

## THE MEDIA ARTS

### *An Introduction*

The Media Arts standards are intended to address the diverse forms and categories of media arts, including: imaging, sound, moving image, virtual and interactive. Media arts standards do not dictate what or how to teach, but define age-appropriate outcomes for students, towards the achievement of Enduring Understandings and Artistic Literacy. They are therefore quite generalized, not specifying particular technologies or techniques, and containing very few examples of terminology and activities. The Connecticut Arts Standards allow for a great diversity of instruction, methodology and circumstance. They are adaptive to the wide range of conditions that exist currently for the form across the country. District learning targets may offer greater specificity as they are developed, and [Model Cornerstone Assessments](#) will provide more specific examples of projects, lessons and activities. (NCAS for Media Arts, 2)

### *About*

Media Arts is a branch of art education that encompasses a range of disciplines, technologies, and critical frameworks. It is more constructive to think of Media Arts as an *ethic, attitude, or behavior* than as a single artistic medium. It is rather an approach to the creative process that is in constant flux, in which artists learn and engage with emerging technologies in pursuit of unique, expressive uses. Media artists are interested in what each medium offers in pursuit of their work, and the ways in which they can be combined in new and innovative ways. Media Arts, therefore, is an intrinsically interdisciplinary practice.

### *Means and Ends*

If the tools and techniques (the *means*) of Media Arts are always evolving as emerging technologies build upon themselves, then the products and outputs (the *ends*) are in flux as well. Media Arts education is preparing students for jobs, creative venues, and media cultures that are unclear to us right now—in fact, they might not yet exist. Practical outputs might be inkjet prints, interactive websites, design campaigns, multi-media installations, journalistic and documentary projects, or site-specific collaborative projects that engage with cultural issues through activism. This broad range of outputs require proficiency in, or at least experience with, tools such as digital image editing; basic computer programming; image and text layout; video editing; sound production and design; storyboarding, sequencing, and concept development; as well as more fundamental skills of research, online behavior, collaborative and group thinking, and digital file management.

### *Interdisciplinary*

Media Arts must be defined as unique from the departments and disciplines that are similar and already bleed into its purview, such as Information Technology, Computer Science, Communications (which often encompasses digital video production and broadcast journalism),

and Music Technology. Media Arts can be thought of as the nucleus around which these disparate fields orbit. Media Arts is the place of convergence, synthesis, and interdisciplinary experimentation. The challenge to the Media Arts teacher is to frame these various techniques and outputs through the lens of artistic expression, as opposed to technical acquisition. While technical acquisition is also imperative, and must be broken down into accessible lessons and exercises, the overarching goal must be to produce works of art. Emphasis (and, more specifically, assessment) must address content—conceptual development, innovative use, and material experimentation—versus demonstration of technique. Media Arts curriculum seeks to yield creative problem solvers and holistic communicators, versus master technicians and narrow specialists. Media Arts teachers are training versatile *learners*, whose flexible, interdisciplinary attitude will prepare them to explore and make use of ever-evolving, ever-emerging technologies and media environments.

### *Emerging Technology versus Foundational Principles*

Does Media Arts education require a computer lab? The short answer is *no*. The discipline of Media Arts is intrinsically interested in emerging technologies because it is interested in all (every) sorts of technical, communication, and experimental media. This is, of course, especially true of the newest forms of media, in that we are just beginning to understand them as a culture. While Media Arts is commonly understood to involve emerging technologies, it also fills two elemental gaps in traditional art education: 1) Interdisciplinary thinking (a potentially broader and more articulated home for what might traditionally be dubbed mixed media, collage, or experimental media) and, 2) Time-based media (a concern for elements of duration, sequencing and multi-sensory composition that might traditionally be addressed through sculptural space and performance art). The following is a list of some of the foundational principles of Media Arts education that can be addressed, regardless of facilities. Some of these principles overlap with other disciplines and standards, and speak to the interdisciplinary nature of Media Arts:

Interdisciplinary thinking

Time-based media

Emphasis on diversity/implications/possibilities of material choices

Deciphering medium (mode of expression) from content (information medium carries)

Sequencing

Linear/non-linear narrative/storyboarding

Image/text relationships

Contexts (cultural, virtual, site-specific, public, private)

Juxtaposition

Captured vs. found source material

Collage (image/sound/video/pattern, particularly in relation to source and context)

Appropriation as cultural critique

Presentation/resolution as dialogical (art as a form of communication)

## *The Artistic Processes in Media Arts*

The following descriptions of artistic processes are meant to apply to schools both with and without updated computer labs.

### CREATE

Creating in Media Arts is distinguishable from creating in other disciplines in its potential as digital assemblage—the potential to combine various source materials to produce expressive meaning. Source material can be divided into two categories: captured and found. Captured material can be considered, generally, material converted from analogue to digital form, and is generated through use of a camera, audio recorder, scanner, or any other capture device. Found material can be considered repurposed, recontextualized, or manipulated digital material, or any other non-digital material that exists in a prior (or priorly formed) context. Within this broad framework of material concern, Media Arts students should make use of the same compositional elements and principles found in visual arts, design, and music: elements of *line, shape, form, color, value, texture, space*, and principles of *balance, movement, rhythm, contrast, emphasis, pattern, unity*. It is the nature of the material curiosities—the things that are captured, found, juxtaposed, and combined—that distinguishes the *media arts* creative process from creating in other disciplines. It is the versatility and variability of forms that the media arts teacher must help to facilitate in order to support this intrinsically interdisciplinary approach to art making.

For instance, various captured video clips of a rushing stream might be best resolved as 1) a linear narrative or documentary video, 2) a poetic, looping video and sound installation, 3) as a visual background for other elements of image/text collage, or even 4) as still frames that act as photographic prints or digitally processed abstractions. And still, of course, there are more possibilities. Creating in Media Arts is, in a sense, letting the final forms of our projects follow our experiments with materials, their contexts, combinations, and conceptual intentions (the term *conceptual* is used generally to mean non- or pre-form ideas and hypothetical impetuses). It is distinguished by multi-media versatility and creative initiative to make use of whatever tools necessary and/or available in the formulation of our work. In creating with a Media Arts ethic, therefore, form follows material experimentation and concept.

### PERFORM/PRESENT/PRODUCE

To follow the logic of *creating* in Media Arts—that form follows material experimentation and concept—final products should not be fixed or predetermined, but rather should be dictated by the materials, concepts, and the various combinations and potential outputs that the media artist entertains. In a discipline so defined by ambiguity, variability, and flexibility with emerging technology, decisive resolution of art works is more important than ever. While this assertion may seem antithetical to the nature of creating in Media Arts as an

intrinsically interdisciplinary and formally open-ended endeavor, it is the clarity of final product—and articulation of material and conceptual choices through which they are displayed—that will help to root Media Arts as a concrete, analyzable, teachable art-making practice.

To reiterate a tenet integral to *creating* in Media Arts, it is the versatility and variability of (*plat*)forms that the media arts teacher must help to facilitate in order to support this intrinsically interdisciplinary approach to art making. For instance: 1) a linear narrative or documentary video might be best viewed in a screening room or theater, but might also reach audiences in new ways on a Website or other public venue; 2) a poetic, looping video and sound installation will have different effects if designed for the cavernous space of a warehouse, versus the intimate space of a closet; 3) collage and/or animated works might be best resolved as collaborative pieces with other artists, such as sound designers or illustrators, and end up as interactive designs, workshop and event-based collaborations, or studio productions; and, 4) still-image photographic or digitally processed prints might require consideration of ink and paper type, questions of scale, environments for hanging and lighting, and archival storage. Beneath all of these divergent possibilities should be the foundational questions: *What is the best way, or set of ways, to convey my ideas, material interests, and meanings to my audience? What, and how, is my final product communicating?*

Realizing and presenting in Media Arts is intrinsically dialogical in that it engages audiences in the variabilities and combinations of source materials, technical tools, and cultural interpretations. Media Arts products are in critical dialogue with their audiences about, among other things, their own formulation. Products are dialogical, for instance, as opposed to being 1) vehicles of technical virtuosity e.g. traditional skills of drafting, mastery of an instrument, or excellence in a specifically specialized track), 2) results of an industry formula (e.g. narrative structure of television and film, or the practices of investigative journalism), or 3) subsumed by an applied art trade (e.g. designing, programming, illustrating, or animating for a commercial studio).

To define what Media Arts products are *not* is not to disparage those above mentioned forms of production (in fact many of the skills and literacies acquired in Media Arts curricula will prepare students for these outputs and industries. For instance, it would be a huge success for a Media Arts student to go on to work as a game designer), but rather to distinguish Media Arts as an interdisciplinary and culturally critical practice, and to more narrowly define Media Arts products as expressive works of fine art, outside of the applied industry model. Critical awareness of the means, material sources, and cultural contexts of a work of Media Arts, therefore, is integral to the shaping of the final product and the parsing (the *negotiation*) of its meanings.

## RESPOND

Student displaying ability to understand and evaluate works of Media Arts are those who are able to decipher the building blocks of what they are viewing or experiencing. In this way,

Media Arts students must learn to deconstruct and discern the materials, sources, and contexts that they experience in a piece in order to begin to negotiate (compare/contrast) the variables, articulate a feeling, formulate an opinion, and respond by participating in a dialogue. A Media Arts student will learn that the materials and tools inform the final output—that the means are integral to understanding and evaluating the ends. Questions such as the following help to give students the critical language to interpret works of Media Arts: *What do the materials and forms the artist has chosen say about the piece's content and meaning? How does its context (whether it is web-based, installed on the roof of a building, performed on a stage, or heard through headphones) influence our experience of the artist's intentions? What relationship does the artist draw between digital (virtual) and analogue (physical) space? How does the experience of the Media Arts piece relate to duration: as an ephemeral, immediate experience, versus one that evolves over time?*

Media Arts students respond to works of art with an understanding that materials, techniques, formal structures, and final output have been chosen intentionally by the artist, and take nothing for granted in the evaluation of the artwork's meaning as a form of communication and cultural production.

## CONNECT

Once Media Arts students *respond* to a work of art with attention to material and cultural criticality, they are able to connect the work to ideas, disciplines, and contexts outside of the work, the art world, and themselves. In that Media Arts is intrinsically interdisciplinary, students are already primed to consider the greater cultural contexts and applications for the ideas that the work of art explores. If Media Arts is a discipline of synthesis and experimentation with the expressive potential of emerging technologies, then it is already a discipline devoted to connection. A student who exhibits mastery of the Media Arts standards might decipher the many divergent strands of research that may have contributed to a work of art, and that the work might inspire, such as cultural studies, various sciences, philosophy, engineering, political science, and infinitely more.

Media Arts, in this way, becomes the conduit to a student's appreciation of, and participation in, art as a culturally integral affair, as opposed to an isolated field. It is also, therefore, a more accessible fine arts discipline, in that it does not require mastery of specific and narrowly defined tools, but rather a flexible, open-minded ability to learn whatever tools one needs in order to express a concept (a creative impetus). It can become the home for the critical thinker, the mechanical tinkerer, and the material experimenter. By developing an acute criticality of artists' choices in the creation of their art work—particularly within the diverse, multi-faceted, interdisciplinary practice of Media Arts—students are more prepared to hone their awareness of their own interests, skills, and material choices, and their own ability to synthesize: a life skill that will help prepare them for whatever endeavors they pursue, whether in the arts or otherwise. Media Arts education, in this way, is an integral discipline in preparing students for

an ambiguous future in which the collaborative, entrepreneurial, technically versatile, culturally literate, and creatively inspired among them will thrive.