

# ARTFORUM

## Jaya Howey

BUREAU

Like many (I'd wager most) "professional" artists, Jaya Howey is also a teacher. But while the tendency among his contemporaries is to compartmentalize their paired roles out of an unstated concern that the prosaic realities of the latter will tarnish the mystic aura of the former, Howey used this exhibition to dissolve the barrier between them. Although the past ten years have seen the emergence of art-as-pedagogy as a fully fledged subgenre—think, to pick one historically aware example, of the Bruce High Quality Foundation's riffs on Beuys's chalkboards—it hasn't consistently focused on the specific challenges of teaching at art institutions. But by rendering typewritten pages of syllabi for courses he teaches at Boston University—a first-year graduate sculpture and painting seminar, an undergraduate "junior painting studio," and an undergraduate painting class—onto mid-size white canvases in institutional gray, Howey directs attention toward the prescriptive minutiae of formal instruction and assessment, and to what are considered the foundational aims and techniques of studio practice. In "Edifying Lines for Sensitive Readers," his second solo exhibition at this gallery, these syllabi canvases were interspersed with sculptures featuring arrangements of patterned cushions piled on and around wooden benches in seeming anticipation of reader fatigue.

That the syllabi on display are Howey's own is key—we are not told to what extent he authored them, though the assumption is that they represent the most personal allowable interpretation of directives shared between degree-granting institutions. They represent, in other words, a reflexive element of complicity. If the stance of rebellious outsider has long since lost its appeal for most artists, having been displaced as the ideal role by that of a measured and market-savvy manipulator of extant systems, then a sneering assault on the pedagogic rules of art-making would have been beside the point. Howey instead opens the syllabi to a more playful kind of reexamination, an implicit invitation to imagine the perfect painting made using a limited set of conventional materials and completed according to an academic timetable.

Howey's paintings also prompt us to consider how we might construct such texts ourselves, were we in the same position of authority. Beginning a painting course with an introduction to the still life may read as a con-

Jaya Howey, AR141  
Introduction, 2016,  
oil on canvas,  
45 ¼ × 35 ⅜".

servative bore, but is it really such a bad idea? And might not a guide to the relative merits of different brands of paint of the kind Howey includes often prove rather useful? And who could entirely dismiss these criteria for students: DISPLAYS A HIGH LEVEL OF CONTEMPORARY ART AWARE-

PAINTING 1 - BASIC TECHNIQUES - SPRING 2016 - T/TH - 2pm - 5pm  
Code: CFA AR141 / Section: B1 / Room: 330 / Credits: 4  
Instructor: Jaya Howey - jayah@bu.edu  
Office Hours: T/TH 12-2 (Please make an appointment with me ahead of time)

**Course Description:**

This introductory painting class is structured to assist you in the process of transferring your observational drawing skills to the medium of oil paint on canvas. With a primary focus on still life, you will slowly (first in black and white, and eventually in color) become familiarized with the methods and tools of oil painting—with the goal of making you as comfortable wielding a paintbrush as you would be working with a pen or a pencil. This approach will provide you with a solid painterly foundation to be utilized in subsequent painting courses.

**Course Goals and Objectives:**

- Establish a familiarity with the material properties and viscous possibilities of oil paint
- Utilize various mark-making tools in order to build a lexicon of dynamic methods for manipulating paint
- Refine your observational skills through the daily practice of painting from life
- Develop analytical and critical-thinking skills within your own work and by critiquing the work of others
- Practice the effective working habits associated with a dedicated painting routine

*\*Individualized instruction occurs during class, as you paint. Feel free to ask for additional feedback as often as is necessary.*

**Grading and Course Requirements:**

Final grades are determined by averaging the scores received for each of the nine painting projects assigned over the span of the semester. Each individual work is graded on its degree of engagement and exploration with the assigned technique. Final grades are further adjusted by class participation, attendance/lateness, and overall investment. Grading is based less on the painting skill you bring to this class and more on the amount of effort you put into each individual exercise. This is a course that encourages initiative, invention, and experimentation—thus your willingness to explore and invest in the assigned projects will ultimately be reflected in your final grade. Outside-of-class painting time averages at around three to four hours per week.

**Absence Policy:**

- Students are expected to email me beforehand if they will be missing a class
- Each missed class will bring your grade down half a letter (A becomes an A-/A- becomes a B+)

**Exchanging Contact Information:**

Techniques are explained at the beginning of class, therefore punctual attendance is required. If you miss even one class, you will likely find it difficult to catch up. I will not take the time to explain what discussions you've missed if you do not show up or if you arrive late—so it's your responsibility to get all of this information from a fellow student. I ask everyone to partner with someone else in class and exchange contact information for these purposes. You should also text the student you've teamed up with if you think you'll be arriving late to class.

**Lateness Policy:**

- Showing up 10 minutes or more after class begins qualifies as arriving late
- Being late or leaving early twice is, in terms of your grade, the equivalent of missing an entire class

**Phones, etc.:**

- No phone use during class time will be allowed – but brief calls can be taken outside of the classroom
- Music on headphones will be allowed further into the semester.

NESS. SHOWS PROOF OF INDEPENDENT RESEARCH INTO THE TOPIC. REGULARLY GRAPPLES WITH THE MANNER IN WHICH IT APPLIES TO THE WORK? Any criticism to be made here might be better directed against the broad strokes of the syllabi's language than against any specific attitudes they embody. We are also prompted to consider the history of art education as a semi-independent field, and whether a syllabus might ever be considered a sort of manifesto (think of, say, the Bauhaus's basic course).

Unlike the text paintings, Howey's benches look to be all about formal choice. The seats themselves, while nicely crafted, are plain-looking and unvarying; their cushions, however, run the gamut of fabric, pattern, and color, and their combinations produce a complex play of

complement and interruption. Their positioning also suggests a usurping of simple physical comfort by other criteria—a condition discussed by the artist in terms of a negotiation between individuals forced to share a (physical or metaphorical) seat. If the text paintings portray academic syllabi as occupying an interzone between individual artistic and larger institutional ends, the benches stand halfway between solitary reflection and social interaction, their discordant upholstery embodying a pure—and joyful—unpredictability.

—Michael Wilson