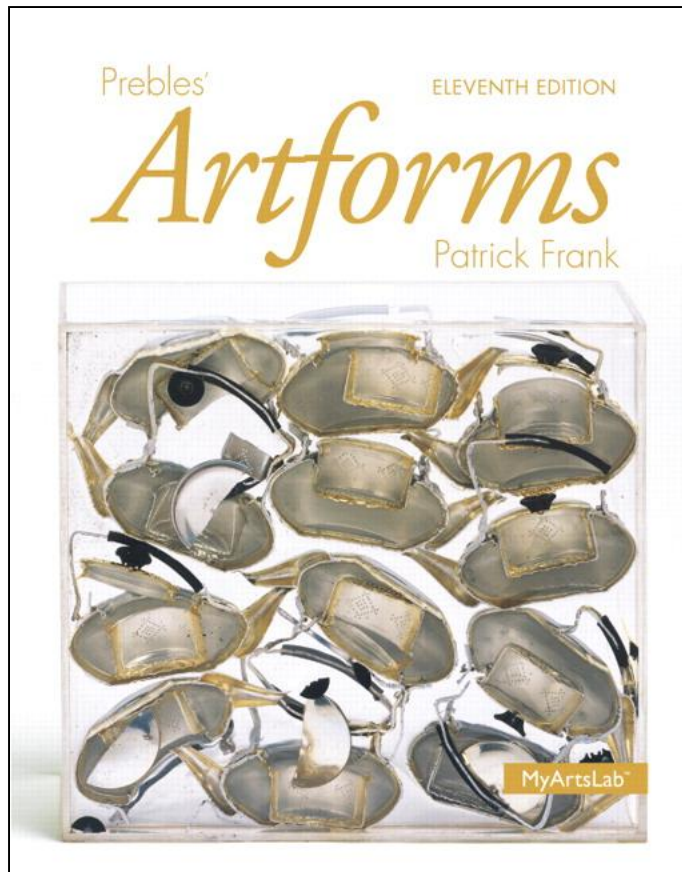


Prebles' Artforms

An Introduction to the Visual Arts

ELEVENTH EDITION



CHAPTER 5

Evaluating Art

Learning Objectives

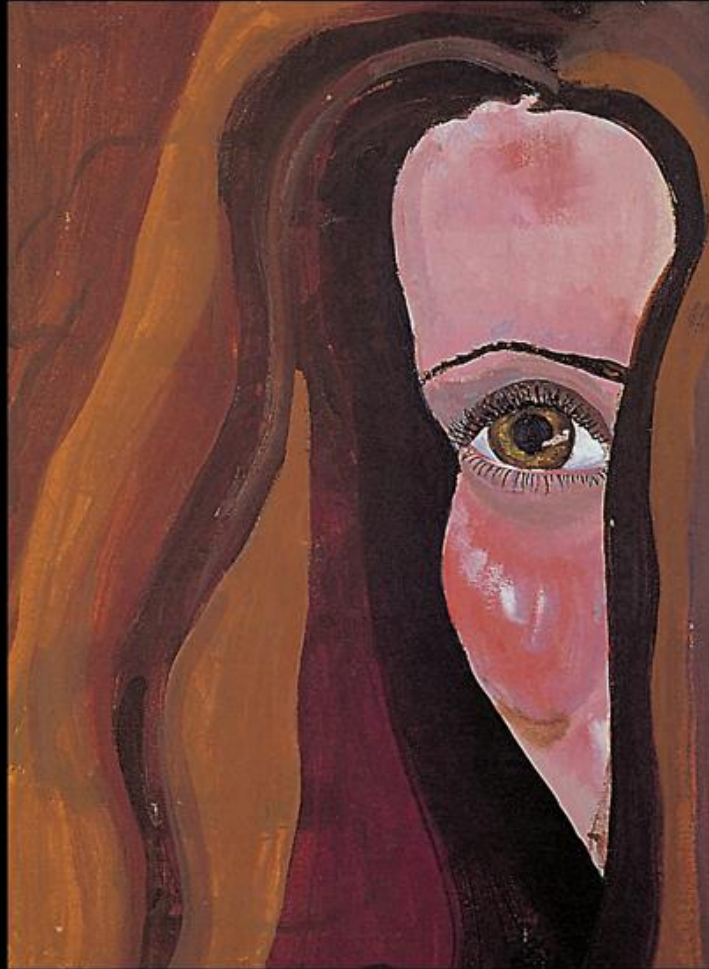
1. Discuss the subjective biases involved in evaluating a work of art.
2. Compare formal, contextual, and expressive approaches used in art criticism.
3. Examine the relationship of art's economic, cultural, and personal value to issues of quality and social context.
4. Combine factual, analytical, and evaluative information to write an essay about an artwork.
5. Explain censorship as a type of evaluation, based on political, moral, or religious values.

Evaluation

- Selecting one thing over another
 - Includes the creative process
- Appreciating the specialness of something
- Quality
 - Relative between people and cultures
 - Simply “skillful” vs. communication of a “life breath” in Chinese culture
 - Changing reputations in Europe

Evaluation

- Value judgments necessarily involve subjectivity.
 - *Shy Glance*, Jingagian
 - Recovered from a trash bin
 - Lacking skill but embarrassingly sweet
 - *Self-Portrait*, Vigée-LeBrun
 - Great assuredness of anatomy
 - May seem conventional to the contemporary eye



Dawn Marie Jingagian. *Shy Glance*. 1976.
Acrylic on canvas. 24" × 18".
The Museum of Bad Art, Dedham, MA. [Fig. 5-1]



Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun. *Self-Portrait in a Straw Hat*. 1782.
Oil on canvas. 38-1/2" × 27-3/4".
The National Gallery, London ng1653. © 2013. Copyright The National Gallery,
London/Scala, Florence. [Fig. 5-2]

Evaluation

- What we find in a work depends on what we are looking for.
 - Personal value judgments
 - Involves viewer's personality
- Begin with an open mind to go beyond snap judgments
- Practice seeing rather than looking

Art Criticism

- Making discriminating judgments, both favorable and unfavorable
- Three basic theories
 - **Formal**
 - Looking at how a work is made
 - Parts of a composition coming together
 - Organization most important factor
 - Values innovation in style above all
 - Comparison to a work's contemporaries

Art Criticism

- Three basic theories
 - **Formal**
 - Titian's *Pietà*
 - Innovative brushwork
 - Understood predecessors' methods and made his brushwork more painterly
 - Bold new compositional devices
 - Delaunay-Terk, *Simultaneous Contrasts*
 - Influenced by Cubism but without overlapping planes



Titian. *Pietà*. 1576.
Oil on canvas. 149" × 136".
Accademia, Venice. © Cameraphoto Arte, Venice. [Fig. 5-3]



Closer Look: Titian, *Pietà*



Video: Students on Site:
Titian, *Pietà*



Sonia Delaunay-Terk. *Simultaneous Contrasts*. 1913.

Oil on canvas. 18-1/2" × 21-1/2".

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. 518 (1976.81). Photo Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza/Scala, Florence © Pracusa. 2013020. [Fig. 5-4]

Art Criticism

- Three basic theories
 - **Formal**
 - Delaunay-Terk, *Simultaneous Contrasts*
 - Novel treatment of landscape as subject
 - Basquiat, *Horn Players*
 - Techniques learned from graffiti
 - Three panels avoid making the work seem like separate paintings
 - May look improvised, but result of discipline



Jean-Michel Basquiat. *Horn Players*. 1983.

Acrylic and oil paintstick on three canvas panels. Overall 8' x 6' 5".

The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica. Photograph: Douglas M. Parker Studio, Los Angeles. © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York 2013.

[Fig. 5-5]

Art Criticism

- Three basic theories
 - **Contextual**
 - First examines environmental influences on a work of art
 - Economic system
 - Cultural values
 - Politics
 - “What else was going on at the time?”

Art Criticism

- Three basic theories
 - **Contextual**
 - *Pietà*
 - Altarpiece for public viewing in a chapel
 - During a time of epidemic of plague
 - Mortality and grief
 - *Simultaneous Contrasts*
 - Seems to be a sunlit landscape
 - Scientist Michel-Eugène Chevreul's research, "Law of Simultaneous Contrasts"

Art Criticism

- Three basic theories
 - **Contextual**
 - *Horn Players*
 - Bebop movement of jazz in 1940s
 - Cut-off ear representing Charlie Parker being “cut off” in his prime, mirroring van Gogh
 - “Ornithology,” a track recorded by Parker and Dizzy Gillespie

Art Criticism

- Three basic theories
 - **Expressive**
 - “Who made it, and who is s/he?”
 - Look for personal meanings, deep psychological insight, or human concern
 - Psychoanalysis and gender studies
 - *Pietà*
 - Painted in Titian’s last year of life
 - Somber reflection of mortality

Art Criticism

- Three basic theories
 - **Expressive**
 - *Simultaneous Contrasts*
 - Compared to artist's ebullient personality
 - Color palette recalls bright folk costumes of native Ukraine
 - *Horn Players*
 - Like a three-verse song
 - Artist's history as an African American
 - Intent and intense personality

What Makes Art Great?

- Art market and art auctions can only show what a certain group of collectors wants to pay for a given work at a given time.
 - Record-holding \$119.9 million for Edvard Munch's *The Scream*
- Dollar values only loosely correlate with historical importance or innovation of a work.

What Makes Art Great?

- At least one element of art criticism must be strongly present for it to be regarded as a “masterpiece.”
 - Museum
- Self-examination can uncover why a viewer values a work as “great.”
 - Why we “relate” to art in the context of the three art criticism theories

Evaluating Art with Words

- Methods to write about art
 1. Get the facts about the work.
 - Name of creator, title, date, subject, medium, size, and location of work
 - If reproduction, clarify original medium and size
 2. Analyze.
 - Parts of work and how they fit together
 - Formal elements, context, artist's input

Evaluating Art with Words

- Methods to write about art
 3. Evaluate.
 - Assess the quality or importance of the work in relation to art criticism technique
 - Innovative
 - “Moves your feelings”
 - Reflects time period or personality
 - Beautiful or challenging to the eye
 - This step should lead to a debatable thesis.

Censorship: The Ultimate Evaluation

- The alteration or removal of works of art from public view
- Carried out for religious, moral, or political reasons
 - Artist's freedom takes back seat to values of civil authorities
- Practiced over history
 - Byzantine Empire and the Iconoclastic Controversy destroying religious images

Censorship: The Ultimate Evaluation

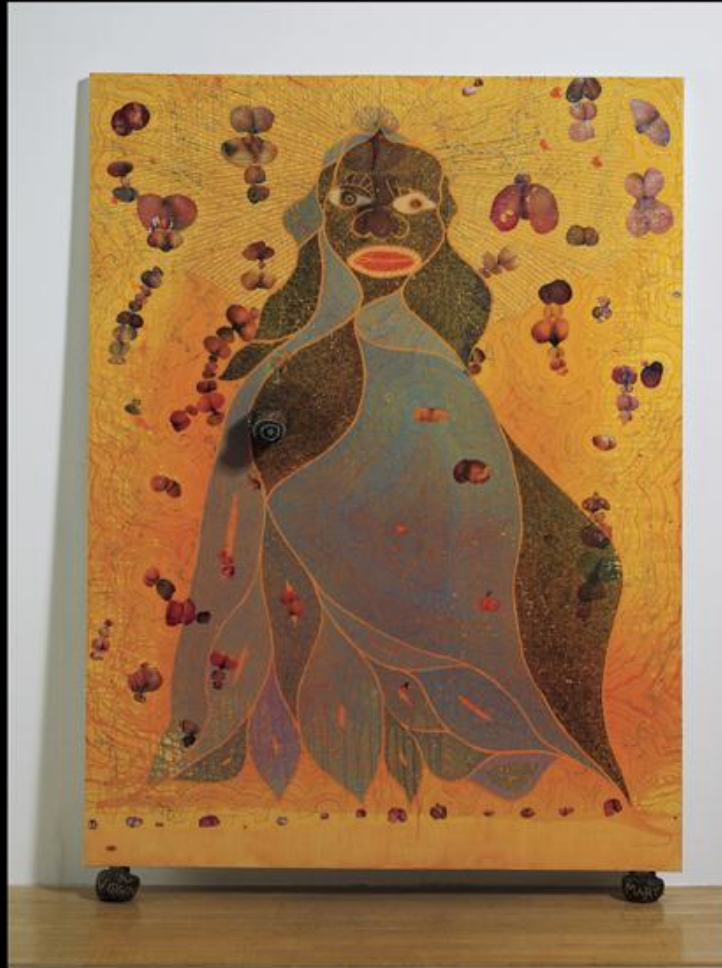
- Practiced over history
 - *The Last Judgment*, Michelangelo
 - Later popes found figures to be revealing and order loincloths to be painted over genitals.
 - Nazi Germany
 - Confiscation of over 16,000 modern art pieces
 - Artists banned from working

Censorship: The Ultimate Evaluation

- In the United States
 - *Miller v. California* (1973)
 - Work may only be censored if it is demonstrably obscene to the “average person.”
 - Freedom of individual expression valued
 - If a work benefits from public funds, may be controversial

Censorship: The Ultimate Evaluation

- In the United States
 - NYC Mayor Giuliani, 1999, tried to close the Brooklyn Museum because of Chris Ofili's *Holy Virgin Mary*.
 - Elephant dung in the piece
 - Offensive to Roman Catholicism
 - An art medium in certain African cultures
 - Nudity controversy
 - 2010, YouTube and Amy Greenfield



Chris Ofili. *Holy Virgin Mary*. 1996.

Acrylic, oil, resin, paper collage, glitter, map pins, and elephant dung on linen. 8' × 6'.

MONA, Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

Courtesy Victoria Miro Gallery, London © Chris Ofili. [Fig. 5-6]

Censorship: The Ultimate Evaluation

- In the United States
 - Nudity controversy
 - 2011, Facebook and drawings of models from the New York Academy of Art
 - Political censorship in Maine, 2011
 - Mural from the Labor Department
 - Showed bias toward organized labor
 - Implied a bias against business
 - Defense that it is not one-sided but based in historical fact



Judy Taylor. *History of Labor in Maine*. 2007.
Oil on particle board, eleven joined panels. 8' × 36'.
Courtesy of Judy Taylor Studio. [Fig. 5-7]