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A Powered-Up Teacher

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Brian Winkenweder critiques the most current work of Zach Mitlas '09. One of Winkenweder's favorite parts of teaching is working directly with students in their studios. He offers advice, positive feedback and constructive criticism, prompting several students to call him a mentor and source of inspiration.

A powered-up teacher

It's hard to imagine falling asleep in Brian Winkenweder's class.

Whether he's turning cartwheels (every class gets at least one per semester), or encouraging students to down energy drinks before they come to class, Winkenweder brings exuberance and enthusiasm to the classroom and expects the same from his students. His lectures, which have been described as exuding "more energy than a triple-shot espresso," create an environment where information and ideas swirl like a tornado, where discussions of issues important to artists spur students to question their own understanding and assumptions of culture, behavior and even politics.

As assistant professor of art and visual culture at Linfield College, Winkenweder's passion for teaching is as contagious as his love of learning. He admits that as an undergraduate he would have liked to take every class offered at the University of Washington. He found his calling in the eighth grade when he learned that you could read books, talk to other people about them and get paid for it.

A prolific writer and researcher, Winkenweder was

awarded contracts for two books last spring, had three articles accepted for publication in academic journals, and is finishing six other articles for publication. In recognition of these achievements, Winkenweder received the first Allen and Pat Kelley Faculty Scholar Award, created through an endowment established by the Kelleys, both '59 (see sidebar).

Winkenweder fills the role of art historian, a discipline that has transformed in recent years into what is now termed visual culture. Visual culture includes the traditional fine arts, but also the worlds of graphics, design, advertising, movies, video games and other pop culture phenomena that have exploded in recent years. His work is multi-disciplinary, including English, comparative literature, art and philosophy.

"I'm interested, almost to a fault, in anything intellectual," Winkenweder said. "When I'm doing research, I can easily get distracted because everything has the potential to be fascinating."

Teaching is also intellectually stimulating.

"There is something that can be very electric in the classroom environment," he said. "There is a discourse that is shaped by each class."

Winkenweder keeps his classes flexible. He doesn't lecture in a style where "you turn the professor on for 50 minutes and then turn him off, just like a fountain of knowledge."

Students are free to ask questions and often seek him out outside the classroom for advice or input. One of the best parts of teaching is working directly with art majors in their studios. Because Winkenweder's expertise is postmodern art, he has a clear understanding of what has occurred in the last 60 years.

"Part of my job here is to be someone who wants to talk about art and who is informed about art, so students routinely invite me into their studios for critiques," he said. "It is the single most enjoyable part of my job, and I remain flattered that they want to hear what I have to say."

Zach Mitlas '09 calls Winkenweder a mentor and the most dedicated professor he has ever met.

"Brian encourages me regularly as a painter to fully develop my ideas and skills," he said. "He works to give students the necessary resources and more in order to help them succeed. During critique, Brian approaches students in a professional fashion, treating each scholar as an equal. He is a highly developed intellectual always trying to energize students to learn and thrive at Linfield and beyond."

Winkenweder's specialized research synthesizes art theory and its underlying philosophies with aspects of the social sciences and communication. He focuses on the influence of two internationally known academics, Ludwig Wittgenstein, one of the 20th century's most important philosophers, and artist Robert Morris, who responded to Wittgenstein's philosophy and incorporated it into his work by re-interpreting the rules of modern art.

Winkenweder views his academic writing, what he calls theoretically informed art criticism or philosophical poetics, as a kind of stylized art, because he exercises a great degree of creativity. "I find that it stimulates the same part of my mind that is stimulated when I am making art.

"It is this tremendously energetic moment of discovery and I use that moment with words," he added. "I really think of how I write as a kind of poetics. I am very sensitive to word choice and also to structure. There's a real craft in how I put my work together."

Teaching allows him to share with students not just his research, but more importantly, how to gather that kind of knowledge.

"It's about helping students learn how to think for themselves," he said. "I am helping them figure out what they are passionate about by sharing my own experiences, my own interests and how I learn more about those topics. When I see the concepts that we have articulated in class informing students' art and showing up in their conversations, that is tremendously gratifying."

Ron Mills, department chair, said Winkenweder is a marvelous addition to Linfield's liberal arts environment in which thoughtful intellectual integration is critical.

"He is a devoted humanist and writer and a compassionate and articulate colleague who offers a thoughtful voice to all faculty discussions and freely gives his expertise to students," he said. "As an occasional performance artist, his capacity to mentor young artists represents a boon for all of us in the artistic and academic community."

Winkenweder believes he has found the perfect fit at Linfield.

"It's not only the values of the institution, but also the size, the intimacy, and the sense of community that exists among faculty, staff, administration and students. I believe I am lucky to be where I am."

By providing for some release time from teaching, the Kelley Award will give Winkenweder the time to start a new research agenda during the academic year, which will include writing a visual culture textbook designed to introduce college students to this burgeoning and exciting new interdisciplinary field of study.

— Mardi Mileham



Allen and Pat Kelley Faculty Scholar Award

Brian Winkenweder is the recipient of the first Allen and Pat Kelley Faculty Scholar Award, an endowment established by Allen Kelley '59, the James B. Duke Professor of Economics at Duke University, and his wife, Pat '59. While serving as a Linfield trustee, Kelley wanted to create a formal means to recognize outstanding scholarship and research by Linfield professors. The cash award is presented to a faculty member whose work is likely to lead to a publication with an academic press or journal. The faculty member will also receive a reduction in teaching load to focus on preparing the research for publication. Winkenweder is preparing material for an introduction to visual culture textbook, tentatively titled *Critical Spectacles: Exploring the Rhetoric of Visual Expression*.

Brian Winkenweder file

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