

# Art Criticism through Formal Analysis

Images sourced from Book : Tao of Photography “Seeing Beyond Seeing”  
By Philippe L. Gross and S.I. Shapiro

\*Other documents from various sources.

# Defining Art Criticism through Formal Analysis

- Art criticism is responding to, interpreting meaning, and making critical judgments about specific works of art through a formal analysis.
- Critics tend to focus more on modern and contemporary art from cultures close to their own.
- Art historians tend to study works made in cultures that are more distant in time and space.
- When initially introduced to art criticism, many people associate negative connotations with the word "criticism."

A professional art critic may be :

- a newspaper reporter assigned to the art beat,
- a scholar writing for professional journals or texts, or
- an artist writing about other artists.

# There are four levels to formal analysis

1. **Description** (observation)

2. **Analysis**

3. **Interpretation**

4. **Judgment**

**Description** = this is a literal description of the artwork.

**What do you know?**

Who created it?      When?

What is the title?

What is the size?

What technique, materials, medium was used to make it?

**Description** = things that you can observe.

This can lead to some implications, but do your best to stay as literal as possible at this stage.

## What do you see?

What seems to be the main **subject matter** and contributing parts to the image?

Use [descriptive language](#) to illustrate what you see.

- What is the setting?
- Who is there?
- How would you describe the [people, relationships, animals, location, activity](#)?
- What is “going on.” “about to happen.” or “just happened?”
- What time of day/night is it? Indoor or outdoors? Can you guess what season?

**Analysis** = How are the elements of are working together?  
does your eye move around the image?

How

## What Principles of Design are in use?

- **Emphasis** : What do you notice first when you look at the work(s)? Where is it positioned? Why is your attention drawn there? What are contributing factors?
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- **Balance** : What type is shown? How is is being created?
- **Pattern, Rhythm, Movement** : Are elements repeated? How are they helping to organize the design?

## What compositional strategies are in use?

- What point of view, perspective, angle, and distance is shown?

**Interpretation** = What does the art make you think or feel?

What is the story?      What is the Content?

- What do you think the artist wants you to notice?
- Do you think there are things in the artwork that represent other things/symbols?
- Why do you think that the artist chose to make the kind of artistic decisions that they did? (materials, process, subject matter, elements).
- What style of artwork do you think it is? Possible types.

**Judgement** = This is your personal evaluation.

What is your opinion and perspective of the artwork?

- What value do you find in the artwork?
  - Examples : Is it a beautiful work of art? Does it make you feel something? Think something? Learn something?
  - Does it convey an important social message?
  - Effects the way you see the world? make insightful connections? reaffirm or question a belief?
- What did this artwork teach you or introduce you to?
- What questions do you have regarding this image?
- What is the best part of this artwork?
- Could anything be improved or elaborated on?