

Separate into small groups (3-5 individuals per group)
List the names of your group members.
One paper per group.

ASSIGNMENT

Your group assignment will be to write, in accurate English, an Art Criticism report for one of the artists/artworks that were shown during class over the past two weeks.

The paper should describe the subject matter and the art elements, lines or forms, shapes, colors, patterns (or repetitions, rhythm) and textures; analyze arrangement, color harmony, and technique; interpret its symbols and meaning; and judge its value.

The critique of the work should be thorough and include components of/from each of the following areas of art criticism.

(There are four major areas of art criticism: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment)

An Introduction to Art Criticism

When you first see an artwork, particularly a painting or sculpture, you know only what you see--the subject, the colors, the lines, the shapes.

To "know" a work of art you must learn to "interrogate" it. You must question the work in a systematic way to discover different aspects you may have overlooked and to find what meaning it may have for you.

This is called art criticism. Art Criticism is a process of questioning and discussing an art work with good reasons in a systematic way.

OBJECTIVES:

You will be able to:

- * Describe an artwork, including the artist's technique
- * Analyze the elements of the work
- * Interpret its meaning for you, and
- * Judge why you and others may value it

CRITIQUE

What is a critique?

A critique is an oral or written discussion strategy used to analyze, describe, and interpret works of art.

A short essay on how to critically look at artwork.

Art is not just about the execution, it is about the concept. The concept of most nonrepresentational art is about the pleasing or satisfying arrangement of shape and color. (Actually, some are not pleasing at all).

Most nonrepresentational art is difficult for people to understand because it doesn't represent a concrete image that our eyes and brain can identify. There is something unsettling and scary about this for people not used to looking at nonrepresentational art. It's why many people look at a Jackson Pollock painting and have the same thought as my mother--I could do that. Or the even more insulting, my kid could paint that. And on the subject of Pollock paintings (which we've yet to see in their related categories of Abstract Expressionism and Action Paintings), many also have cigarette butts imbedded in them, which must make the feeling of non-artness even more intense for some viewers.

Even the context of Fluxus artist/composer John Cage's 4'33" is important. The piece is never played, keeping the audience in a suspenseful silence for the duration of a song length. In the performance of this artwork a pianist comes onto stage and occasionally turns pages. In the midst of this silence the audience becomes aware of ambient noises: a car, a plane, the rustling of people in the hall. It all becomes part of the piece and is meant to challenge and engage the listener.

How to Separate the Parts, Deductive Reasoning in Art Criticism

Description

Describe the work without using value words such as "beautiful" or "ugly":

- * What is the written description on the label or in the program about the work?
- * What is the title and who is (are) the artist(s)?
- * When and where was the work created?
- * Describe the elements of the work (i.e., line movement, light, space).
- * Describe the technical qualities of the work (i.e., tools, materials, instruments).
- * Describe the subject matter. What is it all about? Are there recognizable images?

Analysis

Describe how the work is organized as a complete composition:

- * How is the work constructed or planned (i.e., acts, movements, lines)?
- * Identify some of the similarities throughout the work (i.e., repetition of lines, two songs in each act).
- * Identify some of the points of emphasis in the work (i.e., specific scene, figure, movement).
- * If the work has subjects or characters, what are the relationships between or among them?

Interpretation

Describe how the work makes you think or feel:

- * Describe the expressive qualities you find in the work. What expressive language would you use to describe the qualities (i.e., tragic, ugly, funny)?
- * Does the work remind you of other things you have experienced (i.e., analogy or metaphor)?
- * How does the work relate to other ideas or events in the world and/or in your other studies?

Judgment or Evaluation

Present your opinion of the work's success or failure:

- * What qualities of the work make you feel it is a success or failure?
- * Compare it with similar works that you think are good or bad.
- * What criteria can you list to help others judge this work?
- * How original is the work? Why do you feel this work is original or not original?

THE ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Advanced: Completed and participated in all parts. Used all criteria.

Competent: Completed most of the parts and missed one of the criteria.

Beginner: Completed some parts, but used only a few of the criteria.

Advanced:

- * You accurately labeled the ART form and described the subject matter with many sources of evidence. You also identified the medium, technique, procedure and process. You identified the MAJOR colors and their qualities: texture, brightness or darkness, warmth or coolness.
- * Your analysis of the composition includes the arrangement and relationship of forms, lines and shapes, the use of color, color harmony and technique.
- * Your interpretation includes a discussion of symbol, idea and meaning--for you.
- * Your judgment discussion includes an appropriate art theory and an explanation of your supporting reasons.
- * Your paper is clearly written with correct spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage; and uses a varied sentence structure.

Competent:

- * You labeled the ART form; described the paint use and quality--partially, but gave little evidence.
- * Your analysis of the composition includes two of the three items--relationship of shapes, use of color, and/or technique.
- * Your interpretation includes a listing of symbols and an explanation of the meaning the artwork has for you.
- * Your judgment discussion includes an appropriate art theory with a statement of your supporting reasons.
- * Your paper is clearly written with minor errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage; and uses sentences that lack variety.

Beginning:

- * You labeled the ART form; merely labeled the colors, confused subject matter with interpretation; forgot to describe the paint process, and color qualities.
- * Your paper is not easy to follow and contains a number of spelling and/or grammatical errors.

MORE ART CRITICISM : TOPICAL ASSISTANCE

Description: What is this work, what is its media, how is it manifested (presented).

DESCRIPTION is a process of reporting the things that are in the artwork. Asking yourself these questions will help you with your assignment.

What art form or type of art is this? Is it a painting, a print, sculpture, ceramics, a photograph or something else?

What is the subject matter? Name the things in the artwork. Look closely.

What lines dominate the artwork? Are they straight, curvy? What other words could you find to describe them?

What shapes dominate the artwork? Are they geometric (straight, mathematical-like shapes) or organic (curvy, naturalistic shapes), or perhaps both?

What are the major colors? Name them.

(Check out <http://www.colormatters.com/colortheory.html> as well as <http://artlex.com>)

Name the major patterns (e.g., stripes, circles, etc.) and textures (bumpy, smooth, other) that you find.

Discuss your answers with your classmates or friends.

Analysis : How is it arranged or designed?

ANALYSIS questions should be asked about any artwork, including the one you choose for your assignment.

Artists make relationships--they repeat lines, shapes, colors, and patterns in exciting ways to make an artwork more unified and interesting. This is called composition.

How are the shapes arranged, what is the composition of the artwork? Do the shapes resemble any of the following shapes?

What are the major colors? (This is the hue name of the color)

Are the colors predominantly light or dark or both? (This is color value.)

Are they bright or dull or both? (This is the intensity of the colors.)

What color harmony is used: monochromatic, analogous, complementary?

(Use a color wheel to help you. See <http://www.colormatters.com/colortheory.html> or <http://www2.evansville.edu/studiochalkboard/paint.html>)

How is the value or lighting? Is shading used? Shading means showing a variety of tones or grays, even in the colors. For instance, the lightness of red is pink and the darkness is maroon. Are there just lines in this painting? Or is there light shading, a deep illusion of depth, or high contrast with no shading?

How is the space arranged? Is it flat with no depth? Is there an overlapping of shapes or is there a sense of three dimensions with some shading and shadows, and showing sides, or deep perspective. Find the foreground, middle ground, background.

(Check out <http://artlex.com> for these terms. Also look up perspective; it may help.)

TECHNIQUE, the manner in which it was created, is an important part of any piece of art. As part of your art criticism paper, you should answer these questions, too.

What materials did the artist use--paint, stone, clay, wood, paper, other?

How did the artist make this work? Is it painted, carved, assembled, or made in another way?

Where did the artist find these materials originally?

Do you think the artist made a plan before starting to paint or did he/she just spontaneously begin working? Why do you think so?

Where do you think the artist began the project, with the background, foreground, or with a detail?

What tools did the artist use to make the work; how were they used?

What problems might the artist have had making this work?

INTERPRETATION is the process of understanding or making meaning. This process involves several aspects: emotions, symbols, modern and historical importance, and reinterpretation. Your paper will not be complete without answers to these questions.

What could be a new title for this piece?

What symbols do you see? A symbol is something that stands for something else. For example, a lion is often used as a symbol of strength.

Are there symbolic colors? If so, what do the colors symbolize? For example, blue might mean loyalty or calmness like the sea.

What do the colors express--make you feel? Do they create a mood?

What theme, big idea, is this about? (for instance, nature, politics, religion, childhood, other?)

What does this work mean for people today?

JUDGMENT is a process of deciding the value of something. It is not important that we like or dislike an artwork, but that we try to understand why it is praised by other people. Please explain in your paper why the artwork you have chosen is important.

Choose as many good reasons (theories) as you think appropriate:

Is the artwork representational, like a photograph. How or how not?

Does the work express emotion, symbols or ideals. What emotions, symbols or ideals?

Is the artwork functional, useful? How?

Is the artwork formalistic? Does it have unusual lines or shapes or arrangement?

The group of people or institution that would appreciate this painting the most is

Ask three others for their reactions to the artist's work (a friend, a parent, a teacher). What differences do you notice in their opinions?

Answering the questions above will help you decide the style of the work. Style is the way of constructing an environment—from painting to sculpture to video/film and time installation. It is the way the artist chooses to make the work, including all the selections of what goes into it. Art style has a lot to do with the way the artists use their media, brush strokes or color. With these questions in mind, answer the following questions, too.

What style is the artwork?

Why is this project/artwork effective?

WHAT IS ART HISTORY? HOW DO WE IDENTIFY ARTISTS?

Why is this artist (your selection) an artist? What has influenced the work? What are the subject choices that appeal to this artist? What materials and techniques are used?

When you answer these questions you will be acting as an art historian.

Objectives:

In this lesson you will be able to:

- * Explain what is art history, what art historians do, and what is oral history
- * Understand an artist or art work in a particular culture and at a particular period of time.
- * Practice art history skills such as description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation judgment
- * Develop writing and interviewing skills
- * Acquire ways to find art historical information through interview, the library, the internet
- * Use your cultural/historical imagination

What is Art History? Who is an artist?

In the formal sense, art history is inquiry about an artist, the art object, and other related information. Some art history is contextual and includes an investigation of the creation process and art work in its social and cultural setting.

What do art historians do?

Art historians search for information by inquiry-asking questions and making good guesses. They use two methods of historical inquiry: intrinsic and extrinsic.

Intrinsic methods focus on clues located in the art work itself and include subject and theme, composition, expressive qualities, and the physical (size of the work, dating and analysis of the materials used) and technical (procedures) characteristics of the work. They question what is actually observed in the art work. This method is similar to art criticism.

Extrinsic methods question the external context of an artwork. They seek information about the artwork and artist in his or her culture. This includes functions of the art work, the history of its ownership, the artist's educational art training, his or her patronage, and economic and political influences. Finally religious, philosophical and other cultural concerns that may have affected the artist are considered. These elements illuminate the artwork's creation process and hidden influences. Art historians study such changes over time and group them by subject, form, time, place, artist, and style.

You can display this process as a time line as well.

Who is an artist?

Some people think an artist is someone born with talent. Others think that an artist is one who grows to be a master by practicing hard everyday. We have young artists who are expressing their ideas everyday and we have older folk artists that start painting in their 60's (Grandma Moses). Other artists are technicians--good at making one type of art, and some are great thinkers. In the

animation and film world, the people who make the most money are the directors or writers. An artist may need an audience or an art world to promote his or her work. Many cultures believe that an artist needs to be a mature and experienced person. Some people even think that an artist is just a middleman (or woman) between the medium and the receptacle, for instance paint/paper. In this "Zen" sense, the art becomes what it wants to be. This happens when the artist is in deep concentration.

What is Oral Art History?

All history at one time was oral. History is story. All history was, at one time oral. Oral history is the recording of someone's (with first hand knowledge) report or views. It is the history of ordinary people. The purpose is to preserve a cultural heritage and add a personal dimension to our so-called "objective history." The interviewer must preplan a series of questions. If the interview is to become a permanent record, an audio or videotape should be made, the words transcribed, then edited for a final report.

Aesthetics : Why is it art?

Do you wonder why something is called art? Can people agree and disagree and still be correct? Who determines if something is a work of art?

AESTHETICS is the study of art. There are several areas to consider:

- * The nature of art--what it is
- * The scope of art--what kind of art it is, e.g. painting or sculpture or time media, etc.
- * The quality or value of the art work--it is based on a cultural standard
- * The origin of the work--the artist, the materials used, the history of the artist and the work
- * The art world--the institutions that house the work and support the work

Objectives

You will be able to:

- * Judge the effectiveness of artistic expressions using current art theories. A theory is an accepted explanation or reason or set of assumptions.

List of Art Theories and Explanations

Here are six theories that are often used to analyze a work of art - to judge its effectiveness.

Expressionism

Representationalism

Functionalism

Formalism

Open Concept

Institution Theory

Expressionism

The artist conveys an indirect idea, a mood through the use of color and symbols, etc.. The image may not be recognizable or photographically accurate.



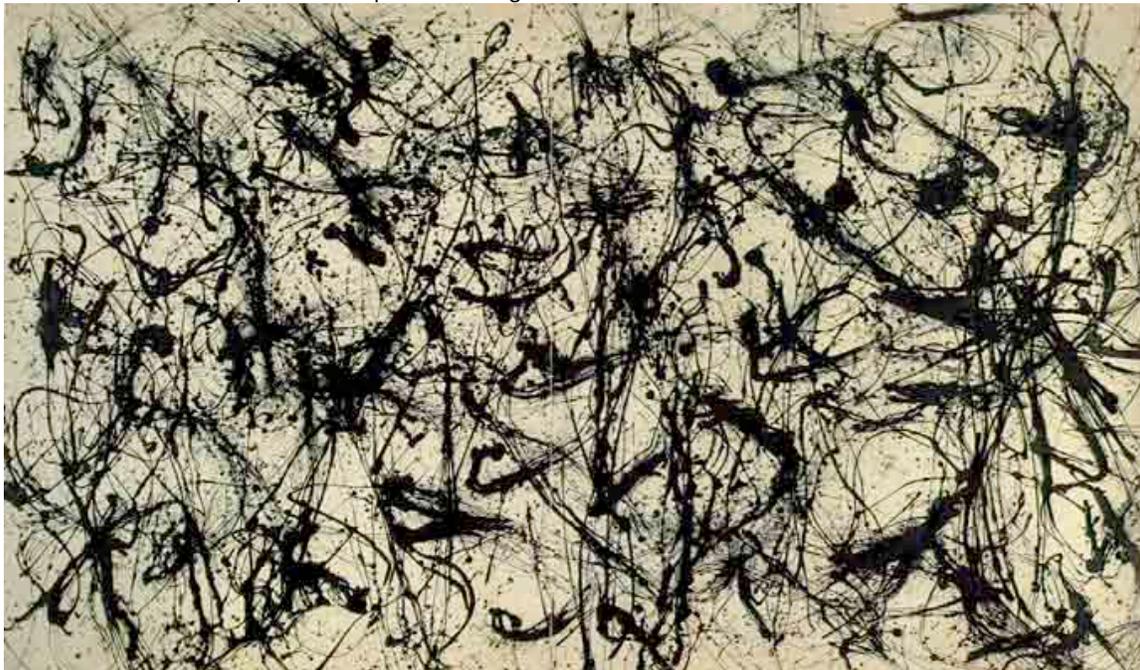
Robert Motherwell, 1915-1991

Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 57, 1957-60

(Also search the web for a painting by Wassily Kandinsky.)

Some artists use only color to express feelings.

Jackson Pollock **Number 32**, 1950



Representationalism - Imitation Theory

The artist tries to imitate life, accurately (photographically) representing people and objects. The work may leave in all the details, even if they are unpleasant. Or it may idealize the scene, leaving out the unpleasant details as in some landscape paintings.



Gilbert Stuart, American, 1755-1828
Dr. William Aspinwall, ca. 1815



Winslow Homer, **Home, Sweet Home**, c. 1863, oil on canvas

Also look the Getty collection <http://www.getty.edu/art/collections/> Click on Artists: then on R to find Rembrandt van Rijn portraits. Click on Collection Types/Paintings, then on Landscapes to find Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century landscapes.

Functionalism

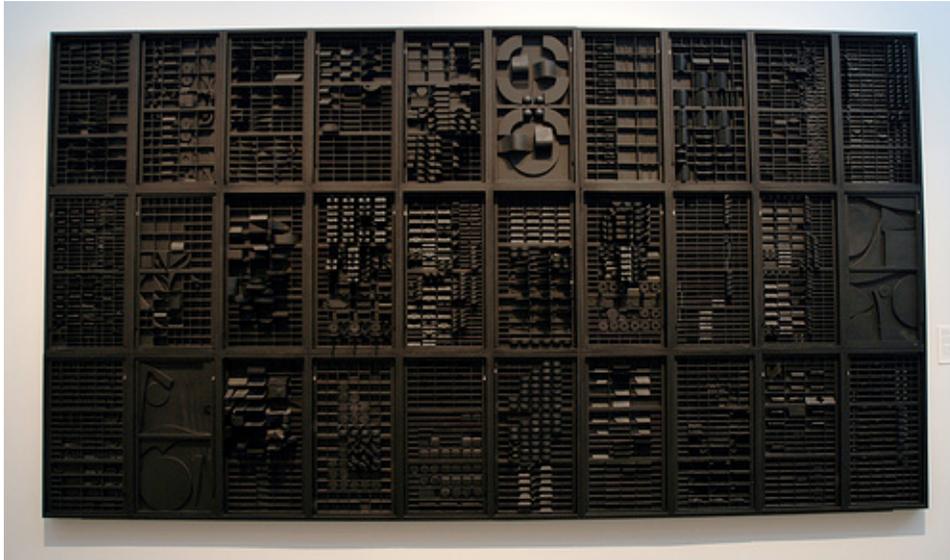
The artist intended the work to be useful, such as a pot, a chair, a ritual object or a building.



Look up functional objects displayed in a museum. You can find them in "Collections: Furniture" in the Getty at <http://www.getty.edu/art/collections/> or "Architecture and Design" in MoMA, the Museum of Modern Art in New York city at <http://www.moma.org> or "The Collection" and then "Fashion Design" at the Phoenix Art Museum at <http://www.phxart.org>.

Formalism

The artist experiments with art forms-lines, shapes, colors, space and their relationships. The composition is more important than the subject matter or theme.



Louise Nevelson, American, 1899-1988, b. Russia

End of Day--Nightscape IV, 1973



Frank Stella (Malden, Massachusetts, 1936 -)

The Prophet (D16, 2X), 1990 mixed media on aluminum

Other resources: <http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/index.html>. Also check out Cubism at <http://artlex.com> to find out how Picasso used cubist forms in his paintings.

Open Concept

This view maintains that ideas about art are always open to change. This is a flexible idea that claims there can be no one theory of art. Environmental art might be explained by this theory.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude



Surrounded Islands, Miami, Florida 1980-83

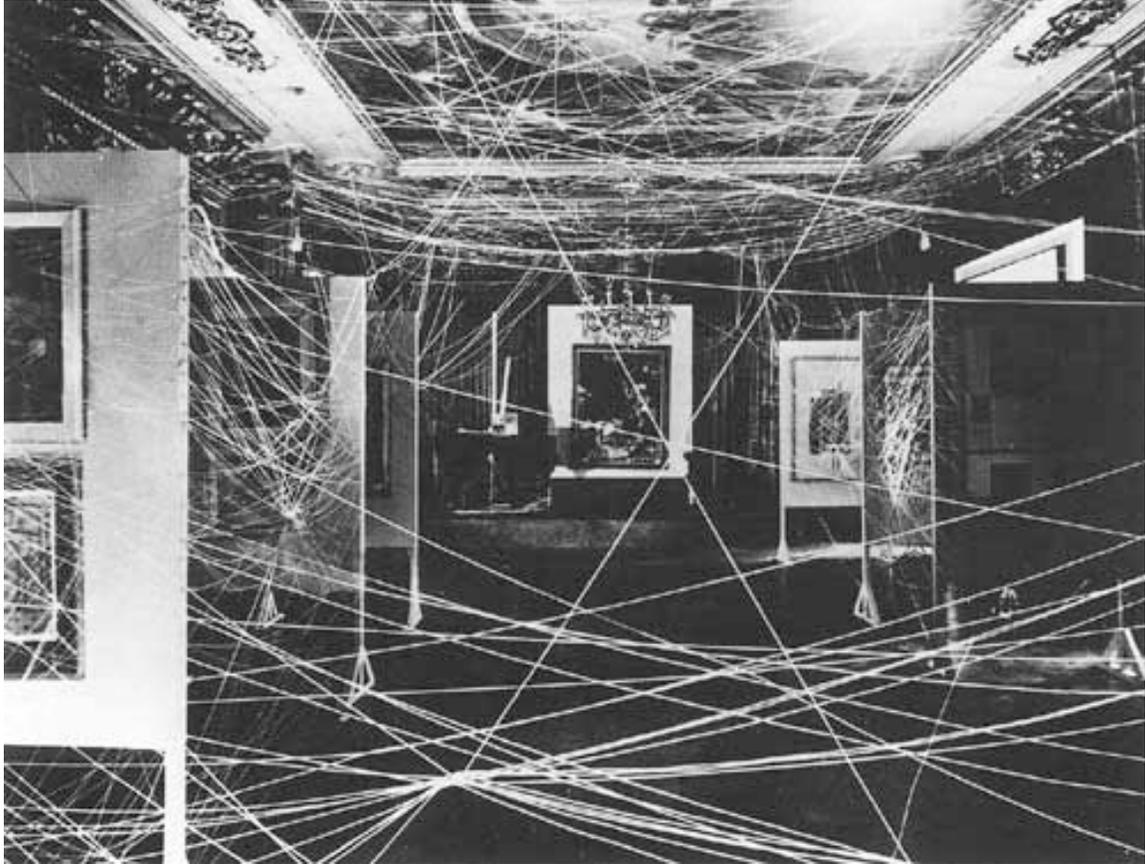
Check out Christo's work at <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/index.html>

Institution Theory

An institution is an established practice that is determined as important by two or more people forming a group. Some institutions are a church, the shopping mall, even florists. The theory "says that whether or not something is art is determined by the reactions that a group of people have to an object. This theory emerged partly as a reaction to the open concept. . .

"In other words, if you want to know whether or not something is art, don't look at the object in question; instead, look to see how people are treating it, where they put it, and what they are saying about it. If people value an object highly, protect it, study it, exhibit it in art galleries and museums, and write about it in art magazines and art history books, then it's clear that people involved have decided that the object is art."

Katz, Lankford, Plank. Themes and Foundations of Art. (Minneapolis: West Publishing Company) 1995, Appendix A-4.



Marcel Duchamp, **Mile of String**
1942, New York



Marcel Duchamp **Boite-en-valise** 1934-41

Check out Marcel Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel as an example of a "ready made" object displayed and valued as art by a group of Surrealist painters that were first "bar buddies."