

THEO 650: Art as Theological Practice

Instructor: Dr. Brian Bantum
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Office Hours: by appointment

Meetings:

February 3-4
March 3-4
April 14-15

Fridays - 1pm-9pm
Saturdays – 9am-3pm
(both days include time for breaks)

Course Description:

**This class is open all students (the curious to the practiced) who want to explore how artistic practice can inform your life and ministry. No prior knowledge or experience required.*

We experience God in our bodies. When I say, “I met God today,” I might mean that I dropped my wallet and a stranger returned it to me, the 2 crisp 20’s still there. I don’t know how I was going to eat this week without them.

Or maybe I was walking a quiet trail with birch trees turning yellow on either side. And in the silence, I could not beat down the sadness anymore, so I walked and cried as the leaves crunched beneath my feet until the light slid from yellow to orange and I had no more tears, but I also felt the sadness become a bit looser.

And sometimes I don’t what I mean by ‘God’ or ‘hope’ or any host of ideas or words we use to make sense of our world. But we throw some flour in a bowl with water and baking soda and mix and knead and divide and rest and knead again. And in that act of making, we begin come to understand the question we had been asking.

We take a flurry of photographs, but this one image catches the light and in it we see something truer than the others, truer than what we saw with our own eyes.

Sometimes I don’t know what I feel or think until I sit down and just begin to scribble words. The words become sentences, then string into thoughts and when I am done, I’ve discovered what I had been thinking about, feeling. We could even call them groans of the spirit, or even prayer.

Art as a theological practice is an exercise in reflecting on God and our life in this world. The class will include discussions of literary devices and techniques, readings and conversation on poetry, short stories, creative essay, as well as opportunities to write and workshop your own emerging work.

This course is open to everyone who wants to grow in their understanding of how the arts and artistic practice can deepen our understanding of ourselves, our world and God, as well as expand how we communicate these ideas to our community. In this class art is not about being a “good” writer or painter or photographer, etc. Here we want to learn from artists how artistic practice helps all of us to become more observant of our world, nuanced in how we express who we are and what we are called to, and more invitational by abiding in the artistic sensibility to sit in the complexities of our world.

In this year’s iteration of the course, we will focus primarily on written work (poetry, short stories, creative essay, lyrics) but I am open to students who come with different art backgrounds who would like to incorporate those into the work and practice of the sessions.

Learning Objectives

- Examine literature, poetry and/or visual art for structure, approach, and analysis of contemporary life.
- Understand tools and techniques of artistic craft. For example, metaphor, fragments, perspective, collage, etc.
- Reflect on artistic practice and processes through reading artist's commentary on practice.

Course Readings:

Required

- Annie Dillard. *The Writing Life*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989. [isbn: 978-0060919887, \$13.49, Amazon.com]

**Remaining readings will be provided as pdfs on Moodle.*

Classes will meet as weekend intensives (Fri-Sat) with opportunities to read selected works, and write, and workshop original work. The weekend intensive will meet three times in a semester with all written work being completed within the weekend. Students should be able to commit the entirety of the meeting hours to reading, writing and discussion.

Assignments:

During each session students will have time to read individually and corporately, as well as write and revise their own work. Assignments will vary from session to session, but each session will have a final piece (or pieces) to be submitted by the end of the session on Saturday. **in some cases we can arrange for the final piece to be submitted by the end of the day on Sunday*

(Doctoral Students) In addition to the completion of in class work and writing, you will also write a 1000-1200 word paper or essay reflecting on artistic practice and theological method, due within 7 days of each session. More information to be provided in the beginning of the Spring semester.