

A CRITICAL METHOD

Follow these steps to enjoy and appreciate art of all kinds!

1



Describe What You See

Identify facts about the artwork. Notice things you can see, name, and describe with certainty.

Label Information Can you find the artist's name, as well as the title, date, size, and medium of the work?

Subject Matter Are there recognizable images such as people or animals? What conditions do you notice? What's happening?

Elements of Art Are one or more elements emphasized?

- ▶ **Line** Notice types of lines used—how do they direct your attention? Are outlines or contour lines included? Are lines implied?
- ▶ **Shape and Form** What 2D areas do you see? Are there 3D objects included?
- ▶ **Value and Color** Is the artwork in color or in black and white? Were different values, shades, and tints incorporated?
- ▶ **Space** How is space described? What techniques are used to imply space and depth?
- ▶ **Texture** Can you tell how a surface would feel? Where does texture occur? What words could you use to describe the texture? Is it real or invented?

2



Analyze Its Organization

Break down the artwork. Describe how its elements are used with the Principles of Design.

Principles of Design

- ▶ **Unity** Does the work feel cohesive? Do all the elements seem to belong together?
- ▶ **Variety** Are there variations in elements to avoid monotony? Is there contrast of color, value, and texture?
- ▶ **Emphasis** Is there a most important area, element, or arrangement of elements? Does your attention go to a specific object?
- ▶ **Rhythm** Is repetition or progression (large to small, dark to light, etc.) used to create organization or flow?
- ▶ **Movement** Do elements suggest motion or direct your eyes? Is movement optical (due to illusions), or real (as in kinetic art)?
- ▶ **Proportion** Are size and amount relationships normal or exaggerated? Do they emphasize space and mood or suggest it?
- ▶ **Pattern** How is pattern used? Is it created by repeating a single element or a combination of elements?
- ▶ **Balance** Is visual weight evenly distributed? Is it symmetrical, approximately symmetrical, or asymmetrical?

3



Interpret What It's Saying

Consider the artist's message. What are they trying to communicate? Use clues from the first two steps or other criteria to figure it out.

Criteria for Interpretation

- ▶ **Mood or Feeling** What emotions do you associate with the work? Does it seem connected with or removed from your everyday life?
- ▶ **Similes and Metaphors** Consider what symbols are present and what they could represent within a cultural or historical context.
- ▶ **Hypothesis and Theory** Examine your first reaction to an artwork. Does the information you've gathered or theories you've been introduced to alter your interpretation of the art?
- ▶ **Defense** Can you defend your theory about the artwork's meaning with evidence from your description and analysis? As you build support for your idea, also consider evidence from other sources such as art history or art texts, magazines, and your own experiences that relate to the artwork.

4



Evaluate Its Success

Determine the artwork's impact. Use clues from the first three steps or explore other criteria.

Criteria for Evaluation

- ▶ **Aesthetic Theories of Art** One or more theories such as Realism or Expressionism may provide reasoning for your judgment. How closely does the work imitate reality for example?
- ▶ **Design** To what extent does the work exhibit organization that enhances the final form and supports the content or subject?
- ▶ **Originality** Has something like this been seen before? Or does the work use a new, novel, or inventive treatment of an idea, medium, or style?
- ▶ **Fame** How well is the artist known? What is the importance of their achievements? Did they affect the work of others?
- ▶ **Historical Importance** Has the work played a role in the history of art or a historical event? Has the work been owned by a famous person?
- ▶ **Comparison** How does the work compare with other artworks similar in content and medium?