

the critique: observation · analysis · interpretation · evaluation

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art 1120

“Things of perfection must not be looked at in a hurry, but with time, judgment and understanding. Judging them requires the same process as making them.” - Nicolas Poussin · March 20, 1642

art criticism In our culture the very word "criticism" generally carries a negative connotation. While in reality, it is one of the most fundamental and effective ways of coming to a better and deeper understanding of an image and what it reflects of and about our culture(s.) The process is less about seeking judgment and more about seeking organizational & insightful questions, such as the "how" & the possible "why."

a re-definition Begin to re-define for yourself, a more accurate interpretation of this very important and empowering process. It will promote deeper reflection, refined perception, and more accurate articulation. An added benefit...if used well, it will assist the artist on the path to a more creative and higher quality of art making. One possible re-definition...."developing the questions." Others?

an approach The following is one good approach to increase your enjoyment when looking at art and to better understand & then formulate an intelligent and thoughtful response.
In order, proceed through these two steps:

1st the OBJECTIVE process

This step involves cool-headed observation and its analysis.

Think of yourself as the detective collecting the evidence.

2nd the SUBJECTIVE process

This part of the process requires a more personal approach of interpretation and evaluation.

Think of yourself as the lawyer, making the case.

objective process

1 OBSERVATION

RECOGNIZE & NAME ELEMENTS, PARTS, & IMAGES THAT RELATE TO THE "SUBJECT"

Simply list what you see (in complete thoughts or sentences.) Observational statements will generally reveal shared recognition of several observers. Frequently, everything in this discussion/paragraph will be repeated by other's comments and critiques. Pretend you are scanning the artwork for "nouns." Rely on the art elements as guideposts you're your observations.

ART ELEMENTS: line, shape, value, color, light, texture, space, time,

2 ANALYSIS

SORT, ORGANIZE & ANALYZE THESE OBSERVATIONS... USE THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND THE TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED BY THE ARTIST... TO DESCRIBE THE "BIGGER (OBSERVATIONAL) PICTURE"

In your discussion, this process will involve the analysis and organization of the observational information. Use the design principles to state larger conclusions. This is where to include how the artist created the work. Many viewers often forget that the simple things may actually be the foundation of the entire piece. Include only objective statements about the design components, media, format, and style... "It does this ...it does that...(i.e. "such and such creates the affect of ...")

DESIGN PRINCIPLES: unity and variety, balance, emphasis, scale, rhythm, contrast, economy

subjective process

3 INTERPRETATION

DEVELOP & PROPOSE POSSIBLE "CONTENT/ MEANING" SENARIOS AS SUGGESTED BY THE SUBJECT AND ITS FORM

Review those last several issues of art elements and design principles in the above analysis. Ask yourself *why* the artist may have chosen that particular way to create the image/work. This involves imagining what are possible reasons for the organization and what meaning it might render. Base these imaginings on your *objective* comments. Pretend you are a lawyer cross-examining the artwork and build meaning based upon the undisputed facts.

4 EVALUATION

GUAGE ITS MERIT/SUCCESS BASED ON CRITICAL CRITERIA & PERSONAL REACTION

Finally, whether or not you actually like the particular work, you can intelligently weigh the merits or lack thereof. You build upon an objective base of analysis through careful observation. Remember to state your final assessment- that it is or is not successful [*not whether or not you like it*] because of your objective reasoning. Whether or not you like the work often has as much to do with your own personal sense of aesthetics, tastes, or styles, rather than its cultural contribution; though both are valid and pertinent to your commentary.