

ELEMENTAL QUESTIONS FOR ART CRITIQUE

“Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man’s growth without destroying his roots.” - Frank A. Clark

Often we become so close to our work that we simply can’t see it clearly anymore. The details may consume our attention and we’re unable to see the big picture. Receiving constructive feedback on our artwork can be incredibly valuable. These questions will help us see our own work with a fresh and critical eye.

The important thing to remember is that a good critique can help improve the quality of your work. Look at every single piece of work as a learning process and REALLY look for what we need to do to improve. Listen. Absorb. Learn.

Set Up

Give each artist/work equal time, at least fifteen minutes. Use a timer to keep things moving.

Display each work on the wall if possible, making sure it’s well-lit.

Describe

The artist describes the facts about the work and tells the group what it is he/she wants from a critique of this work.

Analyze and Interpret

While the artist is silent, every person takes an equal amount of time to review the relevant questions and to comment.

Observe and analyze, don’t judge. say, “I see ...” rather than, “I don’t like ...”

Option: Have each person write down the first three words they think when they see the art, then talk about that.

Question

The artist answers questions and continues to absorb what other people are seeing and saying.

Ask leading questions to help the artist find his/her own solutions.

Don’t point out problems without providing possible solutions.

Judge

Artist and audience answer the questions from this section only if the artist wishes.

Think of what and how the artist needs to hear in this critique, not what YOU would like to hear.

Review

Have a different person summarize each review so that all feedback doesn’t seem to come from one person.

Objective facts about the work: Artist, date, size, title, in progress or finished, series or single?

Subject matter: *Landscape, figure, still life, non-objective, other.*

Style: *Abstract, complex, decorative, folk, functional, impressionistic, non-objective, minimalist, outsider, op-art, realistic, representative, Rococo, simplistic, surreal, symbolic, sculptural.*

Materials, Techniques, Display: Fiber, patterning, embellishments, construction, display, etc.

Questions about Texture, Shape, and Line:

What type of fiber is used? What technical challenges does this material present? How does the actual texture of the cloth effect the outcome of the piece?

Is depth, motion, or a focal point created through the use of a visually patterned cloth?

Are the shapes integrated into the background?

How does the negative space (background) affect the positive space (foreground)?

Do line and shape create stillness or activity?

What is the dominant direction of line in each composition? Where does this lead the eye?

What is the weight of line in this piece? What emotions are evoked with line alone?

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Questions about Color and Value:

What color scheme is used? Triadic, monochromatic, complementary, or analogous.)
What would the impact of this artwork be with a different color scheme?
What emotions do these colors evoke? Why?
Is there high or low contrast in the values used? How does this affect the artwork?
Is the overall color scheme primarily warm, cool, or a mixture and why?

Questions about Unity and Focal Point:

Where does your eye go first, then next, and what draws it there?
Do any lines, edges, colors or shapes create a continuous path for your eye to follow?
Is there one color that stands out or a dark or light spot that draws the eye?
Does one thing look different from all the rest and how so?
Is there a purposeful lack of a focal point?
Is the piece unified or does something look out of place and make you uncomfortable?
Is the discomfort intentional?
Is there repetition of some element, shape, color, or line?
Is the artist emphasizing sameness or variety?

Questions about Rhythm, Motion, and Space:

Is the illusion of space and depth achieved?
Does the artist use perspective, placement, size, overlap, color or value shifts?
How could the illusion of depth be amplified?
Is the main subject portrayed entirely within the frame (closed form) or does it bleed out of the frame (open form)?
What effect does this have on the viewer?
Is movement depicted in what you see? What devices are used to do so?
Are angled lines contrasted with horizontal or vertical lines that enhance the illusion of motion?
Is there a rhythm to the piece and what does it remind you of? What creates the rhythm?
Is the rhythm legato, staccato, progressive, alternating or something else?

Questions about Proportion, Scale, and Balance:

Are exaggerated internal proportions used? Why? What does this emphasize?
Are two different scales juxtaposed within the artwork, why?
How are the colors balanced? In what proportion are bright colors balanced with neutrals?
Is the work deliberately unbalanced in any way and why? What reactions does this evoke?
What is the scale of the work and why did the artist use this scale?

Interpretation

What is the message of the artwork?
Does the message touch or disturb you in any way?
Is this a literal or metaphorical piece?
How does this piece relate to current events in your world?

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How would you feel if you were inside this artwork? What is it that makes you feel that way?
What are the expressive qualities of the work?
What does this work remind you of?
What memories or connotations do the materials bring to mind?
How does the use of color influence your opinion?
What emotions do the colors evoke, and why?
What would the impact of this artwork be with a different color scheme?
Are there any cultural connotations intended with the use of color in this work?
How does the balance of the work make you feel?
How does the scale of the artwork affect your relationship with it?
How close do you feel to the subject of the artwork?

Questions for the Artist

Is this a work-in-progress or finished?
What was your original intention for this piece?
What were you thinking during the design phase?
What happened during the decisions-making process?
What inspired this piece?
Why did you choose the colors in this piece?
Did the construction process go smoothly?
Did you experience any happy accidents?
What was your favorite part of the process?
What did you hope the viewer sees?
What one thing would you change if you could?
What is the most successful part of the piece?
What do you think you've achieved?
Did you learn anything new while working on this piece?
What else has this artwork taught you?
Will this piece lead to others or have you said what you needed to say?

Judgement Answer these questions or not, at the artist's discretion. Remember that these are very subjective opinions.

Is the artwork successful or not, and why? Are the techniques used appropriate and well executed?
What are the strongest and weakest qualities of this work?
Is the piece derivative or original? Is it creative, innovative or daring?
How does this piece compare with other works, or with the artist's previous work?
Can you see growth and development in the artist's work?
Is technique emphasized over composition? Have the materials been transformed?
Does the artwork function as designed?

What is your favorite thing about this piece?

What single thing would you change about this piece?