural and ethical human expression.

Implicit here is the intent of developing critical thinking skills and critical thought processes that leads to empowerment and ultimately teaches students how to make better choices. Whether or not the student will take up arts journalism is not as important as having them develop on one hand, the capacity to look –to engage deliberately and purposefully in the act of seeing--, and on the other, to incorporate analytical thought as a basic life skill. The students will learn to use arguments skillfully and impartially and to organize thoughts and articulate them concisely and coherently using visual contemporary art as stimuli.

Levels

The CWI is initially directed at University and High School levels. Art Appreciation and Aesthetics, Art History as well as Creative Writing classes are invited to participate.

Syllabus

- **The CWI Curriculum Materials** – The CWI materials will provide a list of artists featured in Prospect.2 and an artist/venue list in the city so that the students will be able to visit the biennial in groups or independently. The artwork in Prospect.2 forms the basis of the course, and teachers will be furnished with related materials to support classroom discussion and related assignments. CWI students will be given free passes to view the exhibit and teachers can also schedule free-guided group tours for their classes.
- **Writing Critical Essays** – Students will write a 500-750 word critical essay in response to Prospect.2. Students will share their essays with one another and the class will offer comment and critique.
- **Art Criticism Master Workshop** - An art criticism master workshop will be facilitated by Cameron Shaw, founder of the critical review and online magazine, *Pelicanbomb*. Each participating class will choose the writing of two “critics” from their class to participate in the master workshop. The invited critics will be asked to discuss their process, and the critical models they followed in preparing their essay. Through the master workshop, the students will learn firsthand not only about different approaches to thinking about the different art forms, but also become aware of the study and career opportunities in the field.
- **Publishing** – One critic’s writing from the master art criticism workshop will be published in *Pelicanbomb* in January.

Course Description

Education consists of transmitting to students two different things: the subject matter or discipline content of the course, and the way to understand and evaluate this subject matter. In this vein, this course seeks to develop in its students a general comprehension of contemporary art, while instilling a habit of critical evaluation, and helping them to think effectively about this subject matter through writing. Further, through direct contact with practicing professional critics, they will learn about the craft and profession of visual art criticism.

Objectives:

- To promote the understanding and the critical evaluation of contemporary visual art forms.
- The course will be designed to encourage students to use evidence skillfully and impartially and to organize thoughts and articulate them concisely and coherently using visual contemporary art as a stimulus.
- Learn how to question one's own views in an attempt to understand both the assumptions that are critical to those views, and the implications of them.
- Promote an inquiring attitude toward subjectivity: to recognize the problems of relying on one's own opinions, the probability of bias in those opinions, and the problems of depending on one source.
- Learn about the importance of historical and cultural references.

Methodology:

October

Students will study writing samples and discuss the process of looking and writing. They will study the related materials as chosen by their professor. It is at the teacher's discretion which and how much of the related bibliography and writing samples will be required. Participating classes can sign-up for free guided tours and students will receive passes to visit the biennial. Prospect.2 opens to the public on Saturday, October 22nd.

November:

The students will write a critical review of the biennial (500-750 words), due November 16th. The essay will be commented on and returned for revision on November 25th. The class the class will read and comment on the essays and nominate two peers to attend the *Pelicanbomb* Art Criticism Master Workshop. Names of nominated students will be submitted to Prospect.2 Education Department by November 30th.

December - January

The *Pelican Bomb* Art Criticism Master Workshop will be held on December 17th. One student's essay will be selected for publishing on *Pelicanbomb* in January 2012.

References

Prospect.2 Artist Packet

Available at: <http://www.prospectneworleans.org/prospect2-education/>

This packet includes artist summaries and sample images.

The Master:

The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, W.W. Norton & Co., Second Edition, 2010

Others:

A Short Guide to Writing about Art, Eds. Sylvan Barnet & Marcia Stubbs, Longman 2005

Terry Barrett, *Why Is That Art? Aesthetics and Criticism of Contemporary Art*, Ed. Oxford University Press, 2007

Carol Duncan, *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in the Critical History of Art*, Ed. Cambridge University Press, 1993

Critical Mass, Art Critics on the State of their Practice, Ed. Raphael Rubinstein, Hard Press Ed. 2007

Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

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Donald Kuspit, *Dialectic of Decadence (Art Criticism after Modernism)*. Ed. Allworth Press, 2000

Lucy R. Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America*, Ed. The New Press, 2000

General Reading Bibliography:

Saul Anton, *Warhol's Dream*, Ed. Xavier Douroux JRP|Ringier 2007

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Ed. Penguin 1972

Websites:

<http://www.brooklynrail.org/>

<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/>

<http://www.studio-international.co.uk/>

<http://www.insidenola.org/>

Art Critic Blogs:

Artsjournal.com/artopia

Artsjournal.com/man

electricsskin.com

fromthefloor.blogspot.com

Historical Figures in Art Criticism:

Lawrence Alloway
Charles Baudelaire
Bernard Berenson
Holger Cahill
Denis Diderot
Michael Fried
Roger Fry
Clement Greenberg
Walter Pater
Calvin Reid
Harold Rosenberg
John Ruskin

Modern Figures in Art Criticism:

Holland Cotter
James Elkins
Robert Hughes
Michael Kimmelman
Hilton Kramer
Rosalind Krauss
Donald Kuspit
Raphael Rubenstein
Jerry Saltz
Peter Schjeldahl
Roberta Smith
Judith Wilson

Introduction to Prospect.2

Launched in 2008, **Prospect.1 New Orleans** was the largest biennial of international contemporary art ever mounted in the United States. Conceived by Dan Cameron in the tradition of the great international biennials, such as the Venice Biennale and the Bienal de São Paulo, the Prospect New Orleans Biennial showcases new artistic practices from around the world in a setting that is both historic and culturally unique, and contributes to the revitalization of New Orleans by spurring tourism and bringing international attention to the city's vibrant visual arts community.

Prospect.2, the second iteration, will take place **October 23, 2011 – January 29, 2012**.

Prospect.2 Artists:

Sophie Calle (b. France)	Ivan Navarro (b. Chile)
Nick Cave (b. USA)	Lorraine O'Grady (b. USA)
Jonas Dahlberg (b. Sweden)	Tsuyoshi Ozawa (b. Japan)
Bruce Davenport Jr. (b. USA)	Gina Phillips (b. USA)
Dawn DeDeaux (b. USA)	Ashton T. Ramsey (b. USA)
R. Luke DuBois (b. USA)	Alexis Rockman (b. USA)
George Dunbar (b. USA)	Joyce J. Scott (b. USA)
Keith Duncan (b. USA)	Jennifer Steinkamp (b. USA)
William Eggleston (b. USA)	Dan Tague (b. USA)
Nicole Eisenman (b. France)	Robert Tannen (b. USA)
Karl Haendel (b. USA)	Grazia Toderi (b. Italy)
Ragnar Kjartansson (b. Iceland)	Francesco Vezzoli (b. Italy)
William Pope.L (b. USA)	Paweł Wojtasik (b. Poland).
An-My Lê (b. Vietnam)	

In addition to the projects organized by Prospect.2, a number of artists, including Canadian sculptor **Michel de Broin**, environmental artist **Brandon Ballengee**, and Seattle-based **Don and Patricia Fels**, have been invited to develop major new projects that will premiere simultaneously in New Orleans.

Prospect.2 Venues:

Works will be shown at sites throughout several different neighborhoods of New Orleans, including the French Quarter, Tremé, St. Claude, the Warehouse District, City Park, and Tulane and Xavier Universities. Venues range from museums and major cultural institutions, to public spaces, and non-traditional exhibition spaces. For the first time, Prospect will also exhibit in Lafayette, Louisiana with a video installation by Ragnar Kjartansson presented at the Acadiana Center for the Arts. Additional Prospect.2 venues include: the New Orleans Museum of Art; Isaac Delgado Art Gallery; Xavier University, Arts Village; New Orleans African American Museum; Ogden Museum of Southern Art; Contemporary Arts Center; Louisiana State Museum; Historic New Orleans Collection; The American Italian Cultural Center; New Orleans Healing Center; Newcomb Art Gallery; and UNO St. Claude Gallery.

Venue hours: Wednesday to Sunday from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

Themes & Questions to Consider

Globalism and Localism:

- What external conditions affect the process of making art? Does location or place factor into the work that an artist makes? Culture? If so, how does this manifest visually?

Exhibition Critique:

- What, if anything, do these works have in common? How do they work together? How are they at odds? Do the works seem to agree or disagree with one another regarding our understanding of time?

Social Criticism in Art:

- In much of Contemporary Art, there is presupposition that in art, there is a possibility to deal with, to highlight and to pose questions around social issues. Is this true, and if so, in what manner? How did this change come about? → postmodernism in the early 90s dismantled Art from its pedestal and left a vacuum of meaning. Explore Joseph Beuys' idea of social sculpture, Rirkrit Tiravanija...to Ozawa, Dan Tague...

Art as Civic Engagement:

- Performances: William Pope.L/R. Luke Dubois/An-My Lê

Different modes of Story telling, narrative based art (The Autobiographical as Political):

- Keith Duncan/An-My Lê

The influence of American vernacular traditions in contemporary art/The use of found objects in the artistic creative process:

- Ashton Ramsey/Joyce Scott

Time based mediums – Video, Performance and Sound Works:

- What distinguishes filmic or video works by visual artists from conventional cinematic productions or even from “home videos? How do images, either static or moving, affect our perception of time? We often think of cameras as depicting reality, how do artists manipulate our vision of reality in relation to time through the constructs of editing? What techniques do they use? What techniques seem most effective and why?

Multidisciplinary Art Practice:

- Has multi-disciplinary art undermined the intrinsic values of each media?

Drawing as independent form

The ABC's of Critical Writing

A. The Work of Art

1. Aesthetic Analysis

What does a work of art express?

What do we actually see?

Sensory Properties: Lines. Shapes. Textures. Values (dark/light). Colors (warm/cold). Scale. Space (positive/negative). Volume.

How is what is seen organized?

Formal Properties: Balance. Unity. Movement. (and their contrary). Elements.

Technical Properties: Media. Support. Brushwork/Gesture/Focus.

What emotions and ideas are evoked? How does it make you feel?

Expressive Properties: Mood (somber, happy, funny, sensuous, menacing) Dynamic State (tension, conflict, relaxation), Ideas (courage, wisdom, happiness, sadness, drudgery)

2. Historical/Cultural Analysis

Artist biography and trajectory.

Historical references.

Theoretical/Philosophical references.

Socio-cultural circumstances/ Art as Social Commentary and Political Tool

3. Interpretation

What seems to be the intent of the artist?

Why is the work shown in New Orleans?

Who is its intended audience?

Is it successfully conveyed?

Do you like it? Why?

B. The Exhibition

Title

Relation between the works / relation of the works to the theme, if any

The individual work of art

Installation of the work

C. The Critical Writing

Criteria

Formal Analysis

Stylistic Analysis

Ideology

Sage Advice from your Friendly Art Critic

It is important to note that no process works for all writers. In fact, a single writer may develop different processes for different types of assignments. Nevertheless certain guidelines may help a student discover the processes that best suit his or her thinking as a writer.

1. See the work in person.

This may seem like common sense but with increasing access to images online, it can be tempting to rely on what you see on your computer screen. Visiting a museum or gallery website can provide a helpful introduction to an artist's work or a means to jog your visual memory after a visit, but there is no substitution for seeing a work of art in person.

2. Take notes.

A portable notebook is a writer's best friend.

A press release or checklist may be provided by the exhibition venue or basic information may be provided in the form of wall texts. Make sure to note the title, date, and medium of a work, as well as the artist's full name and title of the exhibition if applicable. This will ensure that you are able to refer to each work specifically and accurately. If no identifying information is readily available, don't be afraid to ask. Gallery and museum personnel will often have access to this information.

Write what you see. Oftentimes the more detail, the better. Nuanced visual analysis is impossible without a firm grasp of what you are actually seeing. Subject matter, materials, colors, shapes, textures, space, quality of line...

Write what you feel. Though you cannot rely solely on your own personal reactions, these initial feelings can be helpful as an entry point to understanding a work of art and to conveying the experience of seeing this work to others. Does it leave you angry, sad, happy, nervous, confused, or another feeling?

Also, take a moment to note what your other senses are experiencing. Some materials smell (like wood or metal) or change the temperature in a room (like neon light bulbs). These factors (like whether it is quiet or loud in an exhibition space) may or may not be intended by the artist, but they may affect your particular experience of the work.

Write what you remember. Seeing one artwork might make you think of another work you've seen, a book you've read, a song you've heard, or even an experience you've had. Note these things as they come up. They may lead you to further areas of thought or research. Art is made by people who, like you, have seen, heard, and experienced many different things that may intentionally or unintentionally inform the work of art.

Do not censor yourself at this stage. No reaction is a "bad" or "stupid" reaction as you process a work of art. Some reactions may not hold up after further thought or research, but that does not mean they were wrong. There will be plenty of time to edit your opinions.

3. Research.

Some writers prefer to break up their research into two parts: before and after seeing a work (or exhibition). As noted above, it can be helpful to familiarize yourself with an artist or relevant historical information before seeing a work. Seeing a work will undoubtedly also spark questions that might be answered through further research.

Regardless of when you do it, it is important to read what others have written on a particular work or artist. With some contemporary artists, available information may be limited to a few articles, reviews, press releases, or sometimes nothing at all. With well-known artists there might be hundreds of articles and books on the subject.

The amount and type of reading you do will be determined by what's available and also the length and type of piece you are trying to write. Reading a 500 page scholarly tome in order to write a 500-word exhibition review would be excessive (unless of course you have the time and interest). If it is reasonable to read everything written on a lesser-known artist then definitely do so. Seeing what others have said can help ground your argument, not only with facts but also whether you agree or disagree with their assessments. Also, you will want to avoid repeating what has been said over and over again about an artist. If there is too much to reasonably read on an artist, use your discretion. Good, reliable, original information comes in many forms but be particularly wary of self-published or user-generated sources (personal blogs, Wikipedia entries), especially if you are only able to consult a limited number of sources. If an exhibition catalogue has been published, that is a good place to start since they are most often written by people very familiar with an artist's work and with a broad audience in mind. If an artist is represented by a gallery, that gallery will likely have a CV that includes a publication history. Larger galleries have also begun to provide links to important writings about their artists via their websites.

4. Organize your thoughts.

You should now have notes from seeing the work in person and notes from your research. Some of these will be factual in nature and some your personal response (also the responses of other writers gleaned from your reading). The key to a persuasive and coherent argument is synthesizing this information to provide evidence of your opinions. People read critical writing in the hope that the writer is well-informed of the facts, but more importantly they read in the hope that the writer will help them to see the work in a new way.

Use your notes to create a basic outline or sketch. It should not be as detailed as your notes. You can always refer back to them. If your research has been thorough you will have more information than will appear in your final draft. This does not mean the research was a waste of time. Writing is ultimately about selection.

Your outline should give a rough sense of the points you will address more fully in your draft. Usually basic information will come first like who the artist is and generally what the work looks like. This will be the platform so your other ideas and more nuanced arguments make sense to your reader. Providing background, like historical information or political or cultural circumstances, may also be important early on, especially if these seem to be defining characteristics of the work.

5. Writing a Draft.

Many writers create something called a zero draft, sometimes called a "vomit draft." It's an ugly metaphor that gets to the main goal of this step. Referring to their basic sketch, they write everything that comes to mind to support these points and do not pay attention to the mechanics of writing at this stage. Some even do this in advance of making an organizational outline. The goal of this draft is to unpack ideas freely and develop new ideas in the process. If your ideas already seem relatively clear to you, or you did a great deal of brainstorming in your original notes, then this step may or may not be helpful and the draft will be more or less loose.

Regardless of whether you begin with a very loose zero draft or something that seems more developed, you will need to revise. Many writers find it most helpful to print out the draft at this stage, giving your

brain and your eyes a chance to view it in a new way. In general it is better to address global revisions first such as changes to the overall structure or the addition, removal, or movement of information. Local revisions such as word substitutions come next, though there is no need to put off something that immediately catches your eye. There are two main questions to ask yourself as you revise: Is each sentence written as clearly as possible? Does each sentence further the point I am trying to make?

6. Reread and revise again.

If possible, get a second opinion. A new reader may see problems or areas of confusion that you were not able to see yourself. If you use a second reader, trust this person and take his or her opinions and revisions seriously. One goal of writing is to communicate to others. Art writing poses a particular challenge because you are trying to make someone SEE with words.

Compiled by Cameron Shaw

Prospect.2

FALL 2011

Prospect.2 Artist/Venue Key

Art House on the Levee

ROBERT TANNEN (USA)

Contemporary Arts Center (CAC)

JONAS DAHLBERG (Sweden), GEORGE DUNBAR (USA), KARL HAENDEL (USA), GINA PHILLIPS (USA), ALEXIS ROCKMAN (USA), DAN TAGUE (USA), GRAZIA TODERI (Italy), OZAWA TSUYOSHI (Japan)

Delgado Community College, Isaac Delgado Art Gallery

PAWEŁ WOJTASIK (Poland/USA)

Historic New Orleans Collection, Broulatour Mansion and Courtyard

DAWN DEDEAUX (USA)

1850 House - Louisiana State Museum

SOPHIE CALLE (France)

Old U.S. Mint - Louisiana State Museum

WILLIAM EGGLESTON (USA), RAGNAR KJARTANSSON (Iceland)

Newcomb College Art Gallery, Tulane University

NICK CAVE (USA), JOYCE J. SCOTT (USA)

New Orleans African American Museum

LORRAINE O'GRADY (USA)

New Orleans Healing Center

KEITH DUNCAN (USA)

Dutch Alley Performance Pavilion, French Market District

R. LUKE DUBOIS (USA)

New Orleans Museum of Art

BRUCE DAVENPORT, JR. (USA), NICOLE EISENMAN (France/USA), AN-MY LÊ (Vietnam/USA), JENNIFER STEINKAMP (USA)

Ogden Museum of Southern Art

ASHTON RAMSEY (USA)

Piazza d'Italia/The American Italian Cultural Center

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI (Italy)

UNO St. Claude Gallery

IVAN NAVARRO (Chile/USA)

Xavier University Arts Village

WILLIAM POPE.L (USA)

Acadiana Center for the Arts, Lafayette

RAGNAR KJARTANSSON (Iceland)

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- Saul Anton, *Warhol's Dream*, Ed. Xavier Douroux JRP|Ringier 2007
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- Joseph Murphy, *Santeria: African Spirits in America*, Ed. Beacon Press, 1993
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