Formal Analysis

Please use this outline to analyze your artwork

Four Levels of Formal Analysis

1. Description=pure description of the object without value judgements, analysis or interpretation. It answers the question “What do you see?”

The elements that constitute a description include:

1. Form of art whether architecture, sculpture, painting or other
2. Medium of work and technique
3. Size and scale of work
4. Elements or general shapes
5. Description of axis (vertical, diagonal, horizontal etc.)
6. Description of line and how line describes shape and space. Thick, thin, variable, irregular, intermittent, indistinct.
7. Relationship between shapes…large, small, overlapping etc.
8. Description of color and color scheme=palette
9. Texture of surface
10. Analysis= determining what the features suggest and deciding why the artist used such features to convey specific ideas. It answers the question, “How did the artist do this?”

The elements that constitute analysis include:

1. Determination of subject matter through naming iconographic elements historical event, allegory or mythology etc
2. Selection of most distinctive features or characteristics whether line, shape, color etc.
3. Analysis of the principles of design or composition. Stable, repetitious, rhythmic, unified, symmetrical, harmonious, geometric, varied, chaotic, horizontal, vertical etc.
4. Function
5. Use of light, role of color
6. Treatment of space and landscape both real and illusionary(including use of perspective) compact, deep, shallow, naturalistic, random
7. Portrayal of movement and how it was achieved
8. Perception of balance, proportion and scale
9. Emotional reaction
10. Interpretation= establishing the broader context for this type of art.

Answers the question “Why did the artist create it and what does it mean?”

The elements that constitute interpretation include:

1. Main idea, overall meaning
2. Interpretive statement: Can I express what I think the artwork is about in a sentence?
3. Evidence: What evidence inside or outside the artwork supports my interpretation?
4. Judgment: Judging a piece of work means giving it rank in relation to other works not forgetting to consider its originality.
5. Is it a good artwork?
6. Criteria: What criteria do I think are most appropriate for judging the artwork?
7. Evidence: What evidence inside or outside the artwork relates to each criterion?
8. Judgment: Based on the criteria and evidence, what is my judgment about the quality of the artwork?

Adapted from UWGB.edu