Evaluating Art With Words

(from Prebles’ *Artforms*)

Using these three guidelines, you can interpret and analyze art. Keep this for your notes as well as for your final paper.

1. **Get the facts.** Find out the name of the artist/creator of the work, the title of the piece, the date it was made, the medium, the dimensions (size) of the work and location of the work. Describe the work using as many facts as you can find. If you are looking at a reproduction of the work, it is important to be clear about the medium and size of the original work.
2. **Analyze**. Look at all the elements of the work and examine how they fit together. How does the choice of medium affect the work? What formal elements did the artist use? Assess the work in its context: Does it fit into a movement or time period (e.g. Impressionist? Abstract Expressionist? Contemporary?) Does it lead the way for a new movement or follow behind another movement? (Van Gogh was part of the Impressionist movement, but lead the way for the Fauvists movement) Consider its placement, both in the artist’s career but also in the art historical time line. If the work was created a long time ago, how was it received at the time it was created? How is it received today?
3. **Evaluate**. Use the three types of art criticism discussed in class to assess the quality or historical importance of the piece. Is it innovative? Does it move you, emotionally? Does it show a particular moment in the artist’s life? Does it speak to a greater social issue or cause? What kind of art is it? Think is it for delight, commentary, persuasion? Does it challenge the viewer?

In terms of how you write, these steps are not equal. Steps 1 and 2 are the most objective steps. Step 3 leads you to a debatable thesis or position on the work. Step 1 is the easiest as you can find that information with a quick search (or if you are in a museum, look at the wall label). Step 2 requires you to dig a little deeper. Do more research. Step 3 is the hardest, but most important step. It requires practice and careful seeing. [[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Frank, Patrick. Prebles’ *Artforms*, New York, Pearsons, 2014, Print [↑](#footnote-ref-1)