

ART CRITICISM AND AESTHETICS

Have you ever tried to describe a work of art to another person? What are some of the things you look at when you judge whether or not you like a piece of art? Often, people rely on accepted art authorities to tell them what to value in an artwork and why. When people do this, they miss the satisfaction and pleasure that come from personal interaction with a work of art. Learning to see and understand a work of art, such as the painting in Figure 4.1, requires that you know two things. You must know *how to look* and *what to look for*. Art criticism will provide you with a method of looking at artworks in order to learn as much as possible from them. Aesthetics will help you identify what to look for when conducting those critical examinations.

FOCUS ON READING

Read to Find Out As you read this chapter, respond to the artwork. Learn about the four steps that an art critic uses in evaluating a work of art. Read about the three aesthetic theories and how to use them.

Focus Activity Respond to the artworks you see in the chapter. Examine the painting by Edward Hopper in Figure 4.1. What is your first impression of *August in the City*? What do you find interesting about it? What specific details account for your impression? Write down your response. As you find out more about the painting, note whether your impression changes and why.

Using the Time Line The Time Line introduces you to details of some of the other artworks you will learn about in this chapter. Which of these artworks would you like to learn more about? Why?



1781
Self-Portrait by Marie-Louise-Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (Detail)



1784–92
Portrait by Francisco Goya



1897
The Sleeping Gypsy by Henri Rousseau

1700

1750

1800

1850

Portraits express a variety of qualities

Paintings have different meanings



FIGURE 4.1 Edward Hopper. *August in the City*. 1945. Oil on canvas. 58.4 × 76.2 cm (23 × 30"). Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida. Bequest of R.H. Norton. 53.84.



1945
August in the City by Edward Hopper



1955
Berkeley No. 52 by Diebenkorn
(credit, p. 100)



1969
Modular Painting in Four Panels V by Lichtenstein
(credit, p. 93)



Refer to the Time Line on page H11 in your *Art Handbook* for more details.

1900

Details in artworks express moods or feelings

1950

Nonobjective art has visual appeal

2000

Art Criticism: A Search for Aesthetic Qualities

Vocabulary

- aesthetic qualities
- literal qualities
- design qualities
- expressive qualities

Discover

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify the four steps in the process of art criticism.
- Use the first three steps—description, analysis, and interpretation—to gather specific kinds of information from a work of art.

Art critics have their own methods of studying works of art. They use these methods to learn as much as possible from artworks representing a variety of styles and techniques. They carefully examine these works, searching for **aesthetic qualities**, *the qualities that can increase their understanding of the works and serve as the criteria on which their judgments are based*. Identifying and assessing these aesthetic qualities enables art critics to make judgments and to defend those judgments with intelligent reasons. In the pages that follow, you will learn that the aesthetic qualities include the literal, design, and expressive qualities.

The methods used by art critics to identify these qualities often involve four operations: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment. Learning how these operations are used will help you develop your own skills in examining and discussing works of art. These examinations and discussions will help you make your own personal decisions about those works and greatly increase your enjoyment of them.

The Art Criticism Approach

Art criticism is not a matter of casual observation and impulsive expressions of likes or dislikes. It is a reasoned activity of the mind. Art critics use the operations of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment to gain information *from* the artwork, rather than gathering facts about the work and the artist who created it. Used by a critic, these operations direct

attention to *internal clues*, that is, clues found *in* the work itself. When examining any work of art, critics ask and answer questions such as these:

- What is seen in the artwork?
- How is the artwork designed?
- What does it mean?
- Is it a successful work of art?

To understand more clearly how a critic gathers information from an artwork, follow an imaginary critic named Robert as he examines a painting (**Figure 4.2**). You will learn how a critic uses the operations of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment. It is the same approach you will use to gain a more complete understanding of art. It can help you as you try to improve your own works of art.



■ **FIGURE 4.2** When Rousseau first exhibited this picture, viewers greeted it with smiles and laughter. **What was your first impression of it?**

Henri Rousseau. *The Sleeping Gypsy*. 1897. Oil on canvas. 129.5 × 200.7 cm (51 × 79"). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim.

Description

Robert begins by making a thorough inventory of everything he sees in the work. In other words, he identifies the **literal qualities**, or *realistic presentation of subject matter*, and the elements of art found in the work.

Identifying the Literal Qualities

Focusing first on the literal qualities, Robert observes that the painting depicts an incident taking place in a silent desert landscape illuminated by a perfectly round, cool moon. A few stars twinkle in the blue night sky. In the foreground, a lion sniffs at a gypsy asleep on the sand next to the still water of an oasis. The gypsy, not yet aware of the lion, sleeps peacefully on a carpet of some sort. Beside him rest a mandolin and a large jug. His right hand still grips the staff he used in his trek across the desert.

Looking more closely, Robert observes that there are no footprints in the sand around the gypsy. Could this be an oversight, a detail the artist merely forgot to include in his picture? Robert decides to file this question away in his mind, to be considered later when he attempts to interpret the work. Directing his attention to the lion, he notices that it does not look entirely like a real animal. The tail extends outward gracefully, perhaps too gracefully, and the mane appears to have been carefully arranged. Although it does appear menacing—it is, after all, a lion—Robert finds that it reminds him of the stuffed animals he has seen in toy shops. The lion stares with buttonlike eyes at the gypsy, who slumbers on despite looking stiff and not altogether comfortable. He wears no sandals and is clothed in a colorful striped garment that shows no sign of a hard day's travel.

Identifying the Elements of Art

Satisfied that he has taken into account the realistic details in the painting, Robert turns his attention to the elements of art, making note of the different hues, values, lines, and shapes and of the way space is represented.

Robert is surprised to find that the artist painted with simple, unmixed colors. Most of these colors are found in small amounts in the

gypsy's costume and the carpet on which he rests. There, narrow stripes of red, blue, yellow, green, orange, and violet can be identified. The same dark orange noted on the mandolin is also used to color the jug. The sky is blue, and neutral browns and tans bordering on yellow are used for the sand, the lion, and the feet, arms, and face of the gypsy. Light and dark values of blue, brown, and tan can be identified throughout the work.

Robert notes that each shape is clearly defined, making it stand out prominently from the background. Gradual changes in value within each make these shapes look like solid, three-dimensional forms. He also observes that long, short, straight, and curved lines of different thicknesses have been used on the lion's mane and for the narrow stripes of the gypsy's garment and carpet. A series of straight lines represents the strings of the mandolin.

Satisfied that he has made a thorough description of the literal qualities and the elements of art, Robert is ready to move on to the second step of the art criticism process: analysis.

Analysis

During analysis, Robert uses the principles of art to determine how the elements of art used in the picture are organized. By focusing on the relationship of principles and elements, he hopes to gain an understanding of the work's **design qualities**, or *how well the work is organized, or put together*. This understanding will enable him to determine if the work has an overall sense of unity.

Using the Design Chart

Robert uses a design chart as an aid in analyzing the painting. With the chart, he can identify the most important design relationships linking the elements and principles in the work. If you were to look over his shoulder, you might see Robert recording these design relationships on a chart similar to the one in **Figure 4.3**, page 88.

Robert reviews the design chart and concludes that he has identified the most important design relationships. He knows he might have found more subtle relationships.

Using the Design Chart to Analyze *Art*

		DESIGN CHART						
		PRINCIPLES OF ART						
		Balance	Emphasis	Harmony	Variety	Gradation	Movement/ Rhythm	Proportion
ELEMENTS OF ART	Color: Hue		#1	#2				
	Intensity							
	Value		#3			#4		
	Value (Non-Color)							
	Line		#5		#6			
	Texture			#7				
	Shape/Form		#8			#9		
	Space							

■ FIGURE 4.3 Design Chart

1 Robert begins his analysis by placing his first check mark (#1) at the intersection of hue and emphasis. Perhaps, like Robert, you noticed that many of the hues in this painting have been used on the gypsy's colorful costume and carpet (Figure 4.4). This emphasizes the gypsy's importance and makes him, along with the lion, the painting's center of interest.

2 Robert's next check mark (#2) links hue with harmony. This reflects his decision that large areas of the artwork have been painted with a limited number of hues. A relatively simple arrangement of blue, brown, and tan distributed throughout the work ties the parts together into a harmonious whole. At the same time, it makes the gypsy's colorful costume appear more pronounced.

3 A check mark (#3) at the intersection of value and emphasis is an important one. Robert recognizes how contrasts of light and dark values help emphasize not only the lion and the gypsy, but important details like the mandolin and the moon as well. Notice, on the one hand, how the lion's dark form is boldly silhouetted against the lighter sky (Figure 4.5). This clearly establishes the animal's importance. On the other hand, the light values of the gypsy, mandolin, and moon make them stand out against the darker values around them.

4 Robert made another check mark (#4) at the intersection of value and gradation. The gradual change from dark to light values is obvious. This change of value is most clear in the large areas of sky and sand and in the methods the artist used to make the lion and the gypsy look three-dimensional.



FIGURE 4.4

Henri Rousseau. *The Sleeping Gypsy* (detail). © 2004 Succession. H. Matisse, Paris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



FIGURE 4.5

Henri Rousseau. *The Sleeping Gypsy* (detail).

5 Robert's decision to place a check mark (#5) linking line and emphasis reveals the importance he attaches to the principle of emphasis in this composition. Already he has made three check marks identifying this principle, and he has not yet completed his analysis. The check here refers to the concentration of lines or stripes that decorate the gypsy's garment and carpet. These lines clearly contrast with the large, unadorned areas of sand and sky and help emphasize the sleeping figure.

6 Another of Robert's check marks (#6) ties the element of line to the principle of variety. The thick and thin, straight and curved, long and short lines in the lion's mane, the gypsy's costume and carpet, the strings of the mandolin, and the outlines of distant sand dunes provide the variety needed to make the painting visually interesting.

7 Noticing the painting's consistently smooth surface, Robert placed a check mark (#7) at the intersection of texture and harmony. This reflects his decision that the glossy surface helps pull the painting together to make a harmonious whole.

8 Robert's next two check marks (#8 and #9) link the elements of shape and form with the principles of emphasis and gradation. He saw that the artist emphasized the shapes of the gypsy and the lion by making them look more like three-dimensional forms. A gradual change from dark to light values gives each the appearance of a solid form occupying real space. Notice how the form of the gypsy overlaps that of the lion, which in turn overlaps the water and the sand dunes. Behind the sand dunes is the night sky. This overlapping of forms draws Robert's eye to the desert stretching back as far as the eye can see.

Another art critic with a different background might come up with a different list of design relationships for the same work. This is one of the benefits of analysis. It opens the door for interesting discussions that enable two critics to learn even more about the work in question.

Having described and analyzed the painting, Robert is ready for the third art criticism operation: interpretation. He knows that this is the most exciting and the most personal step in the art criticism process.

Interpretation

When interpreting the meaning of an artwork, Robert must refer to everything he learned from the work during description and analysis. His concern centers on identifying the **expressive qualities**, or the *meaning, mood, or idea communicated to the viewer*. Robert knows, however, that a work of art may be interpreted in different ways by different people. His interpretation of the painting will be a personal one, based on the information he has gathered from the picture.

As he described and analyzed the painting, Robert became more and more conscious of its uneasy mood. He attributed this to the manner in which the elements and principles were used to depict a strange, haunting subject: a helpless gypsy asleep in a mysterious landscape, unaware of the lion hovering over him. The absence of footprints in the sand

seems to support the idea that the picture represents a dream rather than reality. Viewers who identify the helplessness of the gypsy will recognize their own feeling of helplessness when they find themselves alone and facing the unexpected in a dream. But whose dream is it, the gypsy's or the viewer's? Robert is unsure—but then decides that each person looking at the painting must make that decision on his or her own.

Robert's examination of the painting's literal, design, and expressive qualities is now complete. The only thing left to do is determine whether the work is—or is not—successful.

Judgment

Judgment is an important part of the art criticism process in order to demonstrate a genuine appreciation for art. The act of making a judgment and defending that judgment with good reasons demonstrates that a person understands and appreciates a work of art.

How Robert or any other critic judges a work of art depends in large measure on the theory or theories of art he or she favors. These theories help identify the different aesthetic qualities found in the artwork. They are important because they represent the criteria or proof on which judgments are based. To better understand these aesthetic theories, it is necessary to examine the important role aesthetics plays in art criticism.

LESSON ONE REVIEW

Reviewing Art Facts

1. **Recall** During which art criticism operation is concern directed to the expressive qualities?
2. **Describe** What are the literal qualities?
3. **Explain** How can a design chart aid someone in analyzing a work of art?
4. **Explain** How does a person demonstrate that he or she understands and appreciates an artwork?

Sharpening Your Skills

Using Art Criticism When using the art criticism approach, you must describe the elements and principles used by the artist when creating a work of art. Recall that in Chapter Two, elements and principles were presented and defined.

Activity Create a cut paper design that uses as many of the elements and principles as possible. Respond to your design using the four art criticism steps. Description—which elements were used? How? Analysis—which principles were used? How? Interpretation—what moods, feelings, or ideas does the work express? Judgment—is your design a work of quality? Display your design critique with the class.

Using Aesthetics and Art Criticism

Vocabulary

- aesthetics
- nonobjective art

Discover

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify and discuss three major aesthetic theories.
- Explain how statements of like and dislike differ from judgments about artworks.
- Use the steps of the art criticism process to examine a work of art.
- Discuss how the process of art criticism can be used to examine nonobjective artworks.

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy concerned with identifying the clues within artworks that can be used to understand, judge, and defend judgments about those works. There are many different aesthetic theories, but no single theory takes into account all the aesthetic qualities found in artworks. Three of these theories are imitationalism, formalism, and emotionalism.

Imitationalism

Some aestheticians and art critics feel that the most important thing about a work of art is the realistic presentation of subject matter, or the literal qualities. They feel that a successful work must look like, and remind viewers of, what can be seen in the real world. People with this view feel an artwork should imitate life, that it should look lifelike before it can be considered successful (**Figure 4.6**). This theory, stressing the importance of the literal qualities, is called *imitationalism*.

Formalism

Not all aestheticians and art critics place importance on the literal qualities. Many feel that the success of a work depends on the design qualities, or the way it is organized. They favor a theory of art known as *formalism*, which holds that the most important aspect of a work of art is the effective use of the principles of art to arrange the elements of art. They believe that an effective design depends on how well the artist has arranged the colors, values, lines, textures, shapes, forms and space relationships used in the work (**Figure 4.7**, page 92). For these critics, a successful work of art need not look lifelike, but it must use the elements and principles effectively to achieve an overall unity.

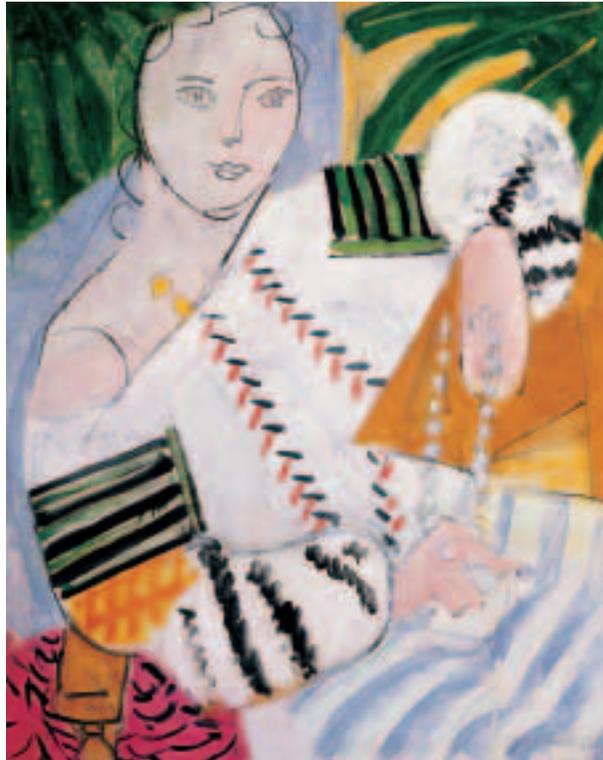
- **FIGURE 4.6** Imitationalism requires that a work of art look real, or lifelike, in order to be considered successful. Explain why this painting would be appreciated by someone using that theory of art.

Marie-Louise-Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. *Self-Portrait*. c. 1781. Oil on canvas. 65 × 54 cm (25½ × 21¼"). Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.



■ **FIGURE 4.7** Notice the artist's use of the elements and principles of art in this painting. **Why would this work be appreciated by a viewer using the theory of art known as formalism?**

Henri Matisse. *The Rumanian Blouse*. 1937. Oil on canvas. 73.3 × 60.6 cm (29 × 24"). Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio. Bequest of Mary E. Johnston.



Emotionalism

Other aestheticians and art critics contend that the success of an artwork depends on its ability to communicate an emotion or idea to the viewer. This theory, called *emotionalism*, places greatest importance on the *expressive qualities*, or the feeling, moods, and ideas communicated to the viewer by a work of art (**Figure 4.8**).

These three theories of art, summarized in **Figure 4.9**, can be useful when you look for different aesthetic qualities in works of art. Keep in mind, though, that each theory embraces certain aesthetic qualities and rejects others.

■ **FIGURE 4.8** This realistic painting also succeeds in expressing a certain feeling or mood. **What is that feeling or mood? What has the artist done to focus your attention on the woman's face and expression?**

Georges de la Tour. *Magdalen with Smoking Flame*. 1638–1640. Oil on canvas. 117 × 91.76 cm (46 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 36 $\frac{1}{8}$ "). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California. Gift of the Ahmanson Collection.



Using More than One Theory

During judgment, the last art criticism operation, Robert must make a decision about the merits of the painting *The Sleeping Gypsy* (Figure 4.2, page 86). Robert realizes that if he relies on a single theory of art, with its emphasis on either the literal, design, or expressive qualities of the work, he may be doing the work an injustice. He might take into account the aesthetic qualities favored by the theory he selected, but in doing so he would overlook other important qualities stressed by the other two theories.

Keep Robert’s concern in mind when you examine works of art. If you rely on a single aesthetic theory, you limit your search for information to those qualities favored by the theory you are using. This limitation places you at a disadvantage, especially when you examine works representing different styles. Imitationalism, for example, may be helpful when you examine works that are realistically painted. It would be useless, however, if you were examining paintings with no realistic subject matter. In such cases, it would be wise to turn to one or both of the other theories.

To illustrate this last point, examine the painting by the American artist Roy Lichtenstein in **Figure 4.10**. Clearly, there is no recognizable subject matter in this painting. Colors, values, lines, shapes, and textures are used to create a design consisting of several geometric units. The same design is then repeated in four identical square panels. Because there is no subject matter, imitationalism, which emphasizes the literal qualities, would not be useful here. Insisting on using that theory would result in rejecting Lichtenstein’s painting as a successful work of art because it fails to portray a realistically rendered subject. To gain an understanding of this painting, you would have to turn to another theory of art—formalism or emotionalism.

Formalism, with its emphasis on the elements and principles of art, is clearly the most appropriate theory to apply here. Why? The reason is that Lichtenstein’s painting lacks both realistic subject matter and the expression of a mood or feeling. Instead, it uses carefully selected art elements that are arranged in such a way that they achieve an overall sense of unity. Its sole purpose is to please the eye.

THEORIES OF ART			
Aesthetic Qualities	Imitationalism	Formalism	Emotionalism
	Literal Qualities: Realistic presentation of subject matter.	Design Qualities: Effective organization of the elements of art through the use of the principles of art.	Expressive Qualities: Vivid communication of moods, feelings, and ideas.

FIGURE 4.9 Theories of Art and Aesthetic Qualities



Practice your art criticism and aesthetic judgment skills in Art Quest activities at art.glencoe.com.



FIGURE 4.10 The artist claimed that the inspiration for dividing this work into four parts came from an elementary school drawing assignment in which he was asked to divide his paper into four sections and repeat the same drawing in each one. **Why is it appropriate to use formalism rather than imitationalism when examining this work?**

Roy Lichtenstein. *Modular Painting in Four Panels V*. 1969. Oil and magna on canvas. 137.16 × 137.16 cm (54 × 54”), each of 4. Collection of the Lowe Art Museum, Coral Gables, Florida. Gift of the Jay I. Kislak Mortgage Corporation. 92.0075.

On the other hand, consider the painting by Giorgio de Chirico in **Figure 4.11**. Although the subject is recognizable, it is hardly true to life. Notice the strange perspective of the unusual buildings, the wagon that looks too fragile to carry any substantial load, and the unnatural light that creates bright areas to contrast dramatically with areas of dark shadow. At the same time, the painting seems to ignore many of the rules of good design stressed by formalism. However, it would still be regarded as an outstanding work of art if another theory,

emotionalism, was used. Indeed, this painting succeeds in communicating a feeling of great tension. The overpowering sense of anxiety generated by the painting is intended to arouse our emotions.

It is important to remember to take all three theories into account during every critical inquiry in art. Keep in mind that a single theory of art can not only point out certain qualities in some works of art, but it can also point out all the qualities in all works of art.



■ **FIGURE 4.11** By using emotionalism as a guide, the viewer is able to sense the uneasy feeling communicated by this unsettling work and be better prepared to make a judgment about it. Certain sounds are sensed in this painting that add drama to the scene. **Can you identify those sounds and explain why they are important?**

Giorgio de Chirico. *The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*. 1914. Oil on canvas. Private Collection/Bridgeman Art Library. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome.

An Art Critic's Judgment

Robert has decided that Rousseau's *The Sleeping Gypsy* is a successful work of art. Moreover, he is confident that he can defend that decision by referring to the aesthetic qualities favored by each of the three theories of art. He became aware of each of these qualities while describing, analyzing, and interpreting the work.

While focusing on the literal qualities during description, Robert noted that the objects depicted in the painting could be easily identified, even though they were not completely convincing. He recognized some stiffness in the figure of the sleeping gypsy, and felt that the lion did indeed bear a resemblance to a child's stuffed toy. This helped reinforce the idea that the scene took place in a dream rather than in the real world. Robert doubted that an accurately painted lion and gypsy would have been successful in capturing the same magical, dreamlike quality.

Robert was pleased with the design qualities he identified during analysis. The work demonstrated both harmony and variety in the use of hue, texture, and value. He was also impressed by the way hue, value, line, and form were used to emphasize the most important parts of the composition, the sleeping gypsy and the lion. What

pleased him most was the way gradations of value created the illusion of three-dimensional forms existing in real space. This made the scene look incredibly real, even though it was not entirely lifelike. In Robert’s opinion, this was a painting in which the art elements and principles worked together effectively to produce a startling image that is also a unified composition.

The expressive qualities noted during his interpretation of the painting were especially appealing to Robert. At first, while attempting to interpret the work, he tried to determine just what was happening in this mysterious, silent desert landscape. Finally, he decided that the work illustrates a dream, although it is by no means an ordinary dream. It is a dream so vivid and captivating that its images and the feelings those images evoke remain fixed in the mind well after the dream has ended.

Learning from External Clues

His examination of the painting completed, Robert might now want to find out what other critics have said about it. Certainly he would want to know what art historians have written about the work. At this point, Robert directs his attention to external clues, facts and information about the work and the artist who created it. This information includes the name of the artist, when and where the painting was done, and the artistic style it represents. Of course, as an experienced critic with

an extensive background in art, Robert knew many of these things before he began his examination of the work. He recognized the work as an oil painting completed in France during the latter part of the nineteenth century. He also knew that it was painted by Henri Rousseau, a retired customs official who started to paint at the age of 40. Rousseau was a so-called primitive artist, one who is untrained or self-taught. Rousseau knew little about how to draw, and he was not familiar with color theory. But the pictures he created were so simple, innocent, and poetic that in time, Rousseau came to be regarded as a genius.

Although Robert might choose to consider these and other external clues after his examination of Rousseau’s painting, it is important to point out that he made a conscious effort to disregard these and other external clues during his critique of the work. He knew that if he took these clues into consideration while critiquing it, they might influence his perception and ultimately his judgment.

Robert’s main objective in critiquing any work of art is to gain a thorough understanding of it. You should set the same objective for yourself whenever you decide to examine an artwork closely. The four-step approach of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment summarized here can help you achieve this objective (**Figure 4.12**). Using this approach enables you to identify the aesthetic qualities in a work and prepares you to make and defend your own decisions about it. Just as important, it makes your encounters with art more personally rewarding.

ART CRITICISM OPERATIONS				
	Description	Analysis	Interpretation	Judgment
Internal Cues	Focus: Subject matter and/or elements of art noted in the work.	Focus: Organization —how principles of art have been used to arrange the elements of art.	Focus: Moods, feelings, and ideas communicated by the work.	Focus: Decision-making about the work’s artistic merit.

FIGURE 4.12
Art Criticism Operations

Using Aesthetics and the Art Criticism Operations

The art critic uses the art criticism steps to identify the aesthetic qualities in a work. These aesthetic qualities, in turn, are keys to judging the work's success. Now, consider using this process to your own advantage when examining and judging a work of art.

Acting as an Art Critic

Imagine you are standing in front of the painting illustrated in **Figure 4.13**. Because

you are now familiar with the literal, design, and expressive qualities, you can determine whether these qualities are in the work. The four art criticism operations—description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment—form a search strategy that will help you find those aesthetic qualities. The first three operations are used to identify the different aesthetic qualities stressed by imitationalism, formalism, and emotionalism. Make sure that you take into account the aesthetic qualities favored by each of these theories when you examine the painting. Using this method helps you make intelligent judgments about the work and enables you to defend those judgments with sound reasons.

Emotional Reactions to Art

Before you begin your examination of the painting in Figure 4.13, ask yourself whether you like it or dislike it. This expression of like or dislike is an emotional reaction to the artwork; all viewers find themselves doing this when they confront works of art. An emotional reaction to art is often deeply felt, and it deserves to be cherished.

Why, then, is it necessary to study the work further, using your knowledge of the art criticism operations and aesthetic qualities? The understanding you derive from a careful study of a work of art often can add to your enjoyment of that work. Sometimes a careful examination can reveal things about the work that may change your initial reaction to it. You may, for example, find that a work you first considered dull and unexciting is in fact lively and satisfying.

There is a difference, though, between expressions of like or dislike and judgment. Emotional statements do not require good reasons to support them. Judgments are a reasoned activity of the mind and, as such, can be challenged. For this reason, judgments *do* require support in the form of good reasons. It is possible to dislike a painting and still judge it a successful work of art, just as it is possible to like a painting you judge unsuccessful. An emotional reaction to a work differs from a reasoned judgment—but both are important.



■ **FIGURE 4.13** Point to things in this work that suggest innocence. What has the artist added to suggest the forces of evil? Why is it possible to say that this painting hints at the passing of time?

Francisco Goya. *Don Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuñiga*. 1784–1792. Oil on canvas. 127 × 101.6 cm (50 × 40"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. The Jules Bache Collection, 1949. 49.7.41.

Description

Begin your examination of the painting in Figure 4.13 by describing the literal qualities or subject matter observed in the painting. To do this, answer the following description questions:

- How is the boy in this painting dressed?
- Does the boy appear to be relaxed and natural, or stiff and posed? Where is he looking?
- Where are the cats located in the picture? What are they doing?
- What is the boy holding in his hands? To what is it attached?
- The bird holds a card in its beak. What is shown on that card (**Figure 4.14**)?
- What is seen on the floor to the right of the boy?

Your description of this work also should include an inventory of the elements of art in the work. To do this, ask yourself what colors and shapes have been used? What is the most intense or brightest of these hues? Is the space deep or shallow? Answer questions regarding the use of hue, shape, and space in this work.

Analysis

During analysis, your attention is directed toward identifying the design qualities in the painting. Analysis questions are intended to help you identify the principles of art used to organize the elements of art noted during description. By referring to the design chart

on page 88, you can formulate the kinds of questions you should ask and answer in order to understand how this work is structured. (Refer to Chapter 2, pages 46 and 47, to review the way questions are formulated using the design chart.) Ask and answer questions regarding the use of the principles of balance, emphasis, harmony, and gradation of value in this work. Are the shapes balanced symmetrically or asymmetrically? How do the background colors contribute to harmony?

Do your questions take into account all the principles employed in this painting? You may well feel that there are other principles at play in this work. If so, make note of these before moving on to the next art criticism operation.

Interpretation

Your efforts in interpretation focus on identifying the expressive qualities in the work. Interpretation questions are intended to reveal the feelings, moods, and ideas communicated to the viewer by the work of art.

Answer the following interpretation questions:

- Why do you think the boy in this picture looks so stiff and unnatural?
- You have identified the boy, the cats, and the birds in this painting. What clues suggest that someone else was present a short time ago?
- The child appears to be looking at something or someone outside the picture.



■ **FIGURE 4.14**

Francisco Goya. *Don Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuñiga* (detail).

Do the clues in the painting suggest what or who this might be?

- How do the three cats provide an indication of what is likely to happen in just a few moments?
- How has the artist suggested the passage of time in this work? Can you explain what happened earlier and what is likely to happen in a minute or two?

Judgment

Judgment involves carefully thought out decision making. Remember that judgment does not mean an expression of like or dislike. Instead, you are asked to make a personal decision about a work's success or lack of success. In addition, you must be prepared to offer good reasons to support your judgment.

Judgment questions should focus attention on the aesthetic qualities identified during description, analysis, and interpretation. These aesthetic qualities form the basis for an intelligent judgment and provide you with the evidence you need to defend that judgment. Answer the following judgment questions: Is this a successful work of art? Is it successful because of its literal, design, or expressive qualities? Perhaps, after posing and answering all the art criticism questions, you have

discovered that a painting can be judged in terms of *all three aesthetic theories*. That is, it can be regarded as a success because of the literal qualities favored by imitationalism, the design qualities emphasized by formalism, and the expressive qualities stressed by emotionalism. It is important to note that some works can be judged successful even if they feature the aesthetic qualities championed by only two or even one of these theories.

Examining Nonobjective Artworks

Nonobjective art is *any artwork that contains no apparent reference to reality*. Artists who create these works place primary importance on the manner in which the elements and principles of art are used. When you examine nonobjective artworks, follow the same procedure you would use with a realistic work. The only difference occurs during description. Because there is no recognizable subject matter to identify, begin this operation with an inventory of the art elements.

Look at the nonobjective artwork in **Figure 4.15**. Is this painting really so different from one that is a literal representation of some part of the world, such as the work

■ **FIGURE 4.15.** The stormy surface of this sprayed and spattered painting provides a clue to the manner in which it was created. **Do you think the painting was done slowly and deliberately, or swiftly and impulsively?**

Lee Krasner. *Cobalt Night*. 1962. Oil on canvas. 2.375 × 4.099 cm (93½ × 161⅜"). National Gallery of Art, Washington. Gift of Lila Achenson Wallace. © 2004 Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.





■ **FIGURE 4.16** Notice that the details of the buildings exposed to the full sun seem indistinct. **How would you feel if you found yourself in the foreground of this picture? Would you feel differently if you were somewhere in the background area? Why?**

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. *View of Genoa*. 1834. Oil on paper mounted on canvas. 29.5 × 41.7 cm (11½ × 16½"). Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection, 1937.1017.

shown in **Figure 4.16**? Both can be described as a careful arrangement of colors and shapes, lines and textures used to create a visually pleasing effect. In one, this arrangement of art elements is used to create a picture that reflects the real world. In the other, the challenge of using the art elements to create a visually stimulating composition is more important than trying to portray a realistic-looking subject.

Assume for a moment that you have the opportunity to question the artist who created the nonobjective painting in **Figure 4.15**. If you were to ask why she painted her nonobjective work, she might answer with a question of her own. Pointing to a flower—perhaps a tulip—she might ask why you find it appealing. Perhaps you would mention the flower’s ruby-red color, the shape of the individual petals, and the way these shapes join to create an attractive symmetrical form. You might also mention the gradual change from light to dark values evident on each petal, the overall soft texture of the flower, and the graceful curve of the stem. Finally, you might say that you admire it simply because it is a tulip, a flower that you find pleasing to look at. It bears no

resemblance to a pair of stylish shoes or a stately oak tree, and you would never think of comparing it to them. You value it as a flower—for its color, its shape and form, its light and dark values, and its texture.

Then the artist might explain that her nonobjective painting also makes use of colors, shapes, forms, values, and textures. She might ask you to appreciate it for the same reasons that you appreciate the tulip. She would probably discourage you from comparing her work to something else. It is, after all, a painting, nothing more or less, and it should be viewed and valued as such.

Careful examination can help you understand and appreciate nonobjective paintings—and distinguish between the works of different artists employing this style.

The three paintings shown in **Figures 4.17**, **4.18**, and **4.19** on page 100 have one important thing in common: They all reject realistic subject matter. To understand them, you must do the same. When you do, you may discover that nonobjective paintings and sculptures can provide as much visual excitement and delight as any realistically rendered art form.

Nonobjective Art

These three works share a “family resemblance”: All three are nonobjective. This is the same kind of resemblance you might identify in three landscape paintings done by different artists.

The three nonobjective painters used a variety of media and techniques. They worked with different elements and principles of art to create three works that would be visually appealing. In the process, they created paintings that differ from each other as much as three landscape paintings might differ.

1 In this work, the artist used tempera paint on paper (Figure 4.17). He created an intricate pattern of white lines and shapes that suggest the written form of a mysterious language.

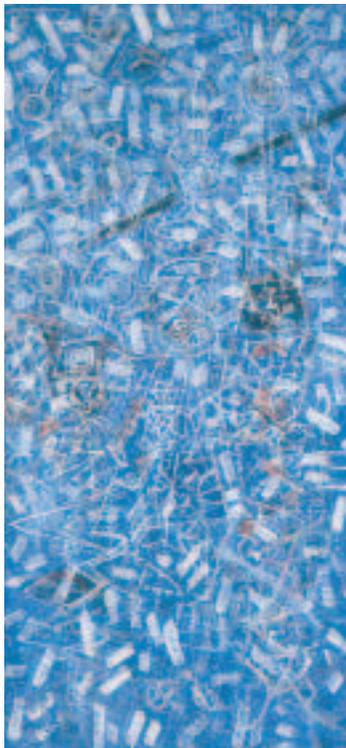


FIGURE 4.17 Mark Tobey. *Echoes of Broadway*. 1964. Tempera on paper. 132.7 × 64.7 cm (52¼ × 25½”). Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas. Gift of the artist.

2 Here the artist used bright, contrasting colors of oil paint to divide the canvas into irregular sections that bear a resemblance to farmlands viewed from a speeding automobile. Accents of orange and blue combined with lively brushstrokes result in a nonobjective composition that suggests the light and color of California.

FIGURE 4.18 Richard Diebenkorn. *Berkeley No. 52*. 1955. Oil on canvas. 1.489 × 1.368 cm (58⅝ × 53⅞”). National Gallery of Art, Washington. Gift of the Collectors Committee.



3 Pollock’s style of painting was revolutionary. After placing his huge canvases on the floor, he stood above them and even walked onto them as he dripped, poured, and splashed paints from sticks and brushes—and sometimes from the paint container itself. The result is a complex maze of lines and colors with no apparent beginning or end. This painting is so large that it seems to wrap itself around viewers, commanding their complete attention.



FIGURE 4.19 Jackson Pollock. *Convergence*. 1952. Oil on canvas. 237.49 × 393.7 cm (93½ × 155”). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1956. © 2004 Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Art Criticism Operations and Architecture

You can use the same art criticism operations in a critical examination of architecture. During description, concentrate on identifying the principal features of a building—doors, windows, towers, and building materials. Then list the elements of art used—the colors, lines, textures, shapes, and forms you observe. In analyzing a building, note how

the principles of art have been used to organize the elements. Consider the meaning or purpose of the building during interpretation. At this point, you may be surprised to discover that some buildings, like paintings and sculptures, can communicate unmistakable moods and feelings (**Figure 4.20**).

Your judgment about any kind of architecture—like your judgment of other forms of visual art—should be based on how well the various aesthetic qualities have been used.

FIGURE 4.20
This royal pleasure palace was designed for a prince who later became King George IV of England. **Using description and analysis, interpret the feeling or mood you get from this building.**

John Nash. The Royal Pavilion, Brighton, England. c. 1816–22. Topham Picture Source, Edenbridge, Kent, UK.



LESSON TWO REVIEW

- Identify** What name is given to aestheticians who feel the most important thing about a work of art are its design qualities?
- Explain** Why is it impossible to consider the literal qualities when examining nonobjective works?
- Explain** Why is it important to take all three art theories into account when critiquing art?
- Recall** What is the difference between a like/dislike statement and a judgment?

Making Connections

Appreciating Art Most art students begin their study of the visual arts by first being able to appreciate works of art that are very realistic. As students continue to learn about art, they begin to develop an understanding of, and an appreciation for, works of art that are abstract or nonobjective.

Activity Find a realistic photo in a magazine. Select and trace two or three of the shapes in the photo. On a sheet of white drawing paper, trace the shapes and repeat them until you have a design that covers the entire page. Use markers or colored pencils for color. The final result will be very different from the realistic photo. Share and compare your work with that of others in the class.

The Mint Is a Revelation

An art museum curator makes aesthetic judgments.

Putting together an art exhibit isn't as simple as hanging some pictures on a wall. Just ask Carla M. Hanzal, curator of contemporary art at the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina. Hanzal was in charge of an exhibit titled *Revelations: A Fresh Look at Contemporary Collections*. Creating the exhibit required many difficult decisions. Hanzal wanted the exhibit to tell the story of the development of contemporary art, from the 1960s to the present. To select artists and their works, Hanzal said she had to answer the following questions: Was the work interesting? Was the artist well known? How well was the artwork executed? (Even famous artists sometimes produce less-than-great works.)

In making choices for *Revelations*, Hanzal wanted to represent regional, national, and international artists. In the Charlotte area, there is a strong craft tradition. Hanzal intended to show that Charlotte also produced other kinds of artists. No matter where the artwork comes from, says Hanzal, "you have to trust your eye and instinct" when choosing it.

Once Hanzal selected the artworks, she had to decide how to arrange them. Instead of placing the works in chronological order, Hanzal grouped them by theme, such as the environment, nature, and quests for identity. This, she says, showed that "artists from different periods deal with the same issues." Many of the pieces came from local collectors. Hanzal was pleased local residents could see which artworks are important to their neighbors. On many levels, art exhibits like this one are... a revelation.



Visitors to the *Revelations* show viewed two recent paintings of poppies by American artist Donald Sultan.

SEAN BUSHER/MINT MUSEUM OF ART

TIME to Connect

Imagine you are a curator and have been asked to present a show on a theme of your choice.

- What would the theme be? What artists—and artworks—would you choose? How would you arrange the artworks—in time order, by artist, or by medium—or some other way?
- Give the show a name, and write an introduction to your "exhibit catalogue." In it, explain the idea behind the show and how the artworks fit in the framework of your theme. Use examples of the artworks you would include.



A worker installs lights for *Zen Garden* by Chen Zhen, a Chinese artist. Curator Carla Hanzal was determined to include international artworks in *Revelations*.

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Reviewing the Facts

Lesson One

1. What are the aesthetic qualities?
2. When examining an artwork, for what kinds of questions does a critic seek answers?
3. How did the lack of footprints in the sand around the gypsy influence Robert's interpretation of *The Sleeping Gypsy*?
4. Why is judgment such an important step in the art criticism process?

Lesson Two

5. Why is no single theory of art adequate when examining and judging different works of art?
6. Where do critics turn to find out more about a work after they have examined it using the art criticism operations?
7. Why does the critic typically avoid referring to external clues while critiquing a work?
8. On what do nonobjective artists place emphasis when creating their works?

Thinking Critically

1. **ANALYZE.** Two aestheticians are looking at one of the paintings illustrated in this chapter. One claims that the work is a success because it records accurately the features and expression of the subject. The other says it is a success because the contrast of light and dark values helps direct attention to the most important parts of the work. Which work are they examining? What aesthetic theory is held by each aesthetician?
2. **EXTEND.** Imagine one day you have discovered a painting that seems to be just blobs of paint, but it is pleasing to you. Then you discover that you have been holding the painting sideways and that it is a picture of a fruit basket. Explain which aesthetic qualities you found successful in this work.

YOUR DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

Review the critiques you have completed while studying this chapter. Organize your notes and keep an electronic file in your digital portfolio. Refer to your notes from time to time to review your progress.

Standardized Test Practice

Reading & Writing

Read the three mini-critiques of Figure 4.8, page 92 and answer the question.

- A.** Rather than tell the biblical story of Mary Magdalene, this work focuses on her state of mind. The candle sets a dramatic mood.
- B.** Each surface detail is painted with meticulous attention. The polished skull, the leather books, the folds of the blouse—each is distinct and crafted with painstaking precision.
- C.** A simple composition of vertical and horizontal shapes helps the painting achieve a balance of form and light.

Which best matches each critique with its author's point of view?

- A** A: Imitationalist, B: Emotionalist, C: Formalist
- B** A: Formalist, B: Emotionalist, C: Imitationalist
- C** A: Emotionalist, B: Imitationalist, C: Formalist
- D** A: Imitationalist, B: Formalist, C: Emotionalist