

# HOW TO DESIGN A SUCCESSFUL ARTWORK

All good finished artworks make use of the tools of making art. The following is an outline that lists the tools of art making and gives some suggestions as to their proper uses. Art is an intellectual activity that requires more than is obvious to the untrained eye. Not everyone who attempts to make are succeeds.

## I. **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ART**

A. **CONTENT** - The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is – What will the art work be about? The content of an artwork is what the image means. The content is what the artist is trying to communicate to the people who will view the artwork. A vast majority of successful artworks are idea generated. Efforts to make art that have no content may struggle to be classified as artworks. Journaling in a sketchbook about your content ideas matter may assist you in deciding what the possible literal or symbolic meanings could be.



An example of how content in art work is driven by thought and dictates subject matter is Figure With Meat by Francis Bacon.

Bacon was born Protestant but as a child lived in predominantly Catholic Dublin Ireland during a time in history when there was much conflict between the two religions. This caused much internal conflict for the artist who was self taught, studying the painting POPE INNOCENT XX by Velazquez who triggered his anger with the church, generating this disturbing work of art.

How can your thoughts provide you with ideas for your art work?

1. Who are you? What personal biographical information are you willing to share with your viewer? Could you select subject matter that symbolically reveals personal insight as to your awareness of yourself. Self-portraits or even works that are self-analytical are valuable methods of artistic communication.



This self-portrait by Oskar Kokoshka gives us a look at his personality.

There is much to be understood about the artist by the expression on his face.

How would you interpret it?

What do you think he is trying to reveal about himself?

Do you have the courage to examine yourself to express what you know about you in your art work?

2. What emotion dominates your thoughts? For example, what do you love or hate? Are there ways of expressing love or hate that are so universal that no matter who sees the images you produce they will think and feel what you do when they see your art?

In this painting, Head of a Woman by Joan Miro he clearly expresses how he feels about this woman.

Isn't Miro's anger with her obvious?

What emotions do you feel strongly enough that you could use it as the idea for your art work?



3. In what do you believe? Is there a belief system in place in your life that guides your actions socially, morally, or spiritually? Could this belief system be the source of imagery that could be useful in your artwork?

George Segal created this work of art entitled Bus Rider to tell us about how Rosa Parks influenced his beliefs about racism.

What convictions do you have that could spark ideas for art works?

Could you defend your beliefs with your art?



4. What intangible universal idea do you value or wish to explore? Could you explore concepts like beauty, truth freedom, greed, envy, or justice that in many ways transcend culture and time? Might examination of how they apply to an individual life or to mankind in general make excellent content for artworks?



In Birthday by Marc Chagall the artist examines the power of love to make the impossible possible.

Idea generated images come from the intellectual activity that all successful artists use to cause art to happen.

What universal ideas could you use that would be understood by anyone who sees your art work?



5. What is the story? What has happened to you that might have happened to anyone? Could the universality of such personal events makes for great visual stories? Or what if you told an established story with a visual image?



This lithograph, Death and the Mother by Kathe Kollwitz visually tells the story of how countless women fought to protect their children from the horrors of Nazi Germany. The mother shields her baby from death's attack. The story is both real and personal. The artist experienced much loss, her son died in battle during World War I and her husband died during World War II. She did not live to see the end of the war.

Can you see her fear, loss and grief in this art work?

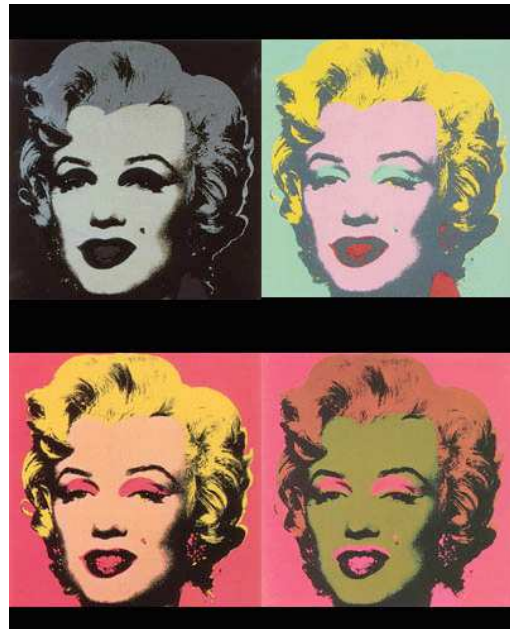
What story do you have to tell that might be told in your art work?

6. What would you defend? What matters enough to you that you have thought it through to a logical conclusion and you could defend it with your thinking?

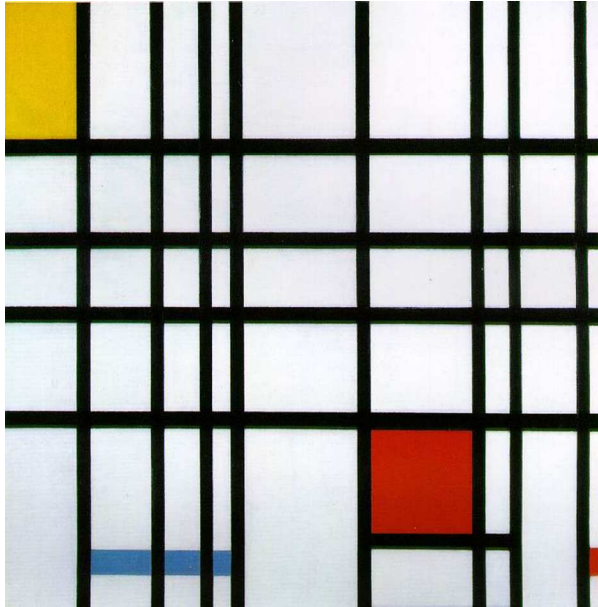
Marilyn Monroe, a serigraph by Andy Warhol communicates his belief that the values of his time were best represented by subject matter from popular culture that was mass produced and available to everyone. An actress in film became the subject of fine art that was produced using a commercial printmaking process.

What is Warhol saying about the beliefs of his time? Is it possible that were also his beliefs?

How could you communicate your beliefs in a work of art?



7. How is your art about art? (Metacognition – thinking about your thinking)  
What kinds of artistic questions are you asking?



Composition Red Yellow Blue  
by Piet Mondrian is a work of art  
that is about an artistic question.

Plato, in The Republic, said that  
artists only make imperfect  
copies of what already exists.  
Mondrian asked if it was  
possible to eliminate all but the  
basic ELEMENTS OF ART and  
still make art. This now famous  
Neo-Plastic artwork was the  
result of his question.

Which elements of art did  
Mondrian use?

B. **SUBJECT** - The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is – What will be used to show  
what the art work is about? The subject is what you draw. What should you  
draw? You should choose something that will hold your interest. Good art works  
take time and commitment to be successful. Choose one from the topics list  
that's has been provided for you.



**C. PLANNING** - The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is – How will the art work be organized? Before an artwork can be accomplished there are some important steps that need to be taken.

**DOCUMENTATION OF IDEAS** - Keep a sketchbook. Good ideas are rare and wonderful. You may go through many bad or unsuccessful thoughts before the good one comes along. Sometimes an unsuccessful one can be reworked or improved. Ideas that are never recorded are subject to be forgotten or lost.

1. **CHOOSE A PROCESS** - After choosing what to put in your artwork and what it means, you must choose how to work.

a. **IMAGINATION** - Inventing images directly from your imagination will result in unusual, bizarre or even outrageous outcomes. This is the least physically accurate way of making images.

b. **MEMORY** - Relying on one's memory to make images may feel personal, however, remembered images often lack good source material and detail.

c. **DIRECT OBSERVATION** – Artwork that comes from looking at original source material is more accurate, contains important detail and is extremely personal. Adding moods that are remembered and imaginative embellishments to artworks that come from direct observation will insure that the finished product is both unique and accurate.

1. **INFORMATION GATHERING** - Collect visually stimulating information and keep it for later use. A scrap of lace, a butterfly wing, a pressed flower, an article from a magazine or newspaper, a note from a friend or enemy, any thing that can be the start of an idea or the reminder of an idea should be kept in a safe place like a sketchbook for later use. Become a visual pack rat.

2. **JOURNALING** - Write and write often. Any thing from a single word to paragraphs could be helpful in the making of art or stimulating art ideas. Writing, another art form, will often generate visual images but remember a picture is worth a thousand words.

3. **THUMBNAIL SKETCHES** - After choosing subject matter an investigation is necessary. Look at real subject matter not photographs or other artists' artwork. Draw what you see. Examine the subject from multiple points of view. Change your relative distance from the subject and draw it again. Use a viewfinder and let the subject exit the picture plane and draw it again. The more thumbnail sketches you have that examine the details of your source material the more likely you will be to have a successful finished product.

**D. VIEWPOINT** – The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is – Where is the viewer in relation to the art work? The point of view you use tells those who view the artwork where they are in relationship to the subject matter. Before you begin placing things you must make decisions about where you want them to go. To

decide where your viewer will be you must choose to focus on one of each of the following;

1. vertical axis

- a. high
- b. medial
- c. low

2. horizontal axis

- a. far left
- b. far right
- c. central

3. depth axis

- a. close up
- b. normal viewing distance
- c. distant

D. **COMPOSITION** - The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is - How will what is arranged in the artwork control the path of the viewer's eye? Control the viewer's eye requires careful consideration. The following devices can be used to determine what the viewer will see and what order things will be seen.

1. focal points

- a. dominant – strong and noticeable - catches the eye first
- b. subordinate – weaker and less noticeable – subtle

2. directional marks

- a. vertical – up and down
- b. horizontal – side to side
- c. diagonal – in the direction of the slant
- d. curved – flowing gracefully
- e. zigzag – visual stop signs at intersections of lines or shapes

3. shapes – movement through a composition can be accomplished through carefully placed shapes. Shapes can also be used to keep a viewer's eye from exiting the picture plane.

4. color – movement through use of value and intensity

- a. warm colors (red, yellow, orange and white) – radiate, tend to come forward in space
- b. cool colors (blue, green, purple and black) – recede, tend to move back in space
- c. pure (unaltered) are more intense and tend to pull closer in space
- d. altered colors (adding complements and/or a value) are less intense and will push further back in space.

5. picture plane – good two dimensional composition includes the artist's awareness of the surface on which they work and the placement of the objects on that surface.
- a. high – placement on the picture plane indicates that the object placed may be further back in space.
  - b. medial - placement on the picture plane indicates that the object placed may be at a normal distance from the viewer.
  - c. low - placement on the picture plane indicates that the object places may be closer to the viewer.
  - d. size – the size of an object can determine its relative distance from the viewer.
  - e. interaction with the picture plane – any object that bisects the picture plane is going to lead the viewer's eye into or off the page.
  - f. compositional boredom – automatic placement of objects at the center of a picture plane will risk being seen as ordinary.
  - g. compositional suicide – placing lines, shapes or any other element at a corner may invite the viewer's eye to exit the composition and never return

**F. ENVIRONMENT** - The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is – Where will what is happening in the art work take place? The location the subject occupies is an absolute necessity in order to avoid oversimplification. Show the place where things are. Plan an environment for things that fits and adds to the success of the art work.

**G. LIGHT SOURCE** - The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is – How will the use of light help the viewer understand what they are to know? Indicate the direction of the primary light source and if there are any other minor light sources. Make use of the six divisions of light (highlight, light, shadow, core of the shadow, reflected light and cast shadow).

**H. CONTRAST** - The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is – How do relative differences cause interest in the art work? Use contrast for the sake of emphasis. The following examples do not make a complete list but are a good beginning.

1. light to dark
3. rough to smooth
4. transparent to opaque
5. hard to soft
6. organic to geometric
7. flat to 3D
8. interior to exterior
9. shinny to matte
10. static to dynamic
11. inanimate to alive
12. color complements
  - a. red to green



- b. blue to orange
- c. yellow to purple.

I. **TIME** - The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is – When does what is happening in the art work take place? Leave some evidence as to what time of day, what time of year, or when in history is the image taking place. Avoid anachronism unless intended for the sake of content.

J. **DRAMA** – The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is – How does the artwork rescue its' self from being ordinary? Create in your viewer some desire to care about your work. Excite them into a reaction of some kind that is a response to the image you have provided for them. Be careful, however, that shock value is not the only value the art work has. Drama can be caused by:

- |                                  |                                  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. stark realism                 | 11. non-contextual relationships |
| 2. strong emotional content      | 12. exaggerated embellishments   |
| 3. cryptic imagery               | 13. facial expressions           |
| 4. deliberate distortion         | 14. body language                |
| 5. unexpected humor              | 15. historical context           |
| 6. symbolic color                | 16. odd point of view            |
| 7. unusual lighting              | 17. environmental influences     |
| 8. change of scale               | 18. play on word images          |
| 9. personification               | 19. anachronistic object         |
| 10. situational irony            | 20. paradoxical conflict         |
| 11. non-contextual relationships |                                  |

K. **CRITICISM** - The *ESSENTIAL QUESTION* is – What method of evaluation will you use to assess the outcome of your efforts to make art. Assessment is a healthy tool that artists use to decide the important question, “What is next?”

1. **CRITICAL ANALYSIS** – is a formal approach to analysis of an artwork to determine the qualities it demonstrates.

Most people will tell you that they do not know much about it but they are always quick to share their opinions about it. Opinions without logical ideas to back them up make for very uninteresting discussions. It should be important to know why you like or dislike something in the art world and even more important to be able to sound like you know what you are talking about when you discuss it.

The following is based on the four-step process of critical performance as proposed by Edmund Burke Feldman in his book Varieties of Visual Experience. Perform each step in sequence and keep an open mind. Be prepared to fully explain any of the statements you make when answering any of the questions you are asked in this process. You will be amazed at how much better you understand any artwork you examine using critical analysis and how much easier it is to talk about it.

Select an artwork, discover who the artist is, know the title, and the approximate time frame in which it was produced. Knowing the nationality of the artist and the style of the artwork would be helpful, but not mandatory. Try to set aside any opinions you might have for now. They will just get in the way. Then...

**a. STEP ONE – DESCRIPTION**

Make a list, an inventory of everything that you see in the artwork. Take your time. Be careful to look closely in order not to miss any of the details. At this point in the process make no judgments about what you see. Avoid the “it looks like” or “it reminds me of” way of looking at things for now. Just stick to the facts. What do you see?

**b. STEP TWO – FORMAL ANALYSIS**

The formal qualities of any artwork are the ELEMENTS OF ART and THE PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN. To better understand what the artist has attempted to do, you should examine how each ELEMENT and PRINCIPLE has been used to produce the artwork. Make no quality judgments. At this point in the critical analysis you should not decide if anything is good or bad, just examine the facts about the things you described in step one. This is the longest and most difficult step to do well. Give it your best shot. Stick with it. You will be glad you did when you discover how much more you know at the conclusion of this step.

**THE ELEMENTS OF ART – THE BASIC LANGUAGE OF ART**

**LINE** – How many of the five basic kinds of line (VERTICAL, HORIZONTAL, DIAGONAL, ZIG-ZAG or CURVED) are used within the artwork? Does the artist make use of GESTURAL LINE, CONTOUR LINE, HATCHING, or CROSSHATCHING within the artwork? How has the artist used line to influence any of the other elements of art within the artwork?

**COLOR** – How is color organized in this artwork? List the colors in the artists’ palette. Use your COLOR THEORY handout to attempt to determine what color scheme the artists used: MONOCHROMATIC, COMPLEMENTARY, ANALOGOUS, SPLIT COMPLEMENT, DOUBLE COMPLEMENTARY, ANALOGOUS COMPLEMENTARY or TRIADIC. Has the artist influenced the impact of any of the other elements of art because of the application of color within the artwork?

**SHAPE** – Has the artist used any of the other elements of art to create ORGANIC, GEOMETRIC or BIOMORPHIC shapes within the artwork?

**FORM** – Has the artist made any effort to use any of the other elements of art to imply three-dimensionality on a flat

two-dimensional surface or is there any evidence that the elements of art have been applied to the concepts of PERSPECTIVE, CHIRASCURO or THE SIX DIVISIONS OF LIGHT to visually describe the modeled surfaces of forms within the artwork?

**SPACE** – Has the artist made use of any of the other elements of art to apply the concepts of PERSPECTIVE, FOREGROUND, MIDDLE GROUND, BACKGROUND, THE LAW OF DIMINISHING FORMS, THE LAW OF THIRDS, RELATIVE SIZE RELATIONSHIPS, FORMS EXITING THE PICTURE PLANE or OVERLAPPING to define the spatial relationships within the artwork?

**VALUE** – Has the artist added TINTS (white), TONES (gray) or SHADES (black) to any of the other elements of art to impact their relative lightness or darkness within the artwork?

**TEXTURE** – Has the artist used any of the other elements of art or specific media to create either REAL TEXTURE (texture that can be perceived by the sense of touch) or IMPLIED TEXTURE (texture that can only be perceived visually) within the artwork?

#### **THE PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN – THE WAYS TO USE, MANAGE AND MANIPULATE THE ELEMENTS OF ART**

**BALANCE** – Has the artist made use of a SYMMETRICAL, ASYMMETRICAL or RADIAL balance of one or more of the elements of art or the subject matter within the artwork?

**RHYTHM** – Has the artist repeated one or more of the elements of art or repeated subject matter in either a REGULAR (predictable) or IRREGULAR (unpredictable) way within the artwork?

**PROPORTION** – Has the artist made measurements to control the accuracy of relative size relationships of one or more of the elements of art and subject matter (elements and objects are IN PROPORTION) or has the artist deliberately changed the quantity of one or more of the elements of art and scale of objects to skew their proportional relationship (elements and objects are OUT of PROPORTION) within the artwork?

**MOVEMENT** – Has the artist restricted the use one or more of movement or potential movement of the elements of art to cause the artwork to appear **STATIC** or allowed the use of one or more of the elements of art to be used to create the illusion of movement or potential movement and therefore caused the artwork to appear **DYNAMIC**?

**VARIETY** – Has the artist used **MANY VERSIONS** of one or more of the elements of art or repeated the **SAME** of **SIMILAR** subject matters to stimulate **DIVERSE** visual interest within the artwork?

**EMPHASIS** – Has the artist stressed one or more of the elements of art to create either **PRIMARY** or **SECONDARY FOCAL POINTS** within the artwork?

**UNITY** – Has the artist used one or more of the elements of art to create a sense of **COHESIVENESS** within the artwork?

**COMPOSITION** – Although it is not one of the **ELEMENTS OF ART** or **PRINCIPLED OF DESIGN** it is also helpful to discuss the composition and its ability to control the eye of the viewer. Artists make choices as to what they want you to see first, how long they want you to look at it, what will be seen next and how they will direct your eye from one thing to another. This visual control is intentional and planned. The devices of composition are:

1. Line controls the movement of the eye.
  - a. vertical line directs the eye up and down.
  - b. horizontal line directs the eye from side to side
  - c. diagonal line directs the eye in the direction of the slant.
  - d. curved line directs the eye in the direction of the flow of the curve.
  - e. zigzag line works as a visual stop sign.
2. Color controls the movement of the eye in relationship to depth.
  - a. warm colors radiate, direct the eye forward in space.
  - b. cool colors recede, direct the eye back in space.
  - c. Tints of colors radiate, direct the eye forward in space.
  - d. shades of colors recede, direct the eye back in space.
3. Focal points control where the eye pauses.
  - a. dominant focal points capture the viewers' attention first.
  - b. subordinate focal points provide the viewer with a variety of areas of interest.
4. Balance will determine the distribution of visual weight.
  - a. symmetry allows the eye to see equal distribution of visual weight to both sides



of an art work.

b. asymmetry allows the eye to distribution of visual weight to be balanced by placing a positive against a negative to achieve it.

c. radial balance allows the eye to focus on a dominant focal point with all subordinate focal points and elements radiating out from the center.

5. Contrast will direct the eye to focus upon relative differences.

#### THE ELEMENTS OF ART

1. Value - light to dark
2. Shape - organic and geometric
3. Space - near and far
4. Form - flat and modeled
5. Texture - rough and smooth
6. Line - thin and thick.  
solid and broken
7. Color - warm and cool  
light and dark  
bright and dull.  
complements

#### THE PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

8. Proportion - large or small
9. Rhythm - regular or irregular
10. Variety - few and many
11. Emphasis - stressed or not
12. Unity - cohesive or not
13. Balance - in or out of
14. Movement - static and dynamic

#### c. **STEP THREE – INTERPRETATION**

Please try not to decide if you like the artwork or not at this point. It is more important to decide how it makes you FEEL or what it makes you THINK. Try to figure out what the artist is saying to you. The idea he is trying to communicate is called the CONTENT. Is there an obvious message? Is the message encrypted or hidden, waiting to be discovered? It is not always necessary for you to think or feel exactly what the artist originally intended. You should ask yourself how you feel about the artwork. What does it make you think about? How has the artist used SYMBOLS to make you think? Could the subject matter you see mean something other than the obvious or the LITERAL idea you have when you first look at it? What could it mean? What does it mean to you? Some artworks tell a story. Others record the past or predict the future. Still others focus on ideas or human emotions. Try checking the title. It is sometimes a good clue as to what the artist is trying to say. If all else fails, use your imagination to try to figure out a possible meaning, story or idea behind the artwork. What happens in your mind could be as important as what the artist

intended. Sometimes, no matter how hard we try we can find no meaning and we have to be satisfied to understand the artwork based on the formal qualities contained within it. The worst thing that can happen is for you to feel nothing or to have no response at all. If an artwork leaves you cold or angry, it is better than having no reaction at all. In almost every instance, it only those who made no attempt to understand the artwork who will walk away feeling nothing.

#### **d. STEP FOUR - EVALUATION**

Evaluation of an artwork is a necessary evil. It would be better if art could be appreciated for what it is without ranking its worth. However, the world we live in tends to classify worth based on opinion. When evaluating art, opinions are worthless unless well founded in artistic sensibilities. The worst way to evaluate an artwork is to decide if you like it or not. The best thing to do is to determine if the artwork is successful or not based on a comparison of the work to others of its kind. Choose other works by the same artist or works by other artists who work in a similar manner to make a valid comparison. A high quality artwork will cause the audience to think, to ask questions and have a successful composition that controls the viewer's eye long enough to retain his/her interest. In short, is the artwork successful at doing what it was intended to do?

2. CRITIQUE - is an informal approach to analysis of an artwork to determine the qualities it demonstrates.

**WHAT IS IT?** Critique is a process of evaluation, feedback and suggestions, which is requested by the artist, generated by fellow art students who are on the same developmental level and guided by the art instructor.

**WHY DO IT?** That feeling that an artist sometimes gets of not knowing what to do next can be very confusing even crippling. Deciding what is working and what needs to be changed in an artwork can be very difficult. Artists unwittingly tend to paint themselves into the corner and because they are too close to the problem, find it hard to work their way out. It does not have to be done alone. Asking others what they think can be of great assistance. Critique is an intelligent attempt by the artist to get a new insight or a point of view that had not previously considered. Critique can assist an artist in deciding if the suggestions offered should be applied to the work that is being evaluated or to future projects or maybe completely ignored. After all, they are just suggestions.

**HOW IS IT DONE?** Any artist who has the desire and the courage to get a better understanding of their own artwork will look outside themselves for an objective opinion. Sometimes an artist will

voluntarily submit to having critical remarks made about their work or at other times the art instructor may require the student to submit work for critique. Either way, once the artwork has been selected the process can begin. The goal of critique is to discuss what does and does not work in the selected artwork and to praise the good work and make suggestions as to possible solutions to any problems that have been discovered. Critique should never be an art bashing session. Maligning an artistic effort is unproductive, destructive and dangerous and should never be allowed. Whether done by one person or as a group activity, critique should always be constructive and the people who do it should always be supportive. Any problems that are identified in the artwork must be accompanied by constructive suggestions.

**ARE YOU READY TO DO IT?** Critique can be done at any point in the production of an artwork or be postponed till the end. But once critique starts the artist whose work is being evaluated should put on their bulletproof vest, fasten their seatbelt and check their ego at the door. Although it is a difficult and sometimes scary process, critique is a valuable learning tool. Try not to take any remarks too personally. Be open to what might be just what you needed to hear.

**LET'S DO IT!** - Those who make remarks, statements, observations, or ask questions, enter into discussions and make suggestions should restrict their criticisms to the artwork and not the artist. Art is very personal. Therefore criticism should be objective and only about the work not its maker. Criticism should never be exclusively negative. It can and should be positive and encouraging. Those who participate in critique should never make comments of any kind without backing them up with artistically valid reasoning. Gut reactions and knee-jerk comments that have not been carefully considered should be left to the artistically ignorant and uninformed. When in discussion with the artist about the artwork, remarks should fall into one of these categories: **FORMAL QUALITIES, CULTURAL/ HISTORICAL QUALITIES and PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT QUALITIES.**

**FORMAL QUALITIES** – Discuss the artwork in terms of its formal artistic qualities including the elements of art and the principles of design. Ask questions like:

**How do you classify this artwork?** Is it realistic, photo-realistic, representational, surrealist, abstract, expressionistic, impressionistic, non-objective, etc. ?

**Does it have a title?** The name of the artwork may give insight as to the artists' intent and purpose for the work.

**Is content important to the artist?** Try to discern the possible meaning.

**Does the artist intend for the artwork to be abstract, representational, non-objective or realistic?** Unintentional mixing of differing approach to image making can cause the viewer to be confused as to what the artist intended to do.

**What has the artist done successfully?** Always call attention to something the artist has done successfully before offering negative or constructive remarks.

**How would you suggest that the artist address any possible areas of weakness?**

Example

**Weakness** - If some surfaces in the artwork are flat and others are not, **you could ask**; did you intend to flatten surfaces rather than to use modeling to create form?

**Possible suggestion** - Maybe identifying a light source would cause your subject matter to look more three-dimensional.

**How and why were line, shape, form, space, texture color and value used?** Identify and discuss the use of each element of art.

**How and why were proportion, variety emphasis, unity, rhythm, balance and movement used?** Identify and discuss the use of each principle of design.

**Has the artist used directional indicators to control the viewers' eye throughout the composition?** Identify how the artwork reads. Identify how the artist has used lines, shapes, colors, etc. to interconnect the focal points that have been established.

**Has the artists' choice of colors resulted in a logical color scheme?** Illogical use of color could be symbolic but color relationships are still important.

**Does the artists' choice of point of view provide the viewer with enough information to understand its' psychological impact?** **High** – viewer superior to the subject matter, **Medial** – viewer equal to the subject matter, **Low** – viewer subordinate to the subject matter, **Far left or right** – casual / relaxed feel, **Central** – formal / rigid feel, **Close-up** – intimate with the viewer, **Normal** – on common ground with the viewer and **Distant**- remote, removed from a strong relationship with the viewer

**Has the artist effectively used the rules of perspective to create accurate spatial relationships?** Check to see if the lines of sight converge toward a logical vanishing point on the sides of objects that should indicate depth.



**Does the artwork demonstrate any technical flaws?** Example - Straight hatching or crosshatching instead of contour lines to define a curved surface could result in unintentional flatness.

**How successful has the artist been in the use of the chosen medium in this artwork?** Media manipulation can have either a positive or negative impact on the outcome of an artwork. The medium used should never be the star of the artwork. It is the means not the end.

**These are examples of the kinds of formal artistic inquiries that make for a successful critique. Add any you deem relevant.**

**CULTURAL/HISTORICAL QUALITIES** – Discuss the artwork in terms of its cultural or historical relevance including any obvious connection to the work of another artist or stylistic trend in art history. Ask questions like:

**Are there any blatant or maybe even subtle visual similarities in this artwork to artworks by other artists either current or in other time frames? Do you see any stylistic similarities to recognized movements in art history?** At this point it should be said that it is unlikely that any artist could produce work that is totally innovative. It is, however the challenge that we all face. We are all influenced by what has gone before us, but to what degree? What is there in this artwork that makes it unique?

**Is the artist aware of the viewer? What has the artist done in this artwork to guarantee that the viewer will be interested?** The artist may be giving deliberate visual cues to the viewer in order to communicate the intended content.

**What is the cultural intent of this artwork?** The artwork may be intended to either reflect the culture in which it was created or it may be attempting to influence it.

**Is there any culturally specific imagery in this artwork?** Not all visual imagery is universal in intent. The artist may have directed the cultural focus of this artwork to a specific audience and therefore restrict its' success as an artwork to only those who will understand it.

**Is there any cultural symbolism? What do we know about the artist and the society that produced the artist from the symbolic images used in the artwork?** Example – Marc Chagall's painting entitled "Crucifixion" in which he girds the crucified Christ in a Jewish prayer shawl indicating his diverse cultural heritage uses both Christian and Jewish symbolism. The imagery in this artwork tells the viewer that the artist was involved in more than one way of thinking.

**These are examples of the kinds of cultural/historical inquiries that make for a successful critique. Add any you deem relevant.**

**PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT QUALITIES** – Discuss the artwork in terms of the personal artistic growth of the artist. Ask questions like:

**How does this artwork compare to other artworks by this artist? Is the artist breaking new personal ground (Innovating) or is the artist reverting to old, tried and true, “sure thing” methods of producing artworks (regressing)?** Exploration in the arts can and should lead to progressive development. If no progress is taking place, if no change is accomplished, if this artwork looks too much like all of the others that came before it, the artist may have reached a stagnant place in artistic development. Even if it is a good work, too much of a good thing will result in the good thing becoming ordinary, common and predictable with like responses from the viewer.

**What artistic problem is the artist attempting to address?** Example – Josef Albers when painting “Departing Yellow” an artwork in his “Homage to the Square” series, asked himself, “If warm colors radiate and cool colors recede, how can I make yellow, which is a warm color, appear to move back in space?” The conclusion he derived from this question was that to accomplish his goal, Albers would have to make each progressively distant square a duller yellow indicating its increased distance from the viewer.

**What skill development progress has the artist made during the production of this artwork?** Artists sometimes reach a level of facility in their skills. When what they are doing stops being a challenge, it becomes rote and boring. Continued skill development is a must.

#### **NOTE TO THE ARTIST OF THE ARTWORK BEING CRITIQUED:**

Remember that the things said in critique are to be remarks that are only food for thought not commands to be followed. Your artwork should be very personal and not just the product of your reaction to what others said about it. That is not to say that everything said in critique should be casually discarded as unimportant or irrelevant. Critical remarks made during this process are to be considered and judged as to their relevance and usefulness. It may be wise to take notes while your work is being critiqued so you do not forget something that could be h

3. **TEACHER FEEDBACK** – Interaction between the student and the teacher is a valuable resource for evaluation. Ask questions.

Instead of asking your teacher if they like what you are doing share your ideas and plans with them. Ask for suggestions as to the direction you should take in solving the problems that occur during the creative process. Your teacher is watching what you do and waiting for you to ask the right questions.

4. **PEER FEEDBACK** - Interaction between the students in a studio atmosphere is one of the best methods of evaluation. Walk around the room. Find out who is being successful. Ask, “How did you do that?” Most people love to share and learning from fellow students frees the teacher to help those who do not know how to ask for help.

5. **COMPETITION** – All student art competitions are judged by Knowledgeable impartial evaluators called adjudicators. Juried shows give the student a chance

to compare their progress with other students that are on the same level of learning.

6. EXHIBITION – One of the most pleasant methods of evaluation comes when student's works are exhibited. Students who show what they have done often hear feedback in the form of comments by those who view their work.

II. THE ELEMENTS OF ART – The elements are the basic language of art. This vocabulary is what the artist uses to convey the idea that is contained within the artwork. Those who would be artists and do not use this language to construct their product may run the risk of not making art.

A. **LINE** – A line is the path of a point through space.

1. basic line types - Use one or all of the five basic kinds of line to construct your artwork. Each kind of line will do a specific job of directing the viewer's eye around the page
  - a. vertical – up and down
  - b. horizontal – side to side
  - c. diagonal – in the direction of the slant
  - d. curved – flowing gracefully
  - e. zigzag – visual stop signs at intersections of lines or shapes
2. contour line – always follows the surface of an object and shows form
3. growth and decay line – get thick and thin in order to show Value
4. hatching – parallel lines that show value – the closer the lines are together the darker the value – the farther the lines are apart from each other the lighter the value
5. crosshatching – intersecting parallel lines that show value
6. scumbling – irregular spontaneous organic mark making that shows value
7. outlines – the outside edge of any object (flatten objects)

B. **SHAPE** – all shapes are flat and two dimensional, they have height and width and enclose space. Shapes are closed not open.

1. organic – shapes that look like they were grown in nature
2. geometric – shapes that look like they were machine made
3. biomorphic – shapes that have both organic and geometric characteristics

C. **FORM** – all forms are three dimensional or give the illusion of being three dimensional. Forms have height, width and depth or give the illusion that they have these dimensions. Forms usually have modeled surfaces that display the effect of a light source by using the six divisions of light. Sculptures show real form and two dimensional artworks (paintings, drawings, prints, photographs and graphic art) show implied form.



D. **TEXTURE** – is the way things feel or look like they might feel.

1. real texture is a an actual tactile sensation and can be achieved in both two and three dimensional art works
2. implied texture gives the illusion of a tactile experience

E. **VALUE** – relative lightness or darkness is usually understood based on how much light is shown on any form and from which direction the light comes. Tints, tones and shades are produced in colored art materials based on the relative amounts of white and/or gray are added to any given hue. A value drawing or painting is one that has no color in it but is made up of a relative range of white, gray and black. Values are used to show the modeled surface of forms and express three-dimensionality.

F. **SPACE** – spatial relationships are used to depict the viewer's relative distance from what is seen in an art work. The viewer's relative distance is usually expressed in the following terms:

1. foreground
2. middle ground
3. background
4. deep space

G. **COLOR** - is the element of art that is derived from the way the eye perceives reflected light. Color has three properties hue, value and intensity.

1. hue - is the term used to describe a particular variety of color. Each specific variety has its own name. There are an infinite number of hues each with its own name.
2. value - refers to the relative lightness or darkness of a color. On a form value occurs as a result of the amount of light that falls on any object. Within color, value refers to adding black, white or gray to a hue to create a tint, shade or tone. Adding white, black or gray to a hue will change its intensity to a duller variety of the hue. Black, white and gray are not colors. They are values.
  - a. a tint is a light value of a hue.
  - b. a shade is a dark value of a hue
  - c. a tone is what happens to a hue when gray is added
3. Intensity refers to the brightness or dullness of a hue. A pure hue is considered to have very high intensity and therefore be very bright. Dull colors tend to appear to move back in space while

bright colors tend appear to come forward in space. A color that is used in the foreground of an artwork will need to be dulled if the artist intends to use that same color further back in space. There are three ways to dull a color:

- a. add a value – adding black, white or gray to a color will dull it, make it less intense or bright.
  - b. add the color's complementary color – adding green to red, orange to blue or purple to yellow will dull each color or make less intense or bright.
  - c. surround any color with a brighter color and by comparison the surrounded color will appear duller or less bright.
4. primary colors - are the colors from which all other colors are mixed. These colors can not be made by mixing any other colors. The primary colors are
- a. red
  - b. blue
  - c. yellow
5. secondary colors - may be made by mixing any two primary colors. Secondary colors are not lower in intensity because they have been mixed from two pure hues. The secondary colors are purple (violet), green and orange.
- a. red + blue = purple
  - b. blue + yellow = green
  - c. yellow + red = orange
6. intermediate colors - are made by mixing one primary color with a secondary color that contains the primary color. Secondary colors are not lower in intensity because they have been mixed from two pure hues. The intermediate colors are:
- a. red + purple = red-purple
  - b. red + orange = red-orange
  - c. blue + purple = blue-purple
  - d. blue + green = blue-green
  - e. yellow + orange = yellow-orange
  - f. yellow + green = yellow-green

7. warm colors - appear to come forward (radiate) in space.

The warm colors are:

- a. red
- b. orange
- c. yellow

8. cool colors - appear to go back (recede) in space. Blue is the coolest of all colors. Any color with blue in it is a cool color. The cool colors are:

- a. blue
- b. green
- c. purple.

9. neutral colors - are the product of mixing all three primary colors. There are many neutral color names. The most common neutral color name is brown. Neutral colors are either warm or cool depending on how much blue they have in them, the more blue the cooler the neutral. There are four ways to mix a neutral color:

- a. red + blue + yellow = brown
- b. red + green = brown
- c. blue + orange = brown
- d. yellow+ purple= brown

10. black, white and gray - are values not colors. They can be added to a color to change how light or dark the color will be. Adding a value to a color will also change (dull) its intensity. Black is the cool value, white is the warm value and gray is the neutral value. Black and white are very strong pigments. They should never be used alone in an artwork because doing so will cause an unintentional focal point. Instead mix black into colors that look near-black but still show a hint of the color.

11. color schemes - are color plans. Artist decide which colors they will use in an artwork to help cause a composition, define the space or tell the story of their intended content. The three basic color schemes are:

a. monochromatic - one color plus black, gray and white.



b. complementary - two colors that are opposite on the color wheel, one primary and one secondary plus black, gray and white.

c. analogous – three (sometimes four) colors that are next to each other on the color wheel, two primary colors and the color the make when mixed together plus black, gray and white.

III. THE PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN – If the ELEMENTS OF ART are the basic vocabulary for art, the PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN represents the structure for the language. For example: Line, form and color are to nouns, verbs, conjunctions and adjectives as rhythm, emphasis, movement and unity are to phrases, sentences, paragraphs and stories. The PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN are what an artist uses to manage how the ELEMENTS OF ART will be used in an artwork.

1. **RHYTHM** – Any ELEMENT OF ART can be repeated to create pattern. Repetition can enhance the importance of what is being repeated or it can reduce it to the mundane and boring if duplicated too often. There are two kinds of visual rhythm:

A. regular rhythm – Predictable repetition; seeing whatever element is used at predetermined specific intervals will set up a visual rhythm that is regular.

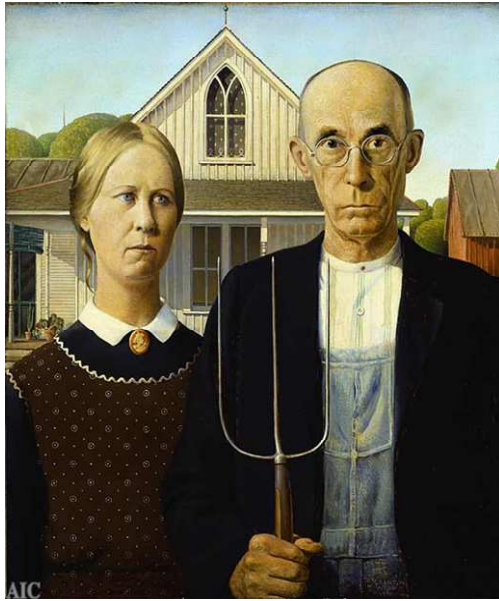
B. irregular rhythm - Unpredictable repetition; seeing whatever element is used at undetermined non-specific intervals will set up a visual rhythm that is irregular.

Example: Peace Plaza at the United Nations  
regular – every flag pole is the same height and distance  
apart and every flag is the same size.  
irregular – each flag has unique colors and designs



2. **MOVEMENT** - Any ELEMENT OF ART can be used to direct the eye of the viewer through a composition. A line, shape, color etc. can be used to lead the eye of the viewer from one place to another. That is visual movement. Because most works of art do not actually move the artist must create the illusion of movement if any is intended in the art work. The best way to understand the concept is to imagine a picture of a flag and ask : Is the flag being blown by the wind?

A. If the answer is no, then the artwork is **static** meaning that there is no visual movement or potential visual movement.



B. If the answer is yes, the artwork is **dynamic** meaning that there is visual movement or potential for visual movement.



C. If the flag is not a picture but a real flag, then it has real **kinetic energy**, actual movement. Some sculpture is kinetic.



3. **BALANCE** – Visual balance in an artwork is

- A. symmetry – equal visual weight
- B. asymmetry – equal but opposite visual weight
- C. radial – visual weight that radiated outward in rays or in a spiral configuration from a strong central focal point

4. **PROPORTION** – Relative size relationships help the viewer to determine how accurate and realistic the image is intended to be. Correct proportions will indicate an attempt at realism while incorrect proportions may indicate that the artist intends to abstract the subject matter. Dramatically incorrect proportions will cause a focal point that captures the attention of the viewer. In addition to the size ratio, proportion may also refer to the amount of a particular **ELEMENT OF ART**; a large proportion of the surface of the canvas may be covered with a particular variety of red, or dominated by a large proportion of organic shaped, or have a small proportion of 3D forms in relationship to flat surfaces.

5. **VARIETY** – In art variety is visually stimulating. Too little variety and the art work may be uninteresting. Too much variety and the art work may be too busy.

6. **EMPHASIS** – Focal points are imperative



7. **UNITY** – Unity is always caused by using one or more of the ELEMENTS OF ART successfully throughout an artwork. Cohesiveness is a synonym which defines unity. When all of the parts of an art work “fit” and make sense together unity has been accomplished. Without unity the art work is not complete.