

# CRITIQUE

## CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

**Critique** is an integral component of studio education for art students and can take several forms. You could have direct dialogue with a professor in front of a work in progress, or your entire class could review a completed work (**A** and **B**). Critique can also be a self-critique and take the form of a journal entry. The goal of a critique is increased understanding through examination of the project's successes and shortcomings. A variety of creative people, from artists to composers to authors, generally affirm that criticism is best left for *after* the design or composition is completed. A free and flexible approach to any studio work can be stifled by too much criticism too soon.

The components of a constructive critique can vary, but a critique is most valid when linked to the criteria for the artwork, design, or studio assignment. If a drawing's objective is to present an unusual or unexpected view of an object, then it is appropriate to critique the perspective, size, emphasis, and contrast of the drawing—those elements that contribute to communicating the point of view. Such a critique could also include cultural or historic precedents for how such an object might be depicted. A drawing of an apple that has been sliced in half and is seen from above would offer an unusual point of view. An apple presented alongside a serpent would present a second point of view charged with religious meaning for Jews and Christians. Both approaches

would be more than a simple representation and would offer contrasting points of view. Nevertheless, both drawings may be subject to a critique of their composition.

### A Model for Critique

A constructive model for critique would include the following:

**Description:** A verbal account of *what* is there.

**Analysis:** A discussion of *how* things are presented with an emphasis on relationships (for example, "bigger than," "brighter than," "to the left of").

**Interpretation:** A sense of the meaning, implication, or effect of the piece.

A simple description of a drawing that includes a snake and an apple might lead us to conclude that the drawing is an **illustration** for a biology text. Further description, analysis, and interpretation could lead us to understand other meanings and the emphasis of the drawing. And, in the case of a critique, thoughtful description, analysis, and interpretation might help the artist (or the viewer) see other, more dynamic possibilities for the drawing.

The many sections devoted to principles and elements of art and design in this text are each a potential component for critique. In fact the authors' observations about an image could be complemented by further critical analysis. For example, the text may point out how color brings emphasis to a composition, and further discussion could reveal the impact of other aspects such as size, placement, and cultural context.

### ▶ A

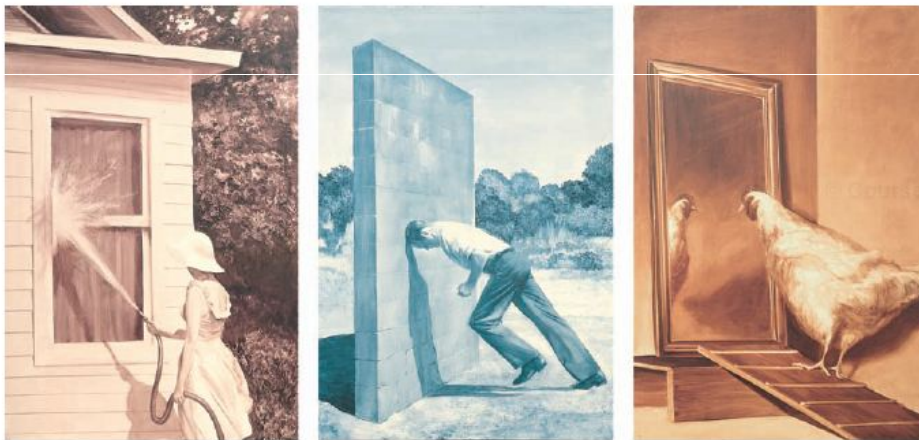
A professor critiques a work in progress.





### ◀ B

Students review and critique each other's work.



### ▲ C

Mark Tansey. *A Short History of Modernism*. 1982. Oil on canvas, three panels, 4' 10" × 10' overall. Collection of Steve and Maura Shapiro. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery, New York, with permission from the estate of Mark Tansey.

The critique process is an introduction to the critical context in which artists and designers work. Mature artworks are subject to critical review, and professional designers submit to the review of clients and members of their design teams. Future theory and criticism are pushed along by new designs and artworks.

On a lighter note, the critique process can include the range of responses suggested by Mark Tansey's painting shown in **C**:

You may feel your work has been subjected to an aggressive cleansing process.  
You may feel you are butting your head against a wall.  
And don't forget that what someone takes from an image or design is a product of what she or he brings to it!