

November 11,

From: Tony May, Professor of Art *Tony May*
To: Spatial Arts Area Screening Committee
Re: CLASSROOM VISITATION REPORT

I visited Professor Shelly Cook-Contreras' Art 13, *3-D Concepts* class on November 9th and her Art 68, *Beginning Sculpture* class on the following day. In both classes critiques were in progress when I arrived. The atmosphere in both classes was comfortably relaxed yet focused. Prof. Cook-Contreras was very clearly in charge. An air of seriousness prevailed amidst scenes crowded with the lively visual clutter of many projects and works in progress (some from other classes) which filled room A103 as well as the small outdoor yard at the *Auto Bay* where the sculpture class also met. (All three of Professor Cook-Contreras's classes are cramped for space and working under less than ideal situations in that regard.)

Students were given all the time they needed to present their projects without interruption after which response was given, coming mostly from the teacher, but at times, especially in the sculpture class, from other students as well. Prof. Cook-Contreras' comments were well-considered and appropriate. The project in the design class was based on the concept of artfully documenting the passage of time. I was present only long enough to see four projects presented and so cannot comment on the overall success ratio. Of those I did see, only one of the four was, I thought, fairly successful. The others were quite poor in both craft and concept and it struck me that the project might be a bit too sophisticated for these particular students. (A student in the class, whose work I found quite successful, later told me that there had been many more strong projects shown during an earlier part of the critique.) It was clear that Prof. Cook-Contreras was asking a lot of these students and expecting them to respond in fairly mature and accomplished ways. I believe that this is good and to be encouraged, especially when it leads the students to undertake extensive self-initiated research. In the design class, however, it may be that a bit more fundamental approach is called for, at least this has been my inclination in teaching this class. I believe this is an issue the whole Spatial Arts area ought to address in upcoming core curriculum meetings because it is one with which we all struggle.

In the sculpture class critique I was much more favorably impressed overall with both the high enthusiasm as well as significant accomplishments of the three students whose work I saw being discussed. This was a smaller group which seemed to have reached a level of cohesiveness and even of having a good time. These students were clearly stretching and growing. They were all attempting big things and being quite successful...and were rightly pleased with themselves and their projects. The assignment itself was well-conceived and sequenced for this group. In these projects personal feelings and concepts were the driving forces and craft and technique were striving mightily to keep up with the ideas but somehow managing to do so and to very good effect! These several projects were, I thought, very impressive coming from a first semester sculpture class. They showed a level of commitment and investment of time (and even money) which was quite extraordinary. Shelly's direction and influence were clearly responsible for these good results.

Professor Cook-Contreras brings a new level of professional expertise in the field of performance art to our faculty. Her own impressive record of achievement in this area has been a source of new excitement and inspiration to many of our students. Her serious commitment to art and performance is clearly manifest in all of the course materials she prepares for her classes. I found those materials to be impressive in their range and quality, clearly indicative of the high standards and expectations she has for her classes. She is well qualified for her present teaching assignment and in her first semester, struggling valiantly to create proper work and performance spaces for her classes within our badly space-challenged facilities. It is truly refreshing to see a new faculty member so quickly taking up the reins and establishing a significant presence for herself within the school. I enjoyed my visits to her classes and commend her on her efforts.