

**“The mere word ‘freedom’ is the only one that still excites me.”
(Andre Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 1924.)**

WRIT 240: Experimental Writing: T/Th 12:35-2:05 Art Studio 100
Dr. Karla Kelsey
Office Hours: Tuesdays 4-5; Wednesdays 3-5 in 15 Writers Institute

Experiments in Image and Text

This course is the study of what can be done—what we can do—in the space where **language** meets **image**, exploring language-workers’ creative ability to imagine language outside of its conventional boundaries. This course emphasizes finding ways to intensify the experience of creative writing through a consideration of how visual art practices can be models for (or blended with) writing practices.

By **image**, here, we mean both the image formed in the mind’s eye as a reader engages a work of literature and the visual, **physical** work that language and visual art performs on the page. By experiment, here, we mean the ways in which language-artists have challenged the **conventions, expectations, and constraints** surrounding the literary arts. The fundamental questions of the course are: what are the possible relationships/interactions between image and text in a work of writing? How can experimenting with these relationships invigorate creative process and artistic invention?

In the course of this course we will read/view significant experiments in image-text work alongside contextual materials that will help us to appreciate and understand particular artistic techniques. In addition, in order to understand the process of such literary art-making, we will engage in our own experiments in the space where image meets text.

Who is this course for and what can it do for me?

This course is for both creative writing majors and non-majors. Any of the assignments can be tuned to help the most experienced writer develop his/her on-going projects (or free him or her from on-going projects) and tuned to the most inexperienced writer, giving him or her the opportunity to explore creatively. As we will be experimenting in this class (think lab coats and beakers), you should come to class open-minded and willing to try things outside of your comfort-zone. This class emphasizes *process* rather than finished, polished product.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This course is structured into 5 topics based on 5 different forms of image and text relationships:

1) Writing with Images/Illustration; 2) Collage; 3) Treated Text; 4) Script/Typography; 5) The Artist’s Book

For each topic we will:

- + view and discuss excerpts asking: what do these excerpts have in common in terms of the relation of image to text? how do they differ? what can an audience get from such a text?
- + read theoretical/artistic statements about the form asking: what do theorists/artists/writers say about the relationship of image and text in this form?

- + articulate the fundamental conventions of the form: given these examples and statements, what is the essential relationships of the form? (Example: the text narrates what happens in the image; the text is itself an image; the text throws the image into questions; the text reinvents the image)
- + plan and produce our own versions of the form asking: how can incorporate what I have learned about this form into my own creative process?
- + present these works in progress

ASSIGNMENTS:

Reading/Viewing:

All required reading/viewing will be done via links or high-resolution scans housed on BlackBoard. These links and scans will be excerpts from longer works. In addition, you will be required to read and report on a full-length text of your choice during the semester. This text will be borrowed from my collection (pulled from our library and from my home library) and will be the “full” version of the class excerpt.

Please plan to print or bring on a tablet/laptop all of the readings that we do for class

Triple-Sided Reading Notebooks:

For each topic/unit we will read 1-2 theorists, who will help us to identify the way that image and text interact/relate. We will also read examples of image-text work that are categorized under each topic/unit. To digest and think about this work you will make journal entries on BlackBoard prior to each class. In these “triple-sided reading notebooks” you will do three things:

1. Pull from the topic’s theorist 1 quote that describes how image and text interact/relate. Type out the quote.
2. Explore one of the following in 3-4 sentences:
 - a. If the quote feels mysterious come to terms with what you think the theorist “means.” In doing so make sure to articulate what feels mysterious about the quotation. Or,
 - b. Answer the Question: How is this interaction/relationship different to or similar to “non-experimental” image-text relationships? Or,
 - c. Muse over the following: What ideas, emotions, experiences might this kind of interaction/relationship be particularly good at conveying? Why?
3. Choose an example from our creative reading for the day. Note the text and page number and respond in 2-3 sentences exploring why you think this example does or does not use image and text such that it interacts/relates in this way?

You will post a triple-sided notebook entry to Blackboard by noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays. As we will be reading only 1-2 theorists per topic, we will be working with a very limited number of theorists, so be prepared to respond 5 or 6 times to the same theorist. Conceivably, you could respond, in 3 different entries for 3 different days, to the exact same quote from the theorist. This is fine: retreading the same ground from different directions often creates depth. Theorists will often reference visual art. If you are not familiar with the artwork please look it up.

1 Full-length Book Presentation: You will select one of the books from my rolling shelf to read/skim and report to our class about. The report will be due to us on the day that we are studying the text. One of the main goals of your presentation is to give us a sense of the whole text as well as to more fully explore what you have written about in your triple-sided notebook.

Please bring your “book report” book with you to class every day during the book’s “unit” so we can refer to it as an example.

5 Experiments: For each topic you will create your own writing experiment. Experiments will range from 1-3 pages in length and will be accompanied by a write-up. We will take class time (listed as studio time on the schedule) to work on these experiments. You might think of this as being similar to the way that visual artists often work on projects in shared space. Conduct and industry during studio time will be part of your experiment grade.

++ If you use the studio time wisely, you should be able to do the majority of the work on these projects in class. Write-ups, ranging from 3-5 pages per experiment, will be done at home.

++ Depending on your approach to each experiment, you may end up spending, throughout the semester, \$5.00-25.00 in art supplies (paper, glue, books to cut up, etc: I have some materials, but you might want something special).

++ Along with art supplies, you should have a space (digital/notebook/shoebox) to keep images that you want to work with this semester. Plan to do this even if you don’t think you will use physical images in your creative work: images will still be important to your assignments. Bring these images with you to class.

++ I invite you to think of your approach to each assignment on a spectrum from physical-image-heavy to language-heavy. In other words, your collage experiment, for example, might be literally cutting up magazines and texts. Or, it might be taking a collage-like structure to a piece of writing without any actual visual-art images involved. The choice will depend on your individual goals/needs along with the subject matter you are exploring.

1 Experiment Presentation: During the course of the semester you will present, orally and in writing, 1 of the above experiments, which you have performed, to the class. While this is not in workshop format, you will have the opportunity to ask the class for reactions and for feedback.

Participation and Attendance: More than 2 absences will result in a lowering of your grade. Participation includes active engagement in discussion and assignments.

Grade Break-Down:

Triple-Sided Notebook:	35
Experiments: 10 points each	50
Book Report Presentation	5
Experiment Presentation, Participation, Attendance	10

Experimental Writing Schedule: All reading assignments are on Blackboard: This syllabus will be housed on Blackboard. Any changes in the schedule will be marked in red on the BB version.

August 26: Welcome

August 28: What is an Image? What is text? What is an artist’s book? Warm-up exercises, assignments discussed, and the moving bookbox/bookshelf

TOPIC: WRITING WITH IMAGES/ILLUSTRATION

- September 2: Introduction to Topic/Exploratory Writing Exercises
BB Response Due
Reading: Theoretical Text: James Elinks *Writing with Images*; Lawrence Sutin, *Postcard Memoir*
- September 4: 1 book report) Studio Time: Planning, Playing, Proposing
BB Response Due
Reading: W.S. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*; Carole Maso *Beauty Is Convulsive*
- September 9: 1 book report) Studio Time: Work on Project
BB Response Due
Reading: Anne Carson, *Antigonick*; William Blake *The Complete Illuminated Books* (BB PDF for scan, see this site for the text (it is hard to read in Blake's version): <http://facstaff.uww.edu/hoganj/urizen1.htm>)
- September 11: 1 book report) Studio Time: Work on Project
BB Response Due
Reading: Robert Seydel *Book of Ruth*; Charles Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy*
- September 16: 1 book report) Studio Time: Finishing Touches/ Peer Interviews
BB Response Due
Forrest Gander: Poetry Films: <http://forrestgander.com/performance.html>
- September 18: 3 Presentations of Finished Work
All Experiments are Due + Discuss criteria for success/failure of this form of project/experimentation
NO BB Response Due

TOPIC: COLLAGE

- September 23: Introduction to Topic/ Exploratory Writing Exercises
BB Response Due
Reading: Theoretical Text(s) Marjorie Perloff "The Invention of Collage" and other texts possibly listed on BB; Reading: Jess Jess: *O! Tricky Cad and Other Jessoterica*
- September 25: 1 book report) Studio Time: Planning, Playing, Proposing
BB Response Due
Reading: Max Ernst Une Semaine De Bonte: *A Surrealistic Novel in Collage*; David Shields *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*
- September 30: 1 book report) Studio Time: Work on Project
BB Response Due
Reading: Reading: William S Burroughs *The Soft Machine*; October 2: 1 book report)
Studio Time: Work on Project
BB Response Due
Brandon Downing *Lake Antiquity*

October 7: 1 book report) Studio Time: Finishing Touches/ Peer Interviews

BB Response Due

Keith Waldrop *Several Gravities*

October 9: 3 Presentations of Finished Work

All Experiments are Due + Discuss criteria for success/failure of this form of project/experimentation :

NO BB Response

October 14: Fall Break (No Class)

TOPIC: TREATED TEXTS

Oct 16: Introduction to Topic: Studio Time: Planning, Playing, Proposing

BB Response Due

Reading: Theoretical Texts Mary Ruefle “On Erasure” and other theoretical texts as listed on BB; Tom Phillips *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel*; Sappho/Anne

Carson *If not, winter*

October 21: 1 book report) Studio Time: Work on Project (Dan Beachy-Quick in Class)

BB Response Due

Reading; Ronald Johnson *Radi os*; Jen Bervin *Nets*; Jen Bervin online *The Desert*:

<http://www.jenbervin.com/html/desert.html>

Wed October 22: Dan Beachy-Quick reading

October 23: KK is Visiting Writer at Shippensburg: Studio Time on your own

NO BB response

October 28: 1 book report) Studio Time: Finishing Touches/ Peer Interviews

BB Response Due

Reading; Mary Ruefle *Little White Shadow*; Erica Baum *Dog Ear*

October 30: 1 book report) 3 Presentations of Finished Work +

All Experiments are Due + Discuss criteria for success/failure of this form of project/experimentation :

NO BB Response

TOPIC: TYPOGRAPHY/SCRIPT

November 4: Introduction to Topic: Studio Time: Planning, Playing, Proposing

BB Response Due

Reading: Theoretical Text Johanna Drucker “The Art of the Written Image” and other texts possibly listed on BB; Robert Walser *Microscripts*

Field Trip to our Library's Special Collections Letterpress books

November 6: 1 book report) Studio Time: Work on Project

BB Response Due

Reading: Emily Dickinson *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems*;

Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge *Endocrinology*

Jen Bervin online *The Dickinson Fascicles*:

<http://www.jenbervin.com/html/dickinson.html>

November 11: 1 book report) Studio Time: Work on Project
BB Response Due
Reading: Guillaume Apollinaire *Calligramms*; Williams Emmett *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*; Susan Howe *That This*

November 13 1 book report) Studio Time: Finishing Touches/ Peer Interviews
BB Response Due
Reading: Mark Danielewski *House of Leaves*; Amaranth Borsuk *Between Page and Screen*

November 18: : 3 Presentations of Finished Work
All Experiments are Due + Discuss criteria for success/failure of this form of project/experimentation
No BB Response

TOPIC: ARTIST BOOKS

November 20: Introduction to Topic: Studio Time: Planning, Playing, Proposing
BB Response Due
Reading: Theoretical Text: Johanna Drucker; Anne Carson *Nox*; Chris Ware *Building Stories*; And Steve Almond on *Building Stories* in *The New Republic*:
<http://www.newrepublic.com/book/review/chris-ware-building-stories-graphic-novel-jimmy-corrigan>

November 25: Office Hours: (Studio Time on your own at school or home: Please work on your own artist book during break)
BlackBoard Response still due: Write on the book you didn't address in Thursday's Response

November 27: Thanksgiving: No BlackBoard Response, but please begin browsing through Johanna Drucker's online archive: <http://www.artistsbooksonline.org/>
Work on your own artist book.

December 2: 1 book report) Studio Time: Finishing Touches/ Peer Interviews
BB Response Due
Reading: Johanna Drucker's online archive of artist's books, selection TBA:
<http://www.artistsbooksonline.org/exhibits/exhibit3.html>
Artists Books in the Age of Digital Publishing
<https://jacket2.org/commentary/amaranth-borsuk>

December 4: 3 Presentations of Finished Work +
All Experiments are Due + Discuss criteria for success/failure of this form of project/experimentation
No BB Response Due

Learning Goals: This course satisfies the Central Curriculum category of Artistic Expression. Please find below the learning goals of this category along with the course activities that interface with each goal.

Demonstrate an understanding of the essential elements that constitute the art(s) under examination. (Reading Notebook; Book Report; Experiments)

Demonstrate an understanding of representative creative processes associated with the respective art(s) under examination. (Experiments; Experiment Presentations)

Articulate an understanding of the relationship between art and its audiences and of the potential to sustain that relationship through an ongoing development of the life of the mind. (Book Report, Experiments, Experiment Presentations)

Articulate an understanding of the ways in which art can serve as a medium for recognizing and understanding the diversities of human experiences. (Book Report, Triple-Sided Notebooks)

Identify aesthetic assumptions and traditions associated with the discipline and articulate an informed opinion of the art(s) under examination. (Triple-Sided Notebooks, Experiments)

POLICIES

Since this is a participation-based class, it is vital that you come to class each session, on time. Class and event attendance are imperative to your success, and I reserve the right to lower your final grade after 2 absences.

Academic honesty is expected from every member of the class. Please see your student handbook (www.susqu.edu/student_handbook/honesty.htm) for definitions and consequences of plagiarism.

Students with disabilities should contact me as soon as possible so that I can help to make the classroom more accessible to you.

We will all mutually agree not to:

- leave our cell phones on

- arrive late to class

- leave our materials (books, pieces up for workshop) at home

- do outside work in class

- depend on technology to work in order to scrape through deadlines

- speak without taking into consideration the good of the class and the wellbeing of one another as fellow humans and artists

- allow a behavior or type of criticism that bothers or hurts us to continue on without discussing the problem (first in private and then as a class if necessary)