

# Special Problems In Painting

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## Title: Special Problems In Painting

Course Section: PNTG 4341

Location: Fox Fine Arts, Room A455

Time: T/R 4:30 - 7:20 pm

## Instructor Contact Information

Name: Tom Birkner

Office Hours: M/W 11am - 12pm (130 Prospect Hall)

Email: [tabirkner@utep.edu](mailto:tabirkner@utep.edu)

Phone: 915-422-2404

## On-Campus & Online Communication

Most class content will be in-person. However, email and Blackboard are still important to this course. Blackboard will be updated each week. Check your Miner email daily. Please respond when a response is warranted.

## Instructor's Introduction

Tom Birkner, is a painter with a BA from Rutgers University and an MFA from The Pennsylvania State University. Before coming to UTEP, he taught at Drew University, Madison, NJ and at Parsons The New School for Design in NY and Paris. Tom's work is widely exhibited and he is represented by Paul Thiebaud Gallery, San Francisco, and Gerald Peters Contemporary, Santa Fe.

## Course Description

Great painters create a cosmos of painted imagery that revolves around a core of convictions. The intention of *Special Problems* is to help define, and most importantly, to depict those convictions in a great series of paintings. It is a course determined by the student's interests and instincts. They will define what their work is about. One fundamental difference between the fine and applied arts is the freedom of the artist to determine content. *Special Problems* directs students through this challenge so their paintings are no mere accident, but the result of a passionate, philosophical pursuit.

*Special Problems In Painting* is the third of a three-semester drive toward a senior thesis exhibition.

Expect to work at least 4-5 hours per week outside of class time to meet basic requirements.

## PNTG on Blackboard

There will be weekly content on Blackboard. Of particular importance are the readings. This semester you can choose between two books - *Interviews With Francis Bacon*, by David Sylvester or *Just Kids* by Patti Smith

### Course Material Is Subject To Change

Adapting to changing circumstances supersedes syllabus. The syllabus is a guideline. Changes will occur. Improvisation will be necessary. All changes will be attempts to make the class better given variable conditions.

### Course Requirements That Will Not Change

10 paintings equaling 130 hours of effort

Written statement (1-2 paragraphs) on what you want to accomplish this semester

Hand-written sentence from the weekly Blackboard reading (the sentence you like most)

### More On Course Requirements

A total of ten paintings will be due at semester's end. These are, by far, the most important part of this course and they will count for 90% of your grade. The writings will count for the rest. **However, at 10% of your grade, failure to do the writing component will result in a drop of a letter grade.**

**IMPORTANT:** Your total semester production should equate to 130 hours of work. You are free to dedicate more time to some pieces than to others. For instance, you can do 4-6 small studies that might take 2 hours each. Then dedicate more time to more important paintings.

### Class Critiques

There will be small-group critiques every 3-4 weeks. The final critique will be at the scheduled time of finals week.

You are expected to have new paintings for each critique. Paintings must show enough progress to be discussed and taken seriously. Also, to encourage you to develop paintings throughout the semester, all grading will be informal until your final grade. However, any student may privately ask for a verbal assessment.

### Course Goals and Objectives

- Draw in paint with increased confidence and skill
- Research, collect and utilize multi-faceted image sources
- Use that research to develop exciting painted imagery that is increasingly unique
- Synthesize color, form, light and space more fully
- Grasp more advanced notions of composition
- Paint in a manner appropriate to a given subject (that's what "style" is)
- Create a series of paintings you can be proud of.

- Grading Guidelines

Grading will be based on cumulative effort, improvement and quality. Because skill levels vary, evaluation will be influenced by improvement on an individual basis.

Here's a basic outline of grading priorities:

10 series-based paintings	90%
Statement of semester intent and written quotes	10%

#### Grading Standards

F - Failure  
D - Satisfactory/Below Average  
C - Average  
B - Good  
A - Excellent

If a more detailed explanation of these standards is needed, just ask and I'll be happy to supply it. For info on attendance and its relationship to grading, please see **Attendance Policy** below.

#### UTEP Policies On Covid

This class will follow all UTEP and state guidelines on Covid. Please pay attention to them, as they are subject to change. Our daily policy in class is to follow the common-sense rules we've been following the previous two semesters - masks are recommended, and might become mandatory, surfaces will be cleaned regularly with anti-bacterial solution, and keep a reasonable distance from one another. Please see the final page for more information.

#### Technology Requirements

Much course content will be delivered through Blackboard. Ensure your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have access to the web and a stable web browser. Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox are the best browsers for Blackboard; other browsers may cause complications. When having technical difficulties, update your browser (unless, of course, your friendly neighborhood tech monopoly won't let you), clear your cache, or try switching to another browser.

You will need to have access to a computer. We might use Zoom on Blackboard for video meetings. Please log into Blackboard and open this new function to see if your computer is compatible with it. If not, check that your computer software is up-to-date. If it can't be updated, contact the Tech Center at [helpdesk@utep.edu](mailto:helpdesk@utep.edu)

If you do not have a word-processing software, you can download Word and other Microsoft Office programs (including Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and more) for free via UTEP's Microsoft Office Portal. Click the following link for more information about [Microsoft Office 365](#) and follow the instructions.

IMPORTANT: If you encounter technical difficulties beyond your scope of troubleshooting, please contact the UTEP [Help Desk](#) as they are trained specifically in assisting with technological needs of students. The Help Desk is much better equipped than I am to assist you!

### Attendance Policy

Attendance, punctuality, participation and appropriate class conduct are crucial. Failure to perform to required standards will result in strong grade penalties and can cause failure of this course.

- Each student is permitted 3 absences during the semester without penalty. Students with more than 3 absences should consider dropping this course and retaking it at a time when the student can commit the proper attention to the course.
- Each unexcused absence after 3 will result in the final course grade being lowered by 1 full letter grade. Absences after the first 3 can be excused only if the first 3 absences are excused.
- Excused absences are defined as documented illness or serious illness or death in the immediate family.
- Coming to class late or leaving early is regarded and graded as being absent. All students are required to attend class on time and to remain in the class the entire time. Entering class late and leaving early is disruptive, disrespectful and sets an unacceptable standard for everyone.
- Coming to class unprepared or attending class and not working is regarded as absent.
- Information missed during an absence is the sole responsibility of the student.

#### Course Participation:

- Participation in all discussions, critiques and class days is required for this course.
- Development and execution of class projects must be done utilizing all class meetings.
- Projects executed solely out of class will not be accepted.
- Participation in the collaborative group environment of the studio is essential to the successful completion of this course.

#### Class Conduct:

- **Sick Policy - If you are not feeling well, or if you are sick, then you should not come to this class under any circumstances.** You should instead seek medical care, and/or recuperate at home. Email me or call me when you are able and let me know the circumstances, and I will help you to catch up in class when you are feeling better. . If you are pregnant, or have other physical issues such as

allergies to dust, respiratory issues, anything that I should be aware of, please inform me of this immediately, and we will work to make you safe and comfortable. If a family member is ill, and you need to care for that person, please email me or call and let me know what your situation is.

- **Guests - Guests are not permitted at any time during class.** You are expected to remain in class at all times, and may not step-out to visit with guests during class. There will be one warning. After that, you will be asked to leave class and you will be counted absent.
- **Cell phones and tablets - USE OF PHONES DURING CLASS IS NOT ALLOWED.** If there is some reason you must use your phone, please notify me BEFORE class, and or use your phone during break.
- **Music - Ear phones are permitted in one ear, and not during class discussion. First time anyone does not respond because they cannot hear what's happening in class, earphones will be banned.**
- **Studio Hours -** The studios will be open only during scheduled class times until further notice.
- **Studio Safety -** Some aspects of painting can be hazardous if proper precautions are not taken. All safety procedures will be explained to you throughout the semester, and every consideration has been taken to create a safe environment for you to work in. If you are pregnant, or have other physical issues such as allergies to dust, respiratory issues, anything that I should be aware of, please inform me of this immediately, and we will work to make you safe and comfortable.
- **Cleanliness -** You are required to clean up your work area when you are finished working in the studio. Please put all of your tools, materials, etc. away in your lockers, and wipe down tables, easels and sinks. Do not leave paint or mineral spirits on the floor. **Close all jars containing mineral spirits and put them in the flame retardant cabinet in Studio A457. Put all rags with solvent on them on the red, flame retardant trash cans with lids.** If you have difficulty cleaning up after yourself, then you will receive a special tutorial on how to clean up after class.
- **Work Removal -** Finished works must be removed at the end of the semester. UTEP will not be responsible for work left in the studio. All materials, canvases, etc. will become the property of UTEP Painting after the clean-up deadline. Exceptions to this rule must be discussed with me.

### Late Assignments, Make-up Work and Exams

Late and make-up work are only afforded in the case of an excused absence by arrangement and approval of the instructor.

### **Incompletes, Withdrawals, Pass/Fail**

- Incompletes or "I" grades will be considered for students completing satisfactory or better work and having serious legitimate situations beyond their control requiring additional time to complete the course requirements. All "I" grades are at the discretion of the instructor and the approval of the Department Chair.
- Students hold full responsibility for withdrawing from this course if that procedure is elected. Withdrawals must be completed on or before the final date to drop a course with a

“W”. Students missing this deadline will be issued a grade for the performance in the course.

- PTNG 4341 is a grade-based course and is not available for audit or pass/fail options.

### University Policy Statements

**Cheating/Plagiarism:** Cheating is unethical and not acceptable. Plagiarism is using information or original wording in a paper without giving credit to the source of that information or wording: it is also not acceptable. Do not submit work under your name that you did not do yourself. You may not submit work for this class that you did for another class. If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing, you will be subject to disciplinary action, per UTEP catalog policy. Refer to <http://www.utep.edu/dos/acadintg.htm> for further information.

**Disabilities:** I will make any reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities, including learning disabilities. Please see me personally before or after class in the first two weeks or make an appointment, to discuss any special needs you might have. If you have a documented disability and require specific accommodations, you will need to contact the Disabled Student Services Office in the East Union Bldg., Room 106 within the first two weeks of classes. The Disabled Student Services Office can also be reached in the following ways:

**Web:** <http://www.utep.edu/dsso>

**Phone:** 915-747-5148

### **COVID PRECAUTIONS:**

Please stay home if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we can work on appropriate accommodations. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, you are encouraged to report your results to [covidaction@utep.edu](mailto:covidaction@utep.edu), so that the Dean of Students Office can provide you with support and help with communication with your professors. The Student Health Center is equipped to provide COVID 19 testing.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people in areas of substantial or high COVID-19 transmission wear face masks when indoors in groups of people. The best way that Miners can take care of Miners is to get the vaccine. If you still need the vaccine, it is widely available in the El Paso area, and will be available at no charge on campus during the first week of classes. For more information about the current rates, testing, and vaccinations, please visit [epstrong.org](http://epstrong.org)