

FELDMAN METHOD OF ART CRITICISM

Edmund Feldman, Professor of Art at the University of Georgia, developed an easy four-step method for evaluating a work of art.

1. DESCRIPTION What can be seen in the artwork?
2. ANALYSIS What relationships exist with what is seen?
3. INTERPRETATION What is the content or meaning, based on steps 1 and 2?
4. JUDGEMENT What is your evaluation of the work, based on steps 1, 2, 3?

The critical process is not passive, but active and exploratory. Notice that the process moves from strictly objective statements in step 1 to a subjective response in step 4 (from specific to general).

Descriptive words about an artwork are like pointers; they draw attention to something worth seeing - so remember that the words that you use must be NEUTRAL. Do not use terms that denote value judgments, such as beautiful, disorderly, funny looking, harmonious, etc. Instead, focus on the factual information, such as smooth, bright, round, a lake, a shape, etc. This is important so that you don't jump to conclusions before going through all the steps.

Analysis of relationships such as sizes, shapes, colors, textures, space and volumes, etc., encourages a complete examination of the artwork. It also reveals the decision making process of the artist, who wants the viewer to make certain connections within the artwork.

Interpretation is the meaning of the work based on the information in steps 1 and 2. Interpretation is about ideas (not description) or sensation or feelings. Don't be afraid of revising your interpretation when new facts are discovered (such as the date of the artwork, or the personal history of the artist, etc.) Conversely, don't be reluctant to make an interpretation from your analysis of only the visual information.

Judgment, the final step, is often the first statement that is expressed about an artwork before it has really been examined. Judgment in that case is neither informed nor critical but simply an opinion.