Critical Analysis of Ceramic Art

How to Critique a Ceramic Artwork
Chris Gustin

Teapot, 1999
Porcelain
DESCRIPTION

Remember, the most important step in understanding a work of art is to REALLY look at it. Look at the following piece. After about 5 seconds you will think you have seen it just fine. Write a half-page of bullet points about what you see.

Notice the **Elements of Art/Design:**

**Lines** – What are they like? Are they thick and thin? Vertical or horizontal? Do they suggest movement or stillness?

**Shapes and Forms** – Is it geometric, organic or both? How do the forms relate to one another?

**Value and Colors** – How would you describe the glaze color? Use terms such as hue, value (lightness or darkness), intensity (saturation), transparent or opaque, complementary or analogous.

**Space** – Are the spaces between the walls of the work open or closed? Can you see positive and negative space?

**Textures** – How would you describe the surface (rough, smooth, pebbly, grooved? Is it relief? Does it create shadows? Does the texture vary in different areas?
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ANALYSIS

Now look at it formally, through the eyes of an artist who knows about the art principles (formal elements). Write for 5 minutes.

Principles of Art/Design:

Balance – Look at what you said about the elements. How are they organized to achieve balance? Would you describe the piece as symmetrical or asymmetrical?

Unity – How do the individual elements contribute to the overall composition of the piece? Are the elements of line, shape, form, color or texture repeated in such a way to make the artwork appear whole?

Proportion and Size – Consider words like length, height, width, volume, weight, and thickness. Does the piece have unusual proportions?

Movement and Rhythm – Are there repeated elements? Does the repetition vary? If there are lines, do they appear to be slow or fast?

Emphasis – Does one area grab your attention more than another? What part of the work appears the most important based on the placement of certain elements? What is the focal point or center of interest (COI)?

Pattern – Are patterns random or planned? What elements are repeated to create the pattern? Describe them. Where do they appear? Are they radial, grid, alternating, border or band?

Contrast – Where are elements used differently from others in the artwork? Does it create visual interest? Does it balance the work? Does it create a focal point? Does it add movement to the work?
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Look at the artwork again, and now write, for 5 minutes, about what you think the picture means. The artist may or may not have an obvious intention for creating the artwork. However, you don’t need to worry about what the artist was trying to say necessarily. Just ask yourself what meaning you can pull out of it.

**Mood** – What feeling do you get when you look at the work? Think about words like witty, whimsical, playful, clumsy, mysterious, reflective, calm, quiet, etc. What particular part of the work makes you feel that way?

**Tension** – Is there an energy to the work? Describe it. Consider words like tranquil, dynamic, powerful, lumpish, relaxed, conflicting, stone-like, heavy, etc.

**Ideals** – Does the work express an idea? Is it heroic, majestic, noble, humble, authoritative, regal? What makes you feel that way?
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Finally, ask yourself if this is a good piece of art based on everything you have stated in the previous paragraphs. Remember, not all great art has to be beautiful, or even likable.

- Do the Elements and Principles the artist used express an idea or emotion?
- Does the craftsmanship enhance or take away from the piece? Consider the type of clay the object is made from (earthenware, stoneware, porcelain). Think about how it was constructed (slab, pinch, coil, thrown, combination). What decorative technique was used on the surface (incised, carved, burnished, texture stamped)? What kind of glaze was used? Was it fired in a special way?