

CMX604 S2023  
M 4-6:45 HUM 581  
Nick SOUSANIS@SFSU.EDU  
STUDENT HOURS M11-12; W12-1  
OR BY Appt

# ADVANCED MAKING COMICS



SAN FRANCISCO  
STATE UNIVERSITY

**NOTE:** NOTHING ABOUT THIS MOMENT IS NORMAL, AND OUR EXPECTATIONS MUST REFLECT THAT. YOUR HEALTH, YOUR LIVES, NEED TO COME FIRST (AND SHOULD ALWAYS COME FIRST). DEADLINES ARE IMPORTANT, BECAUSE THEY KEEP THE CONVERSATION MOVING, BUT LIFE IS BIGGER, ALWAYS, SO WE'LL BE FLEXIBLE AND WORK IT OUT TOGETHER.

## DATES

2/20 OBSERVATIONAL DUE  
3/27 MINICOMIC DUE  
3/20 SPRING BREAK  
4/24 NONFICTION DUE  
5/22 FINAL SESSION

## ASSESSMENT:

30% ONGOING ACTIVITIES  
30% SMALL PROJECTS  
5% STUDENT HOURS  
10% PORTFOLIO  
25% FINAL PROJECT

**STUDENT HOURS:** TALK COMICS, GET FEEDBACK, LET'S SUPPORT YOUR WORK!

**PORTFOLIO:** OVERVIEW OF YOUR KEY WORKS, PROCESS SKETCHES, STATEMENT, BIO - A PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNT OF YOUR WORK!

## 3 SMALL FINISHED PROJECTS

SHORT BUT RESOLVED PROJECTS TO PUBLISHABLE STATE:

① **OBSERVATIONAL COMIC:** SLICE OF LIFE, DIARISTIC, I.E. INTERACTION ON STREET, WATCHING A BIRD... **DUE 2/20**

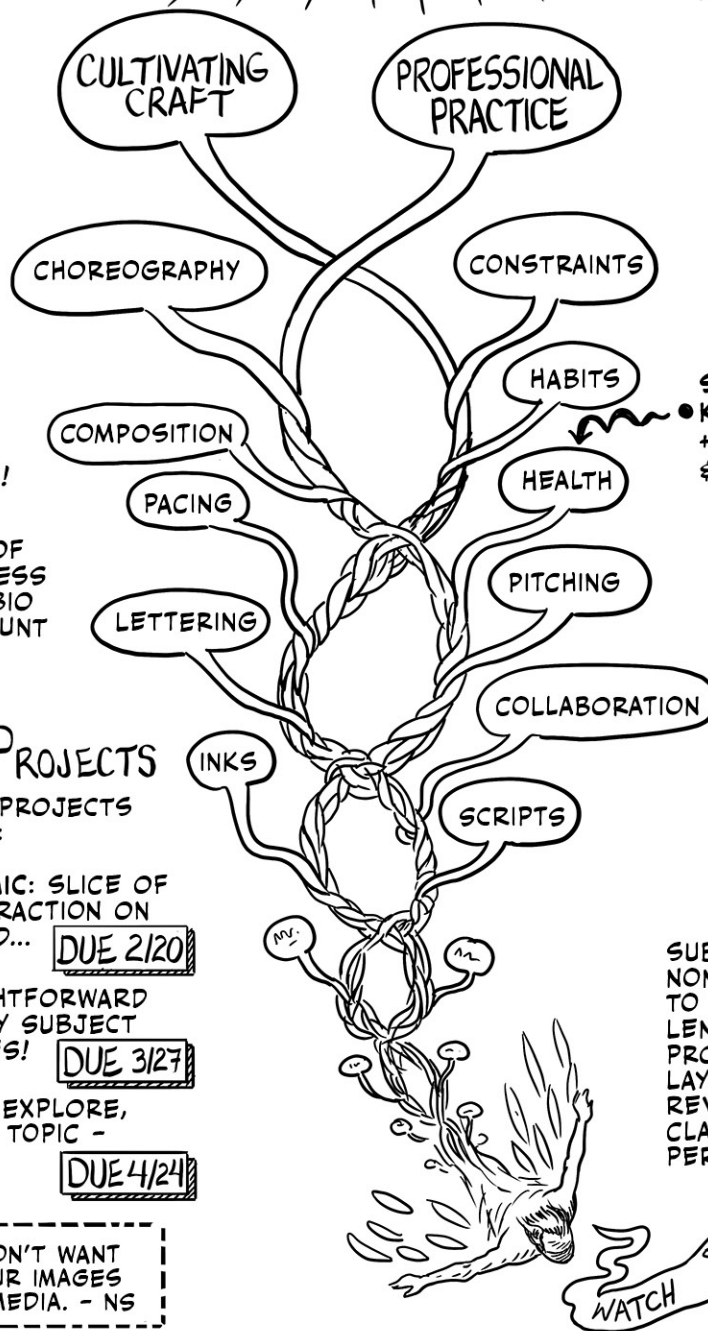
② **MINI-COMIC:** STRAIGHTFORWARD OR EXPERIMENTAL - ANY SUBJECT FORMAT. MAKE MULTIPLES! **DUE 3/27**

③ **NON-FICTION COMIC:** EXPLORE, EXPLAIN INFORMATIONAL TOPIC - SHORT BUT DENSE **DUE 4/24**

\* LET ME KNOW IF YOU DON'T WANT ME TO SHARE ANY OF YOUR IMAGES ON MY WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA. - NS

YOU WILL BECOME CONFIDENT IN FINDING YOUR OWN APPROACH TO SAYING THINGS THAT CAN ONLY BE DONE IN COMICS

+  
DEVELOP A SELF-SUSTAINING COMICS-MAKING PRACTICE.



## CHOOSE 3 MUSES



AUTHORS YOU WILL COPY, ANALYZE, DRAW INSPIRATION FROM TO HELP YOU FIND YOUR OWN WAY

## 2 SKETCHBOOKS

- ① FOR IDEAS, EXERCISES, COMPOSITIONS, & COMICS IN-PROGRESS
- ② FOR DRAWING PRACTICE: MUSES, COPYING, LETTERING, HANDS, EXPRESSIONS, TREES, WATER,... "THINGS I DON'T LIKE DRAWING (AND THINGS I DO)."

## READINGS

SONNY LIEW CHARLIE CHAN HOCK CHYE  
• KRIOTA WILLBERG DRAW STRONGER  
+ REGULARLY DISTRIBUTED COMICS & THEORY READINGS

\* VISIT COMIX EXPERIENCE FOR DISCOUNT - THEY ROCK!



## FINAL!

SUBJECT OF YOUR CHOOSING: FANTASY, NONFICTION, MEMOIR, ... MAY CONNECT TO "EMBED" PROGRAM. SUITABLE LENGTH & LEVEL OF FINISH. YOU WILL PRODUCE CONCEPT SKETCHES, LAYOUTS, THUMBNAILS FOR CRITIQUE & REVISIONS! (WE MAY PUBLISH AS CLASS ANTHOLOGY.) ALL WILL PERFORM COMICS ON LAST DAY!!

WATCH YOU SOAR!

San Francisco State University: Comics Studies  
**CMX/LS/HUM 604 Advanced Making Comics**  
Spring 2023

Class Meetings: M 4:00-6:45 HUM 581 *Comics Lab*

Instructor: Nick Sousanis [sousanis@sfsu.edu](mailto:sousanis@sfsu.edu)

Student Hours: M 11-12; W 12-1 or by appointment (in-person or Zoom)

**Prerequisites:** Must have taken *CMX 304 Making Comics* or consent of instructor.

**A Note about Now:** Let me acknowledge to start off, nothing about our current circumstances is normal, and our expectations must reflect that. As understanding as I typically am about deadlines and workload in normal times, I'll be even more so now. Your health, your lives, need to come first (and *should always* come first), and we can work out solutions for whatever is going on (preferably with a good channel of communication). I want to see the work we do together as helpful to what you are experiencing and not an added burden. This doesn't mean we won't work hard and that it won't be challenging, just that it serves you as something meaningful and relevant to find your own ways into it. Deadlines are important, because they allow us to keep the conversation moving and keep learning from one another, but life is bigger, always, and definitely now, so I'll remain flexible and we'll work it out together.

The course will be in , but we'll continue to take care of each other. At the current moment, that still means masking in indoor spaces, we'll do our best with ventilation/filtration, and if you're sick – please stay home and take care of yourself. I will be streaming the class on zoom and recording it, so even if you can't make it, you can tune in live or watch when you can to access what we did, and all the instructions and resources will be available on Canvas. The key in all of this is to reach out and let me know what's going on and what you need. As a teacher, I see my role as being there *to support you in where you are going*. With that said, on with what we'll do together...

**Overview:** Advanced comics-making. Students will engage in numerous in-class exercises and small projects in making comics alongside analysis of comics, in order to grow their understanding of how to communicate in comics and discover working methods that best work for them. All in-class exercises, activities, assignments, will work towards producing a significant work ready for publication. It is intended that the class produce an anthology of student comics.

**Course Outline:** While comics certainly draw on both drawing and writing, they are a form all their own that embrace diverse drawing styles and skills and boundless approaches to storytelling.

In this class, students will grow in their ability of *how to say things in comics that can't be done in other forms* and *gain command of approaches to communicate their own narratives*. This will entail exploring every aspect of comics-making, with a strong emphasis on grasping all that goes into the construction of a comic. This will include layouts, thumbnails, drawing, inking, lettering, color (if applicable), pacing, page turns, as well as professional aspects, like production and "breaking in".

In-class individual and collaborative exercise prompts will entail explicit experiments with form, as a way of pushing students out of their comfort zone to expand their boundaries. Longer assignments will increase students' understanding of storytelling and conception of subject matter, and serve to refine their working process. It is expected that over the term, students will come to develop their working approach and style, and document their workflow as part of the course.

Students will conduct thorough investigations into how established authors create their works – looking at their habits, working process, and techniques. This will also involve analyzing and reverse-engineering page layouts and design choices as a means of informing students' own creative approaches.

Critique will be an essential component of the course. We will work to hone our eyes and responses in order to offer constructive feedback to peers, and create a community of shared practice – supportive and able to help everyone improve.

Even as we investigate comics texts to highlight formal qualities, we will continue to read theoretical and practical treatises articulating working methods, including such authors as Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen, Matt Madden & Jessica Abel, Lynda Barry, Ivan Brunetti, Will Eisner, Kevin Huizenga, and others.

Over the term, we will be building in each student *a self-sustaining comics-making practice* and *cultivating the confidence to tackle a project from start to finish* and have a solid understanding and expectation of what that means and what it takes. This will prepare students to know how to pitch a project to an editor, publisher, or a client – and be able to clearly define deliverables and timetable. Students will keep and maintain two sketchbooks (or one split sketchbook) – one for ideas and layouts and the other for drawing practice, and compile a thorough portfolio – to showcase their process and development over the term.

The class will culminate with each student producing a significant, self-directed project (specifics of which will be agreed upon between student and instructor), ready for publication. Students will begin developing the concept for this early on in the term, and more time will be allotted in class as the term progresses for consultation and critique around these projects. The class as a whole may opt to produce a physical and/or virtual anthology of student comics that showcases their collective work – that will be determined by the cohort. We will have a public reading of our comics as part of the final day, details to be discussed over term.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

1. identify significant formal features in the creation of comics and speak to their purpose and contribution to the storytelling
2. create comics utilizing a variety of different approaches, i.e. understanding of pacing, page turns, how to integrate lettering, etc.
3. able to effectively communicate a significant and compelling narrative or idea through the comics form
4. have a command of a variety of techniques and steps that go into making a comic – from conception, to layouts, to producing a finished work
5. understand which ways of working best suit the student as author and how to use them most effectively to convey the sorts of narratives they want to tell
6. recognize the ways that they can employ the comics form to speak to real world situations – and have an awareness and sensitivity of the way in which working with visuals can provoke different effects than working solely in text
7. be confident in their ability to produce publishable work

**Readings:** We will be selecting one long form comic as a shared reading among the class, and there will be readings (comics or theory) provided by the instructor throughout the term. Comix Experience and Comix Experience Outpost (near campus) will offer discounts on comics for class members who present a printout of their syllabus – check out these and other SF comics shops!

**Recommended Texts:** As with *Making Comics 1*, given the highly individual and idiosyncratic nature of comics making, there is no “how to” text for the course. However, I recommend acquiring some texts around the elements of craft and theory that you might find insightful to begin to build your own library. Some recommendations: Scott McCloud *Understanding Comics & Making Comics*; Matt Madden & Jessica Abel *Writing Words & Drawing Pictures* and *Mastering Comics*; Lynda Barry *Syllabus*, Ivan Brunetti *Cartooning*; Will Eisner *Comics & Sequential Art*; Nick Sousanis *Unflattering*; Stan Lee & John Buscema *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*; Walt Stanchfield *Drawn to Life*, books on perspective, anatomy, as suit your needs...

**Required Materials:** You will be responsible to build up your own tool as you develop your particular approach to comics making, but I've listed the bare essentials here.

- Sketchbooks: Must have two separate sketchbooks (or a dual one that is split distinctly between sections). In the first you will keep ideas, compositions, comics in progress, and exercises. The other, "What I don't like drawing (and what I do)" – will contain your daily drawing practice. This might include copying other artists, drawing from life, lettering, working on things like hands, trees, cars, facial expressions, etc. Frequently we will tie the week's focus into a mini-assignment.
- Drawing tools of your choice (pen, pencil, brush pen, etc.), color options if you are so inclined...
- Paper – this is highly individual too and something we can discuss together – find something that works for the way you want to work.

**Assignments and Evaluation:**

30% Ongoing mini-assignments (in-class and take home), attendance, participation  
30% Three Small Finished Projects  
5% Student Hours  
10% Portfolio  
25% Final project

(Evaluation criteria for final project: 1) Does the work demonstrate the student's ability to employ the different features of comics creation to convey their meaning with clarity on the page? 2) Does the work demonstrate an ability to understand the variety of approaches that can be brought to bear to make meaning in comics?)

**Ongoing Min-Assignments/Attendance/Participation (30%):** This includes actively participating in discussion and engaging in the in-class and take home ongoing mini-assignments which will consist of a variety of comics-making activities or other drawing exercises, done independently and collaboratively.

**Portfolio (10%):** compile a thorough professional portfolio – to showcase process and development over the term, additionally, you will be encouraged to develop an online presence as an important aspect of understanding how to grow an audience.

**Student Hours (5%):** You are required to visit with professor during *student hours* or make an appointment for a different time to check in and address any questions you wish to explore. To receive full credit – you must show up at least once. This is an opportunity to talk about your ideas one-on-one with your professor and get direct feedback, let's support your work! Take advantage of it!

**3 Muses:** At the beginning of the term, you will identify three authors you feel a strong connection to and want to study more deeply. To do so, you will analyze their use of the form, identify key elements that make their work stand out, copy them, and draw on them as a source of inspiration for how you compose pages, how you handle shading, whatever the case may be in order to help you find your own way. In addition to your self-study that will be undertaken in your sketchbook, we will also develop a few quick exercises around your muses to put them into action...

**Three Small Finished Projects (30%):** As the heading suggests, these three projects will not be large in length or scope – but will require you to work them to a publishable state of completion.

- 1) Observational Comic – this can be slice of life, diaristic, something you observed and want to share (an interaction on the street, watching a bird, whatever). It need not be about you in a memoir sort of way, only about what you observed.
- 2) Mini-Comic – straightforward or experimental. Any subject, format you wish – but something you can make in multiples and distribute. We'll workshop formats, designs, and look at a range of examples leading up to it.

- 3) Non-fiction Comic – this can be as short as one page, something taking up a topic from another class or field you're interested in, a team up with another department, graphic medicine, informational, consider the office of engagement, or other.  
(Potential +1) Why Comics – This is a class collaboration exploring why we make, study, and think about comics. A piece created together that could serve as an argument for the comics studies program here at SFSU. Format to be determined!)

**Final Project (25%):** Finished short comic (4-6 pages, to be agreed upon as we develop the project). Produce concept sketches, layouts, a mockup of your piece, and final piece with time for revisions. You must also provide an artist statement, bio, and process sketches to accompany your comic. This may become part of a larger group anthology, to be determined as a group. We will also do a public reading of our final comics, and will discuss in class.

**Course Outline** In addition to some of the key dates below, I will keep you all apprised in class, via email, and Canvas of what's coming up so that we all remain on the same page, and you are expected to regularly check Canvas and your **sfsu.edu email account** to ensure you are on top of things.

Class 1 1/30: Intro  
Class 2 2/6:  
Class 3 2/13:  
Class 4 2/20: Observational Comic DUE  
Class 5 2/27:  
Class 6 3/6:  
Class 7 3/13:  
Spring Break NO Class 3/20  
Class 8 3/27: Mini-Comic DUE  
Class 9 4/3:  
Class 10 4/10:  
Class 11 4/17:  
Class 12 4/24: Non-Fiction Comic DUE  
Class 13 5/1:  
Class 14 5/8:  
Class 15 5/15:  
Final Exam Period Monday, 5/22 5-7?

**Guests:** TBA

**Canvas:** We will be using Canvas for this class. Those of you unfamiliar with Canvas can find resources and assistance online as well as with the office of Academic Technology. You are automatically enrolled in Canvas for all of your courses registered at SFSU. *Academic Technology* website: <http://at.sfsu.edu>  
Canvas log-in page: <https://canvas.sfsu.edu/canvas>

## Course Policies

**Classroom approach:** I consider learning as acquiring the tools to follow one's own curiosity, and thus teaching means providing a framework, establishing an environment for participants to explore and thrive. Rather than being out in front, I see my role as accompanying students on a journey we all make together. As a class, we all come from different backgrounds and offer distinct vantage points – we want to draw on all of them – to expand the possibilities for what we can all learn as we each find our own way.

To that end...

**Class participation** is essential! We learn in community, gain from each other's perspective. Let's be here, on time, and respect one another's point of view and discover what we can learn together.

**Classroom Policies:** This is a class that thrives on interaction, improvisational collaboration, so it's best if everyone is in attendance and on time. That said, given the circumstances and in regards to my note at top – our expectations will be different. The main thing is to keep me posted on what's going on if you can't join in regularly – we can work with anything from a point of communication.

**Late Assignments:** Again, as above, I'd like to see deadlines observed or clear communication about missing them if necessary – conversations grow best when we're working together. But understanding, flexibility, and grace are essential now more than ever – so keep me updated as you can, and we can make it work.

**Contact and Feedback:** You are encouraged to visit me during student hours or make an appointment to discuss class, raise questions, or just check in. When emailing me, please use your "sfsu.edu" account when possible and put "CMX/LS/HUM 604" and topic in the subject line so I am sure to address it more quickly.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Liberal & Creative Arts will be reported to the Dean, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email [dprc@sfsu.edu](mailto:dprc@sfsu.edu).

**University Policy on Sexual Harassment & Violence:** SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

**The SAFE Place** - (415) 338-2208; [SAFE Place website http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe\\_plc/](http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/)  
**Counseling and Psychological Services Center** - (415) 338-2208; [Counseling and Psychological Services Center website http://psyservs.sfsu.edu](http://psyservs.sfsu.edu)

For more information on your rights and available resources see: [Title IX at SF State http://titleix.sfsu.edu](http://titleix.sfsu.edu)