

# The Nature and Importance of Art Criticism and Its Educational Applications for k-12 Teachers

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THE NATURE OF AND IMPORTANCE OF ART CRITICISM  
AND ITS EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS FOR K-12 TEACHERS

by

TIA BLACKMON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Art Education  
in the College of Education and Human Performance  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Thomas Brewer

## **Abstract**

This thesis will critically examine the importance, purpose, methods, and applications of art criticism. Initial background information on types of critical judgment will lay the foundation to understanding the different methods of art criticism. While the articles and journals read on criticism vary in style and method they all have the goal to become a basic framework for examining the form and content of works of art. My goal of this thesis will be to take researched methods of criticism and create my own methods of criticism to be used in the K-12 art education classroom. The body of my research will examine the following methods of criticism (1) Feldman Method, (2) Broudy Method, (3) Lankford Method, (4) Anderson Method, (5) Feminist Conversation Method, (6) Modernism, and (7) Postmodernism. My research will seek to understand the nature of and importance of art criticism and its educational applications for K-12 art classrooms. In conjunction with the examination of these methods and their corresponding stages, I will be able to synthesize three methods of criticism to be used in the classroom: formalist, expressivist, and instrumentalist.

## **Dedication**

I want to dedicate this thesis to my parents: Tuula and John Blackmon. Without their guidance and constant love and appreciation, I would not be the person who I am today. I push myself to go above and beyond not only to be proud of myself, but to make them proud of me. For that, I am thankful.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The goal of art criticism is the understanding and evaluation of works of art. Art educators want to find a way of looking at works of art that will result in the most knowledge learned about their meaning and merits. Although art education classrooms have, for the majority, been studio-oriented programs, art educators have been making more of an effort to teach art appreciation and criticism. The idea of a student being an art appreciator and a critic supplements the traditional method of the student being a creator and an artist. Art criticism teaches students to evaluate works of art with an overall goal to teach students to evaluate the world around them as well. What has constantly been developed and reassessed is the method of art criticism that is used to judge a work of art.

Methods of art criticism have varied through history in approach, but the goal still stays the same. The obstacle is to have students learn to not only decide between good and bad, but to have them overcome their initial dispositions and perceive the multiple views of experiencing and judging a work of art (Greenburg, 1990). These methods used become the framework for critical process.

The critical process is an analytical method for perceiving a work of art. What these methods represent is broken down in stages. From understanding the history and changes of methods of art criticism, art educators and our students can have a deeper understanding and knowledge of how to approach and analyze different works of art. This understanding of the traditional and contemporary art criticism enhances one's ability to critically think, perceive, and experience a work of art.

From my observations in K-12 art education classrooms; I saw a need for students to be given the opportunity to think critically when examining artwork. One particular interaction with a sixth grade student had resonated with me over the years. Students were given a work of art to critique by writing if they believed the work was successful or not and why. When monitoring students I had noticed a student struggling with her critique. Even with probing questions and help the student was unable to explain or even understand her thought process of critique. The student eventually said to me, “I don’t even know how to explain what I see”. In art education classrooms, art teachers are expected to show art exemplars as a part of their lessons. My questions is how do art educators expect their students to understand and experience works of art **if they are not taught** how to approach and analyze artworks? The answer to the question is the purpose of this thesis, to stress the importance of art criticism and how it can be applied in the classroom.

While art criticism can differ in style and method, they all have the goal presenting a framework for examining the form and content of works of art. The body of my research will examine the following methods of criticism (1) Feldman Method, (2) Broudy Method, (3) Lankford Method, (4) Anderson Method, (5) Feminist Conversation Method, (6) Modernism Theory, and (7) Postmodernism. In conjunction with the examination of these methods and the stages that make up each of them, I will be able to create what I believe to be the best art criticism methods to teach to students in an art education program.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This thesis seeks to understand the nature and importance of art criticism and its' educational application in a K-12 classroom. The purpose of this literature review is to introduce and examine types of critical judgment and selected art criticism methods.

By first reviewing and understanding the types of critical judgment, art educators will have a foundational understanding of critical judgment that apply to the different methods of art criticism that are examined. Using this background knowledge, art educators will be able to understand the purpose and reasoning for each of the seven methods I have chosen to review and use in my final synthesized methods. The need for both major art criticism methods and contemporary theories drove my decision in choosing the following methods in no particular order: Feldman method (1970), Broudy method (1972), Lankford method (1984), Anderson method (1988), feminist conversation method (1970s), modernism theory (late 19<sup>th</sup> century), and postmodernism (late 20<sup>th</sup> century).

The purpose of the literature review is to get a full understanding of the types of judgments art criticism uses, different methods of art criticism, as well as how it applies to students as viewers and critics of art. From this review, I will be able to distill what I believe is important in art criticism methods and create applicable art criticism methods that I would use in K-12 art education classroom. As a first step in understanding the nature of art criticism, art educators must understand the types of critical judgement used in art criticism.

## **Types of Critical Judgment**

Types of critical judgement refers to the different categories of judgment that critics use to come to a final evaluation. In an art classroom, the students would act as the critic and their final evaluations would be on works of art that they observe. As Feldman (1994) said,

*“Evaluation occurs when an idea or definition of excellence is known, and this idea of what excellence is, is also known as aesthetics.”*

The three types of judgment are as follows: formalist, expressivist, and instrumentalist. These types of judgements explain different definitions of what excellent aesthetic value is. Art educators need to understand that the definition of excellence is not subjective, and that they can teach their students this concept of varying definitions or criterion for excellence. Understanding these different types of judgement will aid in the understanding of different methods of art criticism I will be examining and creating in this thesis.

### **Formalist judgment.**

True to its name, formalism is the idea of excellence in the formal relationships between the form and visual elements in the work. These visual elements of the work are free of labels, associations, or the conventional meanings that these elements may have in reality.

For a formalist, an excellent work is designed with careful planning and calculation done by the artist (Feldman, 1994). Within formalism, there is no need on our part to take into account the artist’s means or method of creating the artwork. The elements of art are taken into account of the success of the work: line, shape, balance, color, texture, value, and form. Now, formalism dose not require realism or abstract style to be considered for formalist critique. No matter the style of work, the formalist critic judges a work on the elements of art and its underlying

organization. These criteria are responsible for the formalist critic's perception of the quality of the work.

With this idea of relationships and balance, formalism experiences a challenge on what excellence truly is. The question being: what relationships between elements are pleasing or better than others (Hamm Walsh, 1992)? Barbra Fredette (1993) said in her report of aesthetics in the classroom that formalism is best when it “*embodies the ideal structural possibilities of the visual elements present in the work.*” The issue is that art educators need to teach their students what that structure is, and what kinds of critical judgment to use.

However, this type of critical judgment is not as subjective as it is made out to be. The qualities and organization of the work to be considered “excellent” are found in the elements of art and principles of design. The ideal standard or norm found in Formalism is based on these building blocks of creating/making art and are generally known by art educators and taught to their students. This view on aesthetic quality are held by many artists as well as the general public.

Many artists, critics, and people in general are formalists without knowing it. Their idea of excellence is based on their feelings of the organization of the artwork without consciously describing and analyzing the formal qualities of the work. Formalism gives us a guide of basic art elements and their harmony with one another within a work, rejecting association with anything social, historical, or emotional about it. The more real or better organized it is the better the work is. What art educators need to teach their students in formalist critical judgment is the basic foundations of the elements of art, and how they can use that vocabulary when critiquing a work of art.

### **Expressivist judgment.**

On the other end of the spectrum from formalist, expressivist is the idea of excellence in the ability to communicate ideas and feelings within a work intensely and vividly (Feldman, 1994). Now all art communicates ideas or feelings in some capacity, no matter what the style. So the obstacle for expressivist criticism is to decide on whether art educators are viewing a work that goes beyond the sharing of ideas and feelings. To resolve this, expressivist judgment gives the idea of intensity of experience. The most exceptional work stimulates the most vivid feelings – even stronger than what student critics would experience in everyday life.

For example, when viewing a photograph of a disaster and the people affected, the viewer believe the photo as truth and also believe that the event is causing a reaction, not the photograph (Hamm Walsh, 1992, p. 110). When this occurs, the viewer takes our emotional reaction as an insight about life and world view. The concept of expressivist shows preference for art that becomes a source of insight about life and raw emotion (Hamm Walsh, 1992, p. 110). The artist then becomes a person who, in some way, has grasped some truths about life and found a way to embody those truths and affect the viewer.

From this, the standards of judgment for expressivist criticism are from the emotional response elicited from the viewer. However, expressivist judgment does not shun the importance of formal organization; expressivist judgment insists that the organization is associated with the communication of significant ideas. This meaning that expressivist judgment takes into account the formal qualities of the work and how those formal qualities help create and emotional reaction when judging the excellence of the artwork.

Within an art education classroom, teaching expressivist judgment is essential to students. At a young age students innately associate emotions with observed artwork. Statements such as, “I like this because it makes me happy” or “I like this [artwork] very much because it is funny” are judgments based on how the artworks made the students feel. Without understanding the breakdown of expressivist judgment, students are drawn to judgment based on reactions. In order to have students think critically and understand how they come to their own judgments, it is necessary to teach them the concept of expressivist judgment.

### **Instrumentalist judgment.**

The concept of instrumentalist judgment regards art as a tool for advancing some moral, religious, political, or psychological purpose. Instrumentalist judgment is concerned with the consequences of the ideas and feelings expressed by art and the message associated with them (Feldman, 1994). Art is to serve a purpose more important than itself. Art is not for art’s sake, but more of a means to support a higher purpose.

Instrumentalist judgment lies in its implied analysis of external clues and the consequences of art. Due to this, instrumentalist judgment finds support in understanding the practices of the past. Instrumentalist judgment does not consider aesthetic values of excellence to exist separately from each other. There is simplicity in the relationship between formalist judgment and the expressivist judgment in art, which provides the instrumentalist a standard of judgment. Unlike formalist or expressivist that is based on whether a work has reached its ideal possibilities, instrumentalist judgment can freely distinguish the purpose of the work (Hamm Walsh, 1992). Whether in the title, artist’s purpose, or subject of the work – instrumentalist judgment looks at the

message being conveyed in a work of art and how the message goes beyond the work of art itself. The definition or criterion for excellence lies in this meaning communicated.

Contemporary artwork at most times has a strong message being conveyed whether it is political, social, or economical. As art educators we must incorporate engaging contemporary artwork within our lessons as to expose our students to new artists and artwork. It is important to teach our students instrumentalist judgment for that very reason. Contemporary artwork holds strong messages, and art educators need to understand and teach their students how to critique art based on instrumentalist judgment.

### **Methods of Art Criticism**

It may be thought that any method of art criticism can be the framework for examining the form and content of a work of art. However, with the understanding of the types of critical judgment, art educators must know that each lesson or type of work may not be critiqued using any one method, but in using parts of several. In the following pages, I will be exploring a variety of methods and describing the stages or purpose that make up each. Using these methods as a platform, I will create my own art criticism methods that I would use in K-12 art education classrooms.

#### **Feldman method (1970).**

Edmund B. Feldman's system of criticism uses inductive reasoning to reach a judgment from the supplied artwork based on four stages (Hamblen, 1985). The idea is if students are able to master the method they will then be able to talk about and think critically of art. Discussing art is critical to the process and mastery of art criticism (Feldman, 1994). The following four stages of the Feldman method emphasizes an explanation of the art work.



- 1) Description: Name the facts and inventory the subject matter, noting what is immediately visible in the artwork. Identifying things about the work that can easily be named, labeled, and agreed upon by a group of people (Hamblen, 1985, p. 76-8).
- 2) Analysis: Also can be referred to as formal analysis. Naming the art elements present in the work of art while discovering the relationships and organization between the elements and principles within the whole work (Hamblen, 1985, p. 76-8).
- 3) Interpretation: The process of finding meaning of the work or the expressive qualities such as mood, feelings or emotions. This stage uses the previous description and analysis stages of the work as the explanation of the critic's interpretation (Hamblen, 1985, p. 77-8).
- 4) Judgment: Making an evaluation of the work in relation to aesthetic excellence and to other works of its type. The judgment is a conclusion drawn from the previous stages, what qualifies as aesthetic excellence is based upon the critic and type of critical judgment they use (Hamblen, 1985, p. 77-8).

This method of art criticism is one of the more widely accepted in the art education classrooms. The Feldman method allows a student with no prior knowledge of art to critique an artwork based on basic principles of the elements of art and principles of design. The ability to simplify the critical steps and leave the judgments based on visual facts and relationships makes the Feldman method objective. Although interpretation and judgment are subjective in heart, this method does not take into account viewer emotional response to the work.

#### **Broudy method (1972).**

Broudy's (1972) method has four stages of aesthetic perception that is followed by three stages of aesthetic criticism. Broudy refers his view as the informed aesthetic response, breaking

down criticism into each category of art criticism and judgment style previously noted (Hamblen & Galanes, 1991).

### ***Aesthetic Perception***

- 1) Sensory Properties: Observing what appears in the artwork and identifies the art elements that exist (Hamblen & Galanes, 1991, p. 79).
- 2) Formal Properties: Establishing relationships of the elements of art and their expressive power (Hamblen & Galanes, 1991, p. 79).
- 3) Expressive Properties: Identifying mood, expressions, and emotions portrayed. Recognizing how the work stimulates the senses and effects the viewer emotionally (Hamblen & Galanes, 1991, p. 79).
- 4) Technical Properties: Observing how the work was created in style, technique, and use of skill. Emphasis on how the work was created (Hamblen & Galanes, 1991, p. 79).

### ***Aesthetic Criticism***

- 1) Historical: Determining the expressive intent of the art in relation to the culture, time period, and style it was created in. Historical aesthetic criticism in the Broudy method does not directly mimic instrumentalism because the work does not need to be a tool to a higher purpose, but rather reflects on the relationship to the context of its time (Hamblen & Galanes, 1991, p. 80).
- 2) Recreative: Recognizing the artist's intent or what the work is intended to express. Think of artist's purpose and the different objectives of art (Hamblen & Galanes, 1991, p. 80).
- 3) Judicial: Ranking the value or excellence of a work against other works of similar style or content (Hamblen & Galanes, 1991, p. 80).

The Broudy method is dissimilar from the Feldman method in process and type of critical judgment. The main idea is for the viewer to take into account their reaction to the work and making expressivist judgments. This method defines excellence by the amount of an artworks' emotional power. Just as previously stated in expressivist judgment, students early on naturally make judgments based on emotional response or connection to an artwork. This method allows students to deconstruct those immediate emotional judgments into analytical steps.

**Lankford method (1984).**

Similar to the Feldman method (1970), Louis Lankford's (1984) art criticism method emphasizes the viewer's observation and perspective as well as the properties of the work of art (Smith, 1995). In his opinion, what a work of art means depends just as much on the viewer's perception as properties within the work (Lankford, 1984).

Now even though this method is similar to the Feldman method, it is important to understand multiple approaches to critiquing an artwork. Whereas the Feldman method (1970) is cut and dry with the organizational steps of analysis, the Lankford method has the viewer also consider their own emotional reactions to the work and physical orientation to the work as well. The Lankford method is broken down into five steps that are mutually exclusive.

- 1) Receptiveness: The viewer is to free themselves of reflex responses and preconditions in order to fully receive new information (Smith, 1995, p. 5-6).
- 2) Orienting: The viewer is required to decide the visual boundary that an artwork exists in, the effects of the physical conditions around the work, and position themselves in a way so they are able to view the work completely and clearly (Smith, 1995, p. 5-6).

- 3) Bracketing: The viewer is to focus completely on the existing qualities of the work in whole and limit critical art dialogue of the content of the work (Smith, 1995, p. 5-6).
- 4) Interpretive Analysis: The viewer discusses and partakes in an art dialogue of the symbols, representational meanings, art element relationships, and feelings produced by these factors (Smith, 1995, p 5-6).
- 5) Synthesis: The viewer discusses their judgment and importance of the work with an understanding that the conclusion reached is not an absolute (Smith, 1995, p. 5-6).

The Lankford method is a mix of formalist and expressivist judgment. What is important about this method of art criticism is that the first step allows the viewer to simply react to the work, a step that students as viewers do innately. The combination of emotional and visual power of a work of art as a judgment of excellence in visual aesthetic is a sound method. Art educators need to empower their students' feelings towards a work of art and teach them to relate those reactions to formal qualities in to work, and this method does just that.

#### **Anderson method (1988).**

Tom Anderson's (1988) approach to art criticism stresses critical thinking because it encompasses all thinking skills such as analysis, deductive reasoning, and interpretation (Anderson, 1988). Anderson's method follows closely to educational criticism in its ways to incorporate affective and intuitive thinking with analytical ways of perceiving artwork (Hamm Walsh, 1992). The stages are as follows:

- 1) Reaction: The viewer reacts to the artwork and how the work makes them feel. This is to be a completely affective response (Hamm Walsh, 1992, p. 74).

2) Perceptual Analysis: The viewer begins to search and discover why they felt the reaction.

This stage requires three steps (Hamm Walsh, 1992, p. 74):

- a. Representation: The viewer accounts the obvious symbolic and formal qualities within the work (Hamm Walsh, 1992, p. 74).
  - b. Formal Analysis: The viewer examines and interprets the techniques, formal qualities, and relationships of forms and perceptual organization (Hamm Walsh, 1992, p. 74).
  - c. Formal Characteristics: The viewer looks to understand the style and expressiveness of the work (Hamm Walsh, 1992, p. 74).
- 3) Personal Interpretation: The viewer is to understand their reaction and thoughts of the work in relation to the emotional content and meaning found in the work (Hamm Walsh, 1992, p. 74).
- 4) Contextual Examination: The viewer must research or gain understanding of the framework that makes up the piece. This can include visual symbols, or influences that are social, political, or historical (Hamm Walsh, 1992, p. 74).
- 5) Synthesis: The viewer comes to their final evaluation of the work based on the steps of the method. The combination of the emotional and descriptive components are what makes up the final evaluation (Hamm Walsh, 1992, p. 74).

The Anderson method, similar to the Lankford method, has the viewer first react to the artwork before any analytical steps. What this method differs from other methods is that it has the viewer take into account their personal interpretation of the work as a part of the critical process. This allows viewers to further explain their initial emotional reactions and connections to the artwork.

This method uses expressive judgment by basing viewer's reactions and personal interpretations as the components for final evaluation.

### **Modernism (late 19<sup>th</sup> century – mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century).**

Modern art is usually associated with the era 1860-1960s, which occurred along with Impressionism movement until halfway through the Pop-Art movement (Postmodern Art, 2014). Modern artists centered on the individual, not the group. They also believed that all life had meaning, even with their ideology of reason and rational thought. Modernism values the idea of individual development and technological progression coming from individual rationality. Unlike traditional art, modern art was believed to be successful based on the creative level of self-expression (Anderson, 2005). This meant realism was disregarded as the ideal art style.

Modern art came to represent individual creativity than a community belief or style. Judgments made on modern art by modernists were based on the aesthetic response and intrinsic qualities of the work itself. The concept of modernism calls for expressivist judgment when critiquing work. The core of modern art is the independence of the creative individual artist who acted alone or above their suppressive society traditions (Anderson, 2005). Creating artwork that overcame popular opinion and tastes that became significant, was the very fiber of modernism.

### **Feminist conversation method (1970s).**

Feminist art criticism seeks to reflect the gender and the interpretation and perception of woman in art. However, gender is not relating to the biological sense of the word but relates to the socialization, culture, and gender roles applied to femininity and women (Langer, 1991). Feminist theorists deconstruct patriarchal and hierarchy categorization of art and social norms to offer a more fluid understanding of art in relation to life (Anderson, 2005, p. 236). This does not

mean that this method only applies to females, as this method extends their concerns to all people and advocate for multicultural and cross-cultural content.

Unlike analytical criticism, the feminist method has no set structure. The structure of feminist art criticism is specific to each situation. With this, feminist art criticism leads to be more conversational and descriptive in format, examining content of concern of woman in art as well as cross-cultural and multicultural.

### ***Feminist art criticism dialogue.***

Feminist aestheticians and critics may argue that analytic criticism assists men's way of knowing by defining and establishing a position whereas a woman's typical approach of cooperative discussion based on intimacy with a work (Langer, 1991). The purpose of feminist art criticism is personal engagement and personal fulfillment when experiencing a work of art (Langer, 1991). With this thought, analytical criticism strategies are deemed inappropriate in a feminist critic's eyes.

Using discussion, narratives, and dialogue as a method of criticism makes feminist art criticism subjective and personalized. A feminist critic will approach a work by considering and embracing their personal perspective and emotional response to the work through the lens of feminist theory. The point of feminist art criticism is to find meaning based on emotion and subjective perception rather than a defined truth, using expressivist and instrumentalist judgment within their method.

### **Postmodernism (late 20<sup>th</sup> century).**

According to Arthur C. Danto (1997), a highly respected postmodern theorist, postmodernism began after the 1960s with the disillusionment with life set in after the events such

as the Holocaust, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War. Other factors to what contributed to postmodernism were the new educational priorities of skills over content, emergence of image-based technologies, and the growth of consumerism as well as instant gratification (Danto, 1997, p. 25-78). The new concept of postmodernism took the perspective that anything created exists only within preexisting webs of social constructs and that in order to defy these constructs, artists must question traditional and modern structures.

Postmodernism questions the idea of a “free individual”, asking whether any idea can only exist within a web of previous socially constructed meanings (Anderson, 2005, p. 6-9). With this ideology, art itself must challenge traditional boundaries. Performance artists such as the *Guerilla Girls* are an example of postmodernism.

Postmodernism is a concept that uses instrumentalist judgment. The concept of postmodernism is challenging social structures and creating a strong message, the basis of what instrumentalist judgment examines. It is vital for students to understand postmodernism so they too can question the societal structures around them. Giving students the opportunity to explore and question their world lead to critical analysis and critical thought.

### **Conclusion of Literature Review**

The purpose of art criticism in the classroom is to educate students on appreciation, aesthetics, and evaluation of works of art while facilitating critical thinking and analysis. The purpose of this literature review was to understand the nature and importance of art criticism and to take this information to create applicable art criticism methods for the classroom. By teaching appreciation and art criticism and having students understand the process of art criticism, students are lead to the desired goal of having an authentic art experience. Art educators need to understand



the different types of judgment and methods of art criticism in order to give authentic art instruction to their students. Within my own K-12 classroom, the use of art criticism will be vital to my curriculum and learning goals.

The seven methods for art criticism were chosen because they represent my idea of the major influences in art criticism and can be applicable in K-12 art education classroom. Though they are different in strategy or purpose, each is useful in authentic and high quality instruction.

The importance of art criticism in the classroom is due to its connection to authentic instruction. Art criticism connects to authentic instruction by enhancing student understanding of artworks and the critical thinking process. Critical thought is a higher order of learning and results in students receiving authentic, high quality instruction. Art criticism gives students a comprehensive framework to analyze a work of art and understand their own emotional response to the works and how they relate to the work's content.

This literature review contains the nature and importance of art criticism as well as selected methods of art criticism that can be was examined. What I take away from this literature review is a need to teach students this information in a new way. Just as I had experienced in observing a classroom, there are students who do not understand how to critically analyze artwork or even explain how they made their own judgments. My plan is to take this information on types of critical judgment and different methods of art criticism and create methods of art criticism to use in the K-12 art education classroom.

## **Chapter Three: Goals and Methodology**

The literature review provided information on the types of critical judgment and methods for art criticism. While the types of critical judgment explained gave background information on understanding methods of art criticism, the seven methods of art criticism examined will be used for reference in creating my own criticism methods. The Feldman, Broudy, Lankford, Anderson, feminist conversation theory, modernism, and postmodernism were chosen based on their relevance and impact on art criticism.

My goal is to take these seven methods and extract the purposes of each and apply what I believe to be the most important factors to create my own critical methods for use within my K-12 classroom. The purpose of creating these methods is to provide my students with structured critical methods that will enhance their art education and art experience.

In order to create new methods of art criticism for my classroom, I had to take my research of my selected methods and breakdown the purpose of each method. By understanding what each method evaluates, I can tailor my methods to fit the content I want my K-12 students to understand. The goal of the art criticism method and lessons is to educate students on a variety of aspects of perception and evaluation of a work of art. To synthesize my own methods, I analyzed the seven methods researched by what types and styles of critical judgment they are influenced by and their purpose.

Table 1: A Comparison of Art Criticism Methods

<b>Art Criticism Method</b>	<b>Type of Critical Judgment: Formalist</b>	<b>Type of Critical Judgment: Expressivist</b>	<b>Type of Critical Judgment: Instrumentalist</b>
Feldman Method	X		
Lankford Method	X	X	
Broudy Method	X	X	
Anderson Method		X	X
Feminist Method		X	X
Modernism Method		X	
Postmodernism			X

What I have learned from this table are the aspects of each method and their purpose. The Feldman, Lankford, and Broudy methods dictate a formalist approach to artwork with their emphasis on facts and analysis of symbols (i.e. description and analysis steps).

I decided that the Feldman method used a formalist judgment based on its criticism steps relating visual facts and formalist relationships with little regard to the viewer's emotional response to the work as a factor in their judgments. The Lankford and Broudy model overlap types of critical judgment of formalist and expressivist by taking into account both emotional responses of the viewer and the formal relationships observed in the work. Whereas the Anderson method focus more so on subjective perception and emotion as the means of critiquing a work of art. They ask the viewer to consider their reactions and emotions from the work as the basis for the success of the work. The Feminist conversation model also includes overlap of expressivist and

instrumentalist types of critical judgment due to its focus on using art to call action and focus on viewer reaction.

From my understanding, postmodernism is the challenging or deconstruction of modernism or societal constructs. Postmodernism and Feminist Conversation method does not have a sequential step-by-step process of evaluating a work, but asks viewers to question the social structures of the ideas of the work. So without formal or expressive qualities to take into account, postmodernism is an instrumentalist type of judgment. This concept of postmodernism asks viewers to think outside of themselves and looking beyond obvious or traditional meanings and emotions.

The seven art criticism methods are split into three main types of judgment: formalist, expressionist, and instrumentalist. What I take from this are three forms of evaluation and analysis that need to be addressed and taught in an art education classroom. Art criticism is a method of understanding an artwork with the last “step” of making a judgment on the work of art being viewed. Judging a work as successful or unsuccessful is what makes the difference between these categories. Formalism makes judgments based on the elements of art and principles of design while expressivist makes judgments on how emotion is evoked or conveyed and instrumentalism makes judgments based on the message of the work. K-12 students need to be taught how to approach and evaluate a work of art, and multiple art criticism methods need to be addressed instead of just one method.

The most basic goal of art criticism in general is to understand and evaluate works of art. For the student, the goal is to engage them in art criticism in order to find meanings in the world around them and understand the meaning of others’ lives. This thesis will provide three new

methods of art criticism that I created and how students and art educators will be able to utilize them in an art education setting.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

### **Introduction**

From my reading and research on differing methods of art criticism I have synthesized down three methods of criticism following judgment of work based on either formalism, expressivist, or instrumentalism. I have created these three methods of art criticism by synthesizing information and criticism techniques from each of the methods I have researched. I believe that my K-12 students should understand that as viewers and critics of works of art, our judgments on the success or failure of a work of art can be critically analyzed. What we base our judgments on must also be understood. Teaching these three criticism methods in my K-12 classrooms will aid in students understanding what their stance of analysis and judgment is.

### **Formalist Art Criticism Method (Feldman, Lankford, & Broudy Method)**

In my readings and in classroom lesson plans I have primarily seen the Feldman Method referred to or used as the standard art criticism method for the classroom. Understandably, this method has students with no prior art or art criticism knowledge to look at a work of art and be able to analyze the work and base judgments of success or failure on elements of art and principles of design. These are the very foundations of the art education classroom and give students clear step-by-step directions on how to critique a work of art. Following below is my formalism art criticism method which combines the Feldman method with the Broudy and Lankford method as all three have similar stages of criticism and I feel are better combined as one with concentration on formalist judgment.

### **Formalist art criticism method.**

- 1) Description: Students will simply list what is depicted in a work of art. Noting that this stage is only naming what can be seen visibly and not to be interpreted just yet. A good exercise for students who are struggling is to have them start their descriptions with, “In this work I see \_\_\_\_.” Colors, pictures, objects, and subjects are all examples of observations the students can list.
- 2) Analysis: This method would have this be a formal analysis of the elements of art and principles of design found in the work of art. Students would simply identify the items listed from their description and the element of art or principle of design they fall under they would fall under. From here they can analyze the relationships between the elements or the properties they examine. A further breakdown of how students can identify and examine these properties is as follows:
  - a. Elements of Art: Line, Shape, Form, Value, Color, Texture, Space
  - b. Principles of Design: Movement, Rhythm, Balance, Unity, Emphasis, Proportion, Pattern
  - c. Connections: Students will then explain the relationships between the formal properties of the work that they find. Students can further interpret their analysis in the next step.
- 3) Interpretation: Students will take their description and analysis and create their interpretation of the work. Usually this is the student’s initial reaction when observing work. (I.E. “What I think this means...”. “I think the work is saying...”) The idea is for students to first identify and investigate what they are looking at before making an

interpretation, and basing their interpretation on their description and analysis of the formal properties of the work..

- 4) Judgment: The final step in the formalist critique method has students make their formalist judgments. Using their statements from the previous steps students will decide if the viewed work was successful or unsuccessful. This judgment is based on formal qualities of the work analyzed.

### **Summary of the Formalist Art Criticism Method**

The Feldman method is one of the commonly used critique methods in the classroom for its fundamental use of the elements of art and principles of design. By having students practice and utilize their knowledge of the art fundamentals with the formalist method, the development of students inherently identifying the elements and principles when critiquing a work of art strengthens. Formalism is an important method of critique for this reason, but I believe it is not the only method of art criticism to be taught.

### **Expressivist Art Criticism Method (Anderson, Feminist, Modernism Method)**

Expressionism is a style of art that seeks to convey emotional experience than impressions of the outside world. What the expressive art criticism method seeks to do is have students embrace their reactions to works of art and analyze how the artist was able to convey the message of emotion. I feel this is also an important method of criticism to teach to students given the expressive nature of students even from a young age. Elementary students will draw objects with facial expressions giving inanimate objects emotions or describe works of art as happy, sad, or angry. Using the Anderson Method and themes from the Feminist and Modernist Method I compiled an art critique method based on expressivist judgment.



## **Expressivist Art Criticism Method**

1. Reaction: Students will document how a work made them feel initially. This response is short and does not require an explanation as the reaction is purely emotional. Having students document their emotions in two to five words under a minute would be good practice to having students learn to embrace their initial reactions.
2. Analysis: The student begins to observe the work of art and analyze why they reacted in such a way to the observed work of art. This stage requires two steps and ties in formal analysis as facts to explain emotions conveyed:
  - a. Representation: The student lists the obvious symbols, objects, and subjects with the work of art.
  - b. Formal Characteristics: The student examines and explains the techniques, formal qualities, and the relationships and organization of the artwork. Listing the elements and principles and their relationships would serve to fulfill this step in the process. Art that evokes strong emotions usually show exaggeration of form and color (both of which are elements of art).
3. Personal Interpretation: The student is to understand their reaction and thoughts of the work in by connecting the emotional content and meaning found in the work to their formal analysis. The personal interpretation leads the student to an open subjective perspective on their interpretation. After understanding their own interpretation of the work, students can open discussion with peers.
4. Dialogue: The student (if able) will participate in an open dialogue of each viewer's interpretation as to understand different perceptions and reactions to the work of art. Based

off of the feminist conversation method, open discussion allows students to gain new perspectives and interpretations of the same work observed that they may not have thought of before.

5. Contextual Examination: The student must research or gain understanding of the framework that makes up the piece. This can include visual symbols, or influences that are personal or historical. Understanding the context of the work helps set the scene of an artist's intention in eliciting emotions from their viewer.
6. Synthesis: The student comes to their final evaluation of the work based on the steps of the method and expressivist judgment. The success or failure of the work is judged based on a combination of the reaction, description, analysis, and perception of the work of art.

### **Summary of the Expressivist Art Criticism Method**

For works of art that has purpose to evoke emotion from its viewer would be critiqued using this method. Many styles of art focus solely on an expressive style. However, this does not mean that this method can only be used with artwork that has intent to elicit emotions from the viewer. What this expressive criticism method does is give students the opportunity to take their reaction to a work of art and examine the cause of it. Emotional reactions to artwork happen immediately, especially with students. What this method can do with practice is to provide students the ability to analyze and understand their perception and reaction to works of art.

### **Instrumentalist/Postmodernist Art Criticism Method**

With instrumentalism, both the feminist method and post-modern method related back to a stance of judgment based on the message of a work of art and how that message goes beyond the artwork itself. With post-modernism being the new movement within the art world students

should be able to understand how art can convey a message, challenge social structures, and affect a larger group of individuals that go beyond the artwork itself. To strengthen authentic art education for our students, art educators must expose them to contemporary art and art criticism.

From the information I have gathered in my literature review, I have seen a basic breakdown of how art is perceived from a postmodern standpoint. What I have created below is a similar method from that of the formal or expressive art criticism method that breaks down the critique into steps and has the final judgment based on instrumentalist judgment.

### **Instrumentalist Art Criticism Method**

1. Deconstruct: Students will approach the artwork by describing expressive and formal characteristics of the work in order to make connections and form relationships between the two.
  - a. Expressive: Students will react to the work and make note of any emotions they initially had to the work.
  - b. Formal: Students will describe the work and name elements and principles used in the artwork and question if these formal qualities are related to the message the work is trying to convey..
  - c. Technical: Students will take into account the materials, skills, and techniques used in the creation of the work. Students will question if the technical aspects of the artwork is related to the message the work is attempting to convey.
2. Understand the Message : Students will investigate the message conveyed in the work using the following steps:

- a. **Artist's Purpose:** If possible, students will review artist statements or interviews that describe the artist's intent for the work of art. By understanding what the artist is trying to say, students can alter their perception on what the message of the work is.
  - b. **Contextual Examination:** The student must research or gain understanding of the framework that makes up the piece. This can include making connections of visual symbols, or influences that are social, political, or historical. Understanding the context of the work helps set the scene of an artist's intention.
3. **Evaluation:** After deconstructing the work and gathering evidence of the message that the work was trying to convey, students will evaluate the work of art. Using their evidence and understanding from the previous steps, student will decide if the work was successful or unsuccessful in conveying their instrumentalist intended message.

### **Summary of Instrumentalist Method**

Now creating a step-by-step method for an instrumentalism approach is a bit different than what the general postmodernist concept. The idea of instrumentalism is to ask viewers to think outside of themselves and looking beyond personal meaning and emotion. Many contemporary artworks have a message that asks a call to action to some social, economic, or political issue or controversy. It is essential for art educators to show student's contemporary artwork in order to expand their horizons as well as teach them how to approach and analyze such artworks.

What we also see today is commercialism, social media, and advertising that can also be considered for instrumentalist judgment. Students are constantly surrounded by advertising, and

they consume this information daily through their phones, tablets, laptops, and televisions. Using the instrumentalist method, students have the opportunity to question the information around them. By using this third art criticism approach we are activating students' critical thinking and questioning that aids in their understanding of what they are exposed to in their everyday life.

Each of the steps within the instrumentalist method asks students to relate their observations and interpretations to the message of the work. Students are also asked to question the purpose of the message and find the need for the artworks' message. By teaching students this newer school of thought, they learn to approach contemporary artwork as well as question the world around them.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Documentation**

This thesis provides an accounting of my understanding of the nature and importance of art criticism and how I would apply art criticism methods within my K-12 classrooms. Art criticism is integral to art education as it teaches students to critically analyze works of art as well as the world around them. What I have taken away from my research are three forms of evaluation and analysis that I will be able to apply in my own K-12 classroom. Each of these methods of criticism being separate and important methods of art criticism by having something vital to teach to students in order to better understand critical thinking and receive authentic art instruction.

### **Recommendations for Teachers**

A veteran art teacher told me once to never overestimate what you think your students can do. I believe this statement is true when it comes to exposing students to artwork and expecting them to understand how to critique it. We as art educators need to breakdown the types of critical judgment to our students while explaining and demonstrating different methods of art criticism. Art educators need to deconstruct the complex idea of art criticism into digestible bites so that our students can understand and implement art criticism themselves. Instilling critical thought into our students can lead to higher-level thinking and more authentic art instruction.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The most basic goal of art criticism in general is to understand and evaluate works of art. What I take away from this thesis is an understanding of different methods of art criticism and the breakdown of each. Through this process I had learned a clearer idea of how I am able to

teach my students art criticism. The concept of art criticism is broad and to be able to take time to research and synthesize pedagogic applications that I can use in my K-12 classrooms is invaluable.

If I were to go back I would want to do more research on the concept of postmodernism. The idea of questioning social structures and how that relates to art is a relatively new concept. Researching the history that led up to the new age of postmodernism and the theorists who changed that school of thought is a challenge that I would look forward to pursuing one day.

With an in-depth understanding of the critical process as an analytical method for perceiving a work of art, I can better teach my students how to critique a work of art. These methods I have recreated are broken down in stages. Each stage is made into a digestible bite of information for students to be introduced to new content. Through practice and repetition, students learn how to approach and critically analyze a work of art.

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