

Circle of Creativity

You decide to create (*risk*)

Sketching stage

Finished Work

Show work (*risk*)

Gain Self-Confidence

Get feedback from group

Feel Positive about feedback

Feel negative about feedback

Lose self confidence

Less self-confidence equals less willingness to risk! ...and you fall out to the circle of creativity.

Observations

1. The degree of creative risk taken by the photographer is in almost direct proportion to the photographer's self-confidence.
2. The quality of the feedback—peer, class, & teacher—is the most significant influence on the photographer's feeling of self-confidence.
3. The effectiveness of the group in critique is closely related to both the group's and individual's self-confidence. This is directly affected by critique feedback.

Photographic Portfolio

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2. Formal analysis

3. Interpretation and only then

4. Judgment/evaluation

Description

In beginning your description, look at the print and catalogue the visual information. Describe what you see in detail. Use descriptive words such as busy, cluttered, complex, simple, sparse and clean, etc. Always assume that your reader's only access to the image is through your description. What is there? What is happening?

Formal Analysis

Now, you will examine how the picture components actually fit and work together. Words such as balanced/unbalanced, flowing/static, lines/volumes are appropriate. Use the formal analysis to support your observations in the descriptions, i.e. "The repeating diagonal lines cause the photograph to seem busy, yet the sparseness of subject matter in the foreground creates a static feeling by its emptiness."

Interpretation

Next, you will explore subjectively or objectively the "meaning" of the image. These are "feelings," not judgments and could include such terms as scary, warm, cool, happy, erotic, reflective, etc. For example: "The formal contradiction created by this 'busy emptiness' makes me feel uneasy when viewing this image." This is also your opportunity to connect formal elements to their possible content by way of your interpretation. Discuss how the photographer uses image structure and other photographic devices to affect the meaning of the image.

Judgment/Evaluation

Finally, it is time for making a judgment or evaluation. An evaluation can be based on the historic validity of the image, the craft, or the originality. In any case, your judgment is substantiated by your description, formal analysis and interpretation. For example: The juxtaposition of business and emptiness, although effective formally, seems a forced attempt to create tension in the image." Here it is permissible to say "I like it" or "I don't like it" however, words such as cliché, decorative, sentimental, powerful, weak, emotive, intellectual, are more valuable. Here also is a chance to evaluate the image technically (sharp, tonally correct, cropped well, etc.)

Ultimately, the photographer is forced to make a verbal and intellectual statement about an image that is visual and often intuitive. This is rarely fully satisfactory. The final test for an image lies somewhere between the intuitive and the intellectual. The essence of a good photograph is simply the power to create a new vision of the world around us.

Feedback

Feedback is communication to a person (or group) which gives that person information about how they affect others either directly (as a result of some sort of statement or action) or indirectly (as in photographs). As in any guidance system, feedback helps individuals keep their behavior “on target” and thus better achieve his/her goals.

Some criteria for useful feedback:

1. It is descriptive rather than evaluative. By describing one’s own reaction, it leaves the individual free to use it as he sees fit. By avoiding evaluative language, it reduces the need for the individual to react defensively.
2. It is specific rather than general. To be told that one is “dominating” will probably not be as useful as to be told that “just now when we were deciding the issue, you did not listen to what others said and I felt forced to accept your arguments or face attack from you.”
3. It takes into account the needs of both the receiver and the giver of feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only the needs of the giver and fails to consider the needs of the person on the receiving end.
4. It is directed toward behavior which the receiver can do something about. Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of some short-coming over which he has not control.
5. It is solicited, rather than imposed. Feedback is most useful when the receiver himself has formulated the kind of question which those observing can help him answer.
6. It is well timed. In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior (depending, of course, on the person’s readiness to hear it, support available from others, etc.)
7. It is checked to insure clear communication. One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback he has received to see if it corresponds to what the sender had in mind.
8. When feedback is given in a training group, both giver and receiver have opportunity to check with others in the group the accuracy of the feedback. Is this one person’s impression or an impression shared by others?

Feedback, then, is a way of giving help. It is a corrective mechanism for the individual who wants to learn how well his or her behavior matches intentions, and it is a means for establishing one’s identity.

Photographic Evaluation

Some terms to know and use when attempting to come to an understanding of a photograph.

1. Presentation:

Mounted or framed; color, size, type of mount. Size of print; is it in a book, sequence, or as an individual print.

2. Medium

Two-dimensional: silver, color(type C or R), gum, silk-screen, gravure, etc.

Three-dimensional: film overlay, photosculpture, hologram, etc.

Four-dimensional: time-based event as with most video image statements.

3. Texture & Surface

Smooth, grainy, rough, coarse, polished, glossy, matte, etc.

4. Composition:

(First, is the picture dominated by mass or by lines?) *Kinetic*: based on diagonals and curves. *Static*: based on balanced verticals and horizontals. *Gestalt structure*: objects centered and in tension or centered and passives. Is there a dialogue between shapes, or dominance of one over another? Apparent pressures or motion toward the edge or bursting out of the surface toward you or receding on axis away.

5. Perspective

Flat, all on a plane, without depth, tunnel-perspective. Could be mathematical, Renaissance or “Normal” perspective or non-Renaissance, spherical, distorted, etc.

6. Tonality

Soft vs. Harsh, effects of tone on emotions in interpretation.

7. Rhythm

Rhythm as affected by alternating shapes, lines, motions in a print and as affected by composition and tonality.

8. Gesture

Meaning the gesture of the subjects seen as body language versus composition and tonality.

9. Semiotics

Are the shapes used as signs, and/or symbols? Are the symbols and signs public (verifiable) or private? Obscure or obvious? Romantic, disciplined, surreal?

10. Abstraction:(Root meaning: to draw forth)

Is the subject seen as itself? (for its own beingness)? or is it seen as standing for something else (metaphor)? Or is the camera subject unrecognizable, and is being used for associational possibilities?

11. Point of view:

Psychological is artist human, god-like, concerned, unconcerned, etc. Next, check literal point of view: up, down, inside. Relate the “person” of the camera to the “person” of literature, e.g. 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person storytelling. Is subject reacting to camera, to artist, unaware?

12. Provenance

When and where was the work made? How does this affect its relationship to other works of art and other artists?

13. Biography

Placement of work in artist’s life; personal and cultural history; interactions.

14. Summation:

Look react, think and catalog. Respond and analyze specifically rather than with generalizations. Once a foundation for understanding has been laid, evaluative conclusions (i.e. I like it) take on greater significance.