FASC 246, Construction Techniques

Spring 2015, Fridays 12 – 2.50

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Office hours: Fridays 10 - 12 and 3 - 4.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
A practical introduction to a construction and materials driven practice: making the thing before making the meaning. This course is designed to draw out and foster an approach to making that examines the interrelation of materials, techniques, and skill-sets. A basic introduction to a variety of construction techniques.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE
For this class the process of construction will be considered inextricable from the particulars of the materials chosen and also the tendencies, choices, strengths, skills, and weaknesses of the student/artist making the choices and applying them. You will be encouraged to exploit not only your particular, self-declared, technical strengths but also to make use of your particular, self-declared weaknesses or lack of knowledge. For this class, as well, I will ask you to think of yourself as a kind of “material,” a set of techniques, skills, knowledges, or limitations. You will think of yourself as a process of construction as you gain new skills and recognize new limitations in relation to particular materials we will be working with and modes of construction we will be learning.

Using simple materials and basic techniques some of the class time will explore constructing as a process of thinking exercises. Descriptive journals written and sketched in during and after the construction exercises, plus photo documentation and retroactive analysis, will be the primary means of assessment. Some portions of the class will be about skill acquisition. For this part to work for the student they will need to complete tasks to the best of their ability, manifesting in the things they make a care toward accuracy and quality of finish.

SKETCHBOOK/JOURNAL and DOCUMENTATION
A significant part of the learning process will thus be the keeping of a sketchbook/journal and the ongoing documentation of projects—documentation itself is today considered a kind of skill, and to this end we will also look at your skill in developing effective strategies of documentation. The journal should be a repository of your thoughts about what you are doing, your expectations about the materials, the techniques, and your opinions of what “content” may be ascribed to the finished version of your work in any particular material. In a sense the journal will be a stand-in for your thinking process at the examination time as
well as a self-reflexive tool for your to explore how you make things, work with materials, and even document and think about your practice. What I will be looking for in the journals is honest and clearly written expressions of your expectations/opinions about the materials and techniques; both the accommodating and resisting nature of your own skill set, the materials and the techniques; an examination of a possible internal logic to the project: and a questioning or statement of what could possibly be read into specific materials and their handling at the completed stage of a project.

Photodocumenting each made object and each variation/modification is important. Students should use basic photography (cameras in cell phones are ideal) to create a body of evidence of their work process. This documentation will be submitted as part of the students grading.

Working outside class time is encouraged but not necessary. This class is designed to be supportive of a student’s general practice and so students may bring in thoughts and ideas relating to other courses into this class but must still fulfill the requirements of each course as being separate.

CRITIQUES
At the end of each project block there will be a class discussion whereby each student will deliver a brief overview of their particular work to the class. After each presentation there will be a question period. Critique times may be subject to changes in scheduled time.

REQUIRED SUPPLIES
Sketchbook/journal
Students will need to maintain a journal that will include written and drawn components. It is recommended that they use a US letter sized sketchbook, spiral bound is practical but not necessary, and they may find grid paper very useful. This journal will be used during class time and will need to be submitted as part of their examination. For the sake of eliminating confusion this journal should only be used for this class.
Pencils, ruler, eraser.
Personal safety equipment

A means to digitally photo document work during construction and of “completed” projects. Photography with a cell phone is acceptable. A printed montage of the photodocumentation of the students work will be required for examination as part of the sketchbook/journal.

GRADING
Course grading will be based upon your willingness to engage in the processes and produce substantial sketchbooks/journals with meaningful insights about their practice in relation to the materials explored in class. You will need to manifest some acquisition of the skills being demonstrated in the classes. You
will need to participate in discussions actively, intelligently, critically, and respectfully. While different approaches to working are acknowledged, you must engage in the self-directed construction projects with some vigor. During this course, where student creativity is declared as desired over craft skill, evidence of making an effort that risks “failure of the object” is encouraged.

The sketchbook/journal should contain both written and drawn records of the student’s efforts. A word-processed summary (for legibility purposes, at least a page) of each project should also be included by being stapled into the sketchbook at the end of each project. A printed montage/s of the photodocumentation, with the smallest dimension for any one image being 3”, should also be stapled into the sketchbook at the end of each project. Black and white printing is acceptable. The sketchbook/journal with typed summary and photodocuments will all be due for assessment at the end of the final class. Grade breakdown will be as follows:

Project 1. – 10%
Project 2. – 15%
Project 3. – 10%
Project 4. – 15%
Project 5. – 15%
Project 6. – 10%
Sketchbook/journal (including photodocumentation) – 15%
General Class participation – 10%

PROJECTS—CLASS MEETINGS

WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION
Introductions; course overview; course expectations; health and safety familiarization

The scheduled classes, deadlines and critiques are guidelines only and may be subject to change.

WEEKS 2 to 4
Project 1. Laminated plywood bends and modular connectivity
General Materials/Tools
Sheets of thin plywood (1/8" or 3/16”)
Scrap heavy ply and framing lumber
Table saw
Chop saw/Radial arm saw
Glue
Screws
Clamps
Personal safety equipment

This project has two parts. Firstly students will make their own forms through an
exercise in tool use and material handling. Then, secondly, they will use the forms they have made in a collaborative fashion using temporary methods to create new forms.

Each student will create a plywood shape form with multiple bends along its length by a simple lamination process. All students will use the same gauge plywood cut into strips in order to make a three layer laminated form. They will create a basic laminating bending form in which to clamp in the laminated plywood as it cures. Students can make any bend that they can manage, or are inclined to, but it must have at least two to three distinct bends. Both ends of the finished plywood shape will allow for the students to connect to each other’s shapes.

Once the shapes are cured the class will make multiple structures by connecting all the shapes using connector pieces and clamps. All students will document their input with their own photographs and written thoughts during the group process. There will be a critique scheduled at the completing of this project. All students will present their work and ideas for discussion with the class.

Students will need to have been properly inducted into use of the wood shop for this project. Students may need familiarity with the radial arm saw, chop saw, drill press, band saw and cordless drills. Part of this class will be assisting with this familiarity.

**WEEKS 5 to 6**

**Project 2. Make a small plinth/cube**

General Materials/Tools

½”Plywood or MDF

Glue

Nails

Wood filler

Sandpaper

Paint

Personal safety equipment

Each student will make a small cube shaped plinth. Using the table saw to cut mitered edges, they will then glue and nail the shape together. They will then fill any holes, sand and paint it. The emphasis on this project is to learn some fabrication skills. Gaining some familiarity with industrial tools, table saw, pneumatic nail guns, is useful not only in terms of accessing possibilities for an artistic practice but to foreground a need to attend to safety in regards to their own person and also to those around them.

Students will need to have been properly inducted into use of the wood shop for this project. Students may need familiarity with the table saw, radial arm saw, and pneumatic tools. Part of this class will be assisting with this familiarity.
WEEKS 7 to 8  
Project 3. Heavy paper, single sheet, tab and fold, cut up and tape
General Materials/Tools
Heavy paper
Tracing paper
Scalpel
Sharp Utility knife
Scissors
Tape
Steel ruler
Cutting mat
Small plinth from previous project

The project is two-fold. Firstly use heavy paper to construct freestanding shapes that reflect the qualities and possibilities of the material. Exploring the structural problems of a relatively flimsy structural material and somewhat awkward joining technology. Generating multiple objects (at least 10 objects, minimum.) that explore not only successful self-support, but also the ways in which it cannot, or won’t easily, support itself. Secondly, leading on from the previous part with the difference being that in this case each object must emerge in a continuous form from a single sheet of paper and be freestanding. Students will grapple with strategic cutting, folding and tab/slot methods of jointing to create objects that self-support and occupy space. By experimenting through trial and error students will create several templates that could be used to replicate the objects.

Both parts of this project will require the students to make the shape fit on the plinth they made from the previous project. At least 10 objects should be attempted for each part of the project with students documenting their efforts as they work.

There will be a critique scheduled at the completing of this project. All students will present their work and ideas for discussion with the class.

WEEKS 9 to 10  
Project 4. Lumber and joining
General Materials/Tools
2 x 4 framing lumber
Steel construction connectors
Screws
Cordless drill
Chop saw/Radial arm saw/Band saw
Tape measure
Pencil
Personal safety equipment
Aping construction industry techniques, this project will have the students create
“wrong” structures. They will cut down framing lumber; create basic joints; use industrial joint aids; create both random and perpendicular angles; create multiple freestanding temporary structures and document them. All joining will be made with screws so that the structures can be dismantled and remade. The basic premise of this project will be to handle the materials and explore their potential for object creation and how industrial materials/processes could be made to hold unusual meanings. Students should photodocument objects/object modifications as they work for their own note taking and assessment purposes. There will be a critique scheduled at the completing of this project. All students will present their work and ideas for discussion with the class.

Students will need to have been properly inducted into use of the wood shop for this project. Students may need familiarity with the radial arm saw, chop saw, drill press and band saw. Part of this class will be assisting with this familiarity.

**WEEKS 11 to 12**
**Project 5. Corrugated card, crease, slit-fold, laminate joints**
*General Materials/Tools*
- Corrugated card
- Sharp Utility knife
- Steel ruler
- Cutting mat
- Tape
- Glue

Increasing in scale from the previous paper projects, this project will explore the qualities and possibilities of corrugated card. Comparing crush creases vs slit folding to alter the card into non-planar shapes. Also, remembering the work with plywood earlier, the cards’ potential for greater structure through lamination and slotted joints. Students should photodocument objects/object modifications as they work for their own note taking and assessment purposes. There will be a critique scheduled at the completing of this project. All students will present their work and ideas for discussion with the class.

**WEEKS 12 to 13**
**Project 6 Concave/Convex object**
*General Materials/Tools*
- Chop Saw
- Band Saw
- Belt sander
- Biscuit Joiner and biscuits
- Nails
- ¼” MDF or plywood
- 1” x 2” clear pine
- Glue
- Clamps
- Personal safety equipment
This final project will have students make two small curved boxes. One will be a ramp, concave shape, the other a \(\frac{1}{4}\) round convex shape. There will be some laminating of wood in order to cut the support structure for the curves. Simple butt joins for the rest of the structure and then laying in and attaching the flexible skin. Apart from learning some skills in fabrication the students can experience making objects that bear witness to their structure and their surface.

Students will need to have been properly inducted into use of the wood shop for this project. Students may need familiarity with the radial arm saw, chop saw, biscuit joiner, band saw, belt sander and pneumatic tools. Part of this class will be assisting with this familiarity.

**FINAL WEEK**
**Summation/ Hand in Sketchbooks/notebooks.**

**Attendance**
It is essential that one attend class and work on the assigned projects during class hours. Attendance is mandatory. Attendance will be taken. Excessive (more than three) unexcused absences will result in a final grade lowered by one level, example, “B” to “C”.

- After missing the rough equivalent of 10% of regular class meetings (1.5 classes if the course meets once per week) the student’s grade and ability to complete the course will be negatively impacted.
- For each subsequent absence (excused or otherwise), the student’s letter grade will be lowered by the following increment: 1 absence over 10% equivalent missed = the lowering of the final course grade by one full grade.
- It is always the student’s responsibility to seek means (if possible) to make up work missed due to absences, not the instructor’s, although such recourse is not always an option due to the nature of the material covered.
- It should be understood that 100% attendance does not positively affect a final grade.
- Tardiness can accumulate and become equivalent to an absence.
- Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class.
  - Any student not in class after the first 10 minutes is considered tardy.
  - After a first warning, students who persist in the following disruptive activities: sleeping, texting, emailing or online browsing for purposes other than class research, will result in a tardy for that class session.
Students will be considered absent if they leave without the instructor’s approval before the class has ended or if they take un-approved breaks that last longer than 45 min.

A If you are an A student, you are working above and beyond the requirements of the assignment and producing work that is rich, fully realized and raises many questions. You are clear and attentive to your own developing artistic practice and are challenging your skills and your thinking. You are an important and thoughtful voice in discussions and generous with your peers. You are in class on time with no unexcused absences. If you have to be absent or late to a class you have notified me well in advance.

B If you are a B student you are working hard and producing work that is rich and raises questions although it may not yet be fully realized in it's intensions. You are challenging your thinking and your skills and are a thoughtful presence in critiques. You arrive on time to class and have no more than 2 unexcused absences.

C If you are a C student you are doing what is required with a good attitude. You don't have more than 2 unexcused absences and you aren't late all of the time.

D If you are a D student you are not doing what is required or not doing it satisfactorily which could include turning things in late not being prepared for critiques, studio visits or workshops. Your attitude is indifferent and you have more than 2 unexcused absences.

F If you are an F student you are not doing what is required of the class and are not adhering the department's policies. You have multiple absences or late attendance. You are indifferent and non-participatory.

Required in all Syllabi . . .

Statement for Students with Disabilities
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity
USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the
intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/.

Roski admissions information (Not required for MFA or PAS graduate courses)
For information and an application to become a Fine Arts minor, please visit http://roski.usc.edu/minors/ Please contact the art advisors at 213-740-6260 with any questions about a minor in the Fine Arts. To become a Fine Arts major, please visit http://roski.usc.edu/undergraduate_programs/ Please contact Penelope Jones at Penelope@usc.edu or 213-740-9153 with any questions about majoring in FA. Applications are due October 1st and March 1st every year.”
Bibliography


