

The CRITICAL METHOD

In order to go beyond the question, “*Is it Art*” to “*Is it good art?*,” we must have a rationale which will help us answer this. Is it simply a matter of using the elements of art and principles of design? Is it?

Following the Critical Method to write a criticism of an artwork is like this:

- Follow all four steps in order.
- Write (correct spelling, grammar and high school level word choice) 1-2 complex sentences to address each step.
- A standard level criticism of any work should be at least one detailed, long paragraph.
- An extension level criticism will be more essay style (4-5 paragraphs) a page to a page and a half with multiple specific references to the artwork to support statements made in the body of the work.

Describe *What do you see?*

First of all, what type of artwork is this? (sculpture, movie, painting, drawing...etc.) How does it look? What events are taking place (time of day, social events, etc)? Identify what is easily apparent to see and only state the FACTS.

Analysis *How is it organized?*

When you analyze an artwork, you tell how the subject matter and elements of the work have been organized by the artist. How do the elements and design principles influence the composition? Which ones are strong and which ones are weak? Are the elements and principles being used appropriately?

- *Elements:* Color, Value, Shape, Form, Space, Line, Texture (chose 1-2 to focus on)
- *Principles:* Balance, Emphasis, Pattern, Rhythm, Variety, Unity (chose the most apparent one)

Interpret *What is the mood, message, and/or meaning?*

Use the information from your description and analysis to help you identify the meaning of the work – what does it tell **YOU** about the human experience? Does the work raise questions about art or life? Does it relate to any kind of culture? What objects does the work remind you of? Talk about your own experiences that may relate to the work. Most importantly you should be able to develop some sort of meaning from the work. This is the place for opinions.

Evaluate *Is it successful?*

One word responses do not work here. You need to support your decision by using facts that you have collected from the work by talking about them in your writing. Start off by asking yourself, is the work completed well, or is the work poorly done, and how? Does the work communicate good design principles and/or elements?

Does it try to imitate the real world (*Representational*)? Is the work an abstraction of the real world (*Abstract*)? If the work does not represent anything from the real world then it is *Non-objective*? To what extent does the work hold your attention, arouse curiosity, or make you think?

Now its your turn...

On the back I have written a critique of a work by Picasso we learned about in early in the semester. Next to it, you will attempt to gather your thoughts to write on about The Old Guitarist. This is a planning page and you should have more bullets of information rather than complete sentences.



Da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, 1505

Describe

Da Vinci painted the portrait “Mona Lisa’ showing the Renaissance lady seated in front of a landscape.

Analyze

Choosing to use extreme contrasts of high and low value tones emphasizes the head of woman. The variety of colors used is remarkable mostly because of their extreme low intensity.

Interpret

Because Da Vinci chose to paint the lady with a tiny smile, I perceive it as a sarcastic smirk. The smirk reminds me of the way I hold my mouth when I’m thinking of something that’s best left unsaid.

Judge

While “Mona Lisa’ is famous and priceless, I would prefer to have a portrait of a modern woman with a strong smile hanging in my home.



Picasso, *Old Guitarist*, 1904

Describe

An old man sitting on the ground with a guitar is the subject of Pablo Picasso’s Blue Period painting, “Old Guitarist”(1904).

Analyze

The monochromatic image in a wide range of blues from those seen in icebergs to muddy denim jeans harmonize the composition.

Interpret

Fingers strumming the guitar, the tired old man seems to be holding the only thing left that’s of any value to him. Every surface is worn and soft like faded jeans. This work makes me feel nostalgic and is quite humbling to look at.

Judge

I like “Old Guitarist.” I feel the value of the work exists in the meaning it brings to me.



Picasso, *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907



Picasso, *Old Guitarist*, 1904



Picasso, *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907



Picasso, *Old Guitarist*, 1904