Massachusetts College of Art and Design / Handshouse Studio

Art Projects: Toys for Elephants (3DTD-205X-01)
3 credits, Fri. 8:00AM -1:00PM Woodshop
Faculty: Rick Brown, Office Collins Basement
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This is a new course presented as collaboration between Handshouse Studio, Mass College of Art and Design and the Buttonwood Park Zoo in New Bedford Ma.

This is an intense interdisciplinary, multicultural, community service, international, high profile design/build course providing students with a project where art comes face to face with science. Since 2011, I have co-taught the course three consecutive years. It has become a successful community service project that has relevance on a world scale. Students have an opportunity to make a real contribution to elephant’s daily needs and to participate in a global discussion about the complexity of this threatened species, in an intensely political climate that surrounds the issue. This course has generated attention locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Handshouse Studio has initiated an effort to expand the course into an international project where a number of colleges and university art and architecture programs collaborate with local and regional zoos in an effort to broaden the scope of this design challenge and to provide a wider field of elephant communities and varieties of habitats.

Toys for Elephants has been offered as an elective course open to all interested students throughout the college. It is a design and build course with the objective to create objects and activities that enhance the quality of life of animals in captivity. Students work with animal trainers and keepers to study animal behavior and befriend two adult elephants from the Buttonwood Park Zoo in New Bedford MA and design and produce full-scale functional toys for elephant enrichment.

Departmental Goals:
• Develop basic problem solving skills
• Develop professional practice skills
• Work with an actual client and learn to produce successful designs related to a complex relevant design issue
• Develop communication and presentation skills
• Develop skills in cooperation, collaboration, community service
• Develop a world view and prepare students to become citizens of the world
• Learn to set high goals with limited time and budget and to understand how to incrementally establish clear steps towards successful implementation.

Course Objectives
The course has three phases of development: Research, Design, Construction. (Students are expected to participate in each of the three phases)
• In the Research Phase students observe elephants in their current habit, interview animal trainers and zookeepers, record information in a database as a design resource.

• In the Design Development Phase students brainstorm for ideas based on their own research, create drawings, models and presentation materials to present to a review committee for final selection.

• In the Construction Phase all students work to construct the selected design or designs in their designated materials at full scale.

This is a fast paced class in every phase and our objective is to have one or more successfully completed full scale Toy for Elephants before the end of the semester. Students often realize that this is a high stakes game where if they rise to the occasion through a dedicated commitment to the project can make actual positive contributions to the lives and lively hood of endangered animals.

The class is modeled after a small design firm. Students are organized into design teams. Whenever possible students from different disciplines are organized into teams where shared diversified experience and skills heightens the collaborative overall problem solving experience for everyone.

Each team creates designs and must meet predetermined presentation requirements. Students will present to members of the zoo staff who will determine if the designs are durable and safe, will stimulate physical activity, will occupy and challenge the elephants intellectually, will stimulate and develop socialization skills, will diminish anxiety, will entertain and engage zoo visitors and encourage interactivity that engages elephant participation, and will enhance elephant health and hygiene.

Students present, a second time, to a faculty review board who will prioritize proposals based on; feasibility, financial limitations, construction skill levels, time constraints, and quality of designs based on faculty and zoo staff assessments.

When final selections are made for construction, everyone has agreed to continue to work towards actualization of the chosen projects knowing that success will depend on their continued collaboration and cooperative efforts. The completed works are then introduced to the Elephants for their final evaluation.

This is a unique opportunity for students to participate in a real world community service project to create research and design that has the potential to have a significant effect on the lives of animals in captivity. John Rubin’s Productions is an Emmy Award winning film company based in Cambridge MA that has begun documenting our project and plans to make an hour long made-for-television film on the subject of Toys for Elephants.
Course Calendar

Jan. 24
Roster, course description, determine students skill sets, determine students workdays, discuss and plan first field trip to Buttonwood Park Zoo.
See BBC Film: *Nature: Echo of the Elephants* (focus African Elephants in their natural habitat)
In Class Project: Brainstorm and create questions for zoo trip
  1) Toy categories
  2) Elephant behavior
Designate student note keeper  Create student design teams
Read for next week: *The Astonishing Elephant* by Shana Alexander

Jan 31
Field Trip: Buttonwood Park Zoo New Bedford , MA
(Students come prepared to take notes –notebook and writing tools, cameras to document elephants and elephant habitat)
  Meet Keith Lovett, Director of Buttonwood Park Zoo
  Meet Shara Martin Zoo Animal Curator
  Meet Bill Sampson Elephant Keeper
  Meet Elephant Keepers
  Meet Elephants: Emily and Ruth
  Brainstorming session, questions and answers
  Open discussion of issues related to animal rights, animals in captivity, zoos, natural habitats, circus’s, menageries, elephant sanctuaries, ethics, publicity. What can we do next?

Feb7
Skype Discussion with St. Louis Zoo Elephant Curator
  Discuss issues of animal rights, animals in captivity, elephants in their natural habitats, zoos, circus elephants, menageries, elephant sanctuaries, ethics, publicity, opportunities to make a difference, is toys for elephants ethical?
  Discussion of Design process:
  Groups present Elephant Enrichment Research to the class
  Groups begin design process
  Process and material determination: limit designs to three categories:
  large timber structures / tire constructions/ steel fabrications
Idea generation

Feb14
Design Development
  Discussion and in-class progress
  Research, designs, design details, model making , drawings
Group Review

Feb21
Design development
  Discussions about presentation format
  Titles of Toys
  Concept statement
  Materials list, equipment needs, transportation issues and budget
  Construction schedule installation issues
Group Review
Feb 28
Design development
- Discussions about presentation format
- Titles of Toys
- Concept statement
- Materials list, equipment needs, transportation issues and budget
- Construction schedule installation issues

Group Review
Discussion: **Documentation / final compilation of class projects, photographs and films**

March 7
Field Trip To Buttonwood Park Zoo
Presentation to Designs to Zoo Staff /Review

March 14 NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

March 21
Presentation to Mass Art Faculty /Review
Establish hierarchy of designs based on
- Idea
- Effectiveness as Elephant enrichment
- Feasibility: can we build it (do we have the skill set within our group?)
- Time limitations
- Costs: Do we have the budget?

March 28
Toys for Elephants Construction begins

April 4
Toys for Elephants Construction

April 11
Toys for Elephants Construction

April 18
Toys for Elephants Construction

April 25
Toys for Elephants Construction

May 2
Final presentation of Toys For Elephants to Emily and Ruth Buttonwood Park Zoo

May 12
Last Class Review of class: assess final presentations in- terms of elephant response, design to construction process pro’s and con’s.
Communication with other potential design teams:
- Technical University of Munich, Germany / Florida State University / Washington University, St Louis MO / Ohio State University/Oberlin College

Collectively produce: **Documentation / final compilation of class projects, photographs and films**