**Developing a Critical Eye & Mind:**

**ART CRITICISM AND FORMAL ANALYSIS**

Art criticism is responding to, interpreting meaning of, and making critical judgments about specific works of art.

**There are four levels of formal analysis, which you can use to explain a work of art:**

**Description**.

**This is a description without value judgments,** **analysis, or interpretation. The visual. What do you see?**

a. What is the *Form* of the work? Painting, sculpture, architecture, installation, etc.

b. What is the *Media/technique* used? Ceramic, Paint, Concrete, Steel, etc. How are these media used?

c. What is the *size and scale* of work? Relationship to human scale and/or frame and/or context.

d. What is the *context* of the artwork: original location and date

**Analysis =**

**What does it mean? How is the artist conveying this idea? Factors to consider when analyzing an artwork.**

a. What is the *subject matter*? Historical event, allegory, mythology, etc. Is the artwork representation or nonrepresentational?

b. What are the particular medium(s) used affect subject matter?

c. How are the *elements of design* used to organize the piece? (Line, Shape, Color, Value, Texture, Space, Time)

d. How are the *principals of design* used to organize the piece? (Balance, Unity/Variety, Emphasis/Subordination, Repetition/Rhythm/Pattern, Movement, Tension, etc.).

e. Does the artist focus on certain dominant elements more than others? Does this create a focal point or priorities within the work? How? Why do you think the artist chose to do this?

f. Analyze use of light and role of color, e.g., contrast, shadowy, illogical, warm, cool, symbolic, etc.

g. How do the components or structural system that make up the artwork contribute to appearance of image or to its function?

h. How does the formal organization (composition) help to direct the viewer to a particular meaning/theme?

**Interpretation – Requires research of the artist**

**This establishes the broader context of art to discover content. Why did the artist create it and what does it mean? The various questions that lead to interpretation include:**

a. What is the main idea, overall meaning of the work?

b. What are the commonalities/trends in this artist’s works? Are they formal? Thematic? Material/process related?

c. What are the major similarities/differences between this artist’s works and the works of other artists?

d. Is this artist/artwork obviously influenced by other well-known works by other artists?

e. How is this artist’s work influenced by art history?

f. Is this artist’s work controversial? How? Why?

g. Does the work exist within any established conventions of art making? (This could include certain *stylizations*, “tried and true” approaches or methods, etc.)

h. Does it deviate from established conventions? How?

I. How does the piece function culturally? Is it culturally significant?

j. Is the artwork functional?

k. Is the piece critical of anything? Other artwork/artists? Politics? Another aspect of society? History?

l. Does the work reference a specific event or time period? How? Why?

m. Do the *media* with which the works are made change the meaning/content/context?

n. Does the *process* by which the piece was made add something to the meaning/content/context?

o. Does the technology used to make the piece have a significant impact on the meaning of the piece?

**Judgment**

**Judging a piece of work means giving it rank in relation to other works and, of course considering a very important aspect of the visual arts, its originality.**

Is it a good work of art? What is your perception/personal response? What do you base this on?