

The Meaningful Critique: Responding to Art from Preschool to Postmodernism

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Abstract

An investigation of art criticism was undertaken with studio artists, art therapists, college nonart majors, and clients receiving art therapy services. The method involved establishing aesthetic and expressive criteria taken from Kramer's (1971) concept of formed expression. Utilizing her concepts of "evocative feeling," "inner consistency," and "economy of means," the author systematized responses to art during critiques regardless of the artist's level of functioning, presenting problems, or studio setting. An emphasis is placed upon empathically yet constructively providing feedback to the artist in ways that are both artistically and personally meaningful.

Introduction

Showing one's art, whether as an artist, art student, art therapist, or patient, may evoke feelings of anxiety and even intimidation. Once shown to an audience, the artist not only displays his or her level of skill, but also discloses content that may be highly personal, thus heightening feelings of vulnerability. Almost anyone who has participated in a studio critique has experienced a negative outcome—from feeling unnerved to being insensitively judged to even being attacked as derivative or pretentious. In clinical settings, clients report feeling patronized or analyzed for hints of pathology. When attempting to apply art criticism in settings as diverse as therapeutic practice and education, issues multiply accordingly. Is it feasible to attempt a unified approach to responding to art critically and empathically?

Art Criticism and Studio Art

In contemporary art education, critiques are a natural outcome of studio practice. Yet a survey of students indicated bewilderment over current theories of art and art criticism, many of which are virtually incomprehensible (Henley, 2003). In this survey, 11 of 29 undergraduate art students, and 4 of 11 MA and MFA candidates in studio art complained of confusion regarding contemporary aesthetics. With the advent of various schools of postmod-

ernism, criticism often consists of embracing art theories such as deconstructionism and critical theory (MacGregor, 1992). Hence, art has become vastly more conceptual and theoretical than the formalistic and expressionistic ideas that marked modernism of the 1940s through the 1960s.

Despite the relative complexity of current art criticism models, there are still areas of convergence between modern and postmodern schools that may prove fruitful for art students and art therapists alike (Lachman-Chapin et al., 1998). For instance, noted philosopher and aesthetician Jacques Derrida (1976) has embraced an aesthetic that extols its own grammar, tolerates ambiguity of meaning, and celebrates metaphor and paradox rather than logic. According to current applications of his theory, the meaning of art will always remain elusive and indefinable, especially when images are filtered through the cultural-centrism of spoken or written language (Barker, 1995). This stance should also be compatible with theories of aesthetics in art therapy practice as postmodern critics and therapists alike regularly commune with images that are contextually fragmented, bizarre, and culturally or psychically alien. Both patients and students, then, can be enriched by the postmodern aesthetic as they probe multicontextual meanings of their inner and outer realities. According to critical theory, the expression of individual existential experiences can achieve greater articulation through image-making rather than through written or spoken language.

However, there are still vestiges of prejudice against modernist ideas of artistic "self-centrism" in which the solitary artist working without social context is dismissed as narcissistic and escapist. For instance, in the same university study 9 out of 29 undergraduates felt criticized for working in styles that emphasized formal design elements whose focus was the sheer beauty of form. Student questionnaires quoted instructors as stating, "Self-referencing in art is at best sentimental and at worst elitist," or "Ceramic artists no longer just make pots anymore," and so on. One student reported on the downside of current art theory as a propensity for political correctness. In a critique, his paintings of voluptuously rendered nude women were attacked as elitist and misogynistic. His classically formalist style and sexually edged content were deemed by his feminist instructor to be "body-centric" and thus "hostile to women" (Henley, 2003).

Clinical Settings and Art Criticism

In the case of clinical settings, the idea of art criticism alone may be a foreign or contradictory idea, one that is

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inconsistent with the tenet of the therapist remaining unconditionally accepting of the client's art (Henley, 1992a). Consequently, when art is shown in therapeutic art groups, it is generally considered "sharing" rather than a critique. Such sharing may consist of clients and therapists making supportive yet vague "validations" of the work. During one modest survey, I observed 16 art therapy sessions in hospital settings conducted by registered art therapists while making field observations of graduate art therapy interns (Henley, 1993). Process notes from those visitations revealed that only three art therapists made constructive comments about media, technique, influences, intentions, or stylistic concerns to their clients. The other 13 sessions mainly consisted of clients remarking about which element or color symbolized a particular emotion or problem. Such consistent responses suggested to this writer that over time, the patients had come to learn what the therapist wanted to hear. In almost all of these sessions, notations indicated responses that read as clichéd, canned, or formulaic. It appeared that such responses lent little substance or true insight to the art process. In these clinical settings, the therapist's main focus seemed less about promoting artistic integrity and more about being able to analyze the client or art production for hints of pathology. Hence, a number of clients were understandably guarded in discussing their work, knowing full well the nature of the therapist's intentions to look for pathological indicators in their art. Often the imagery remained defensive as evidenced by the high incidence of personal and media stereotypes. According to Kramer (1971), defensive stereotypes attempt to disguise traces of bizarre ideation or disturbed affect.

Critiques in Art Therapy Education

In art therapy education, studio practice may involve a confusing mix of therapeutic and aesthetic goals (Allen, 1992; Moon, 2002). Often there is an expectation that the critic or instructor will empathize mainly with the emotionality of the art and, in doing so, forgive or ignore its technical or stylistic problems. In my own teaching of studio courses for art therapists, I am often stunned when students react both verbally and in confidential feedback with feelings of anger or devastation when their work is criticized. I have visited and taught at universities where analyzing formal elements or questioning conceptual theory or technical problems are simply not done. Lachman-Chapin (1993) also writes on this phenomenon, reporting that art therapists who hoped to exhibit in a show she curated displayed "a real resistance to being juried or judged" (p. 146). In the face of a mounting furor, the jurors allowed all of the submitting artists to be accepted. Lachman-Chapin suggests that such attitudes could lead to viewing art therapists in art circles as "lesser artists" (1993, p. 145). Allen (1992) writes that such discrimination is a natural outcome of having too many demands placed upon art therapists exhausted with their caseloads or upon art therapy students preoccupied during clinical training.

Integrating Clinical and Studio Aesthetics

Is it possible, then, to reconcile these diverse fields and the array of approaches to analyzing art? Contemporary art therapists have taken up many of these issues; a recent example is Catherine Moon (2002) whose comprehensive review of current aesthetic models in art therapy practice includes her own ideas on the "relational aesthetic." This model attempts to deal with the problem of formal elements of art as well as relatedness with others. Moon argues in the modernist vein that aesthetics includes the time-honored tradition of formal beauty. Yet, it must equally enrich one's personal meaning, deepen relations with others, and promote intrapsychic change, as well as celebrate the artist's diversity of values.

Moon's view is in line with the teachings of renowned critic Ernst Gombrich (1960) who suggests that art works best when the artist provides the viewer with just the right amount of technical, conceptual, and affective information—too much and the audience is not challenged, too little information and the art fails to be evocative, remaining instead obscure and inaccessible. In Gombrich's theory, it is essentially the viewer with his or her myriad associations, projections, and versions of reality that interacts with the image and completes the aesthetic equation. Without prompting an evocative or provocative response from the viewer (whether it be simple curiosity or a feeling of being moved or even outraged), art suffers most when it ignores its audience.

These ideas are strikingly compatible with the aesthetic model conceived by Kramer (1971). She, too, considers both "economy" and "evocative power" as hallmarks of fully formed artistic expression: that unless the art engages the viewer (or, in this case, the therapist) in some form of dialogue about the art—either on a verbal or nonverbal, active or passive basis—the potential for both creative and therapeutic growth remains limited.

The task of this paper, then, is to develop a sensitive yet critical method for responding constructively to art. This method will ideally be applicable to critiques across the art spectrum. Like Moon's "relational aesthetic," the method will emphasize empathic and supportive responses (in both patients and students alike). Yet, to engage the whole aesthetic spectrum, the method will also attempt to engage current theories of art that are important to artists working outside clinical practice. Only then may we begin to integrate both clinical and art-world ideas into post-modern forms of inquiry (Semekoski, 1998).

For the past 2 years, this author and his graduate assistants (Michele Amendolari, Steve Dickens, Monika Tang, and Amy Greene) have practiced critiques in a variety of guises in an attempt to create a systematic method that is applicable across settings in both therapy and studio art. For the purposes of this paper, four populations will be considered: normal children progressing through developmental milestones, art therapy clients of varying presenting problems, a group of at-risk, nonart-major college freshman who are taking a course in 3D design, and undergraduate and

graduate art therapy and fine arts majors taking studio classes as part of their degree requirements. Because these populations are fairly disparate, variations in the critique methodology were adapted depending upon whether the goals were based in art education or clinical therapy.

This undertaking is built upon previous investigations that explored the origins of the creative process (Henley, 1992b, 1998). Of particular focus in these writings was the issue of artistic “intentionality,” which entails identifying the artist’s purpose or rewards for making art. Groups studied were animal species such as primates, elephants, and dolphins (Henley, 1992b, 1998); children with disabilities (Henley, 1989, 1994b); and those suffering mental illness (Henley, 1994a, 1997, 2001). It was found that artistic motivation can be construed as universal. In each population, art was viewed as a by-product of instinctual discharge and often appeared to be rooted in primary process and id derivatives (Henley, 1989). As a means of emotional problem-solving, art provided for the discharge of self-stimulation, self-regulation, and self-comforting. Art often served to ward off or defend against external stimuli that placed demands upon the artist in day-to-day reality. In this manner, art attempts to interpret interaction and relations by making sense of distorted thoughts or perceptions (Henley, 1994a), including fantasies of annihilation (Henley, 2001).

The emphasis in the present study shifts from attempts at discerning the earliest stirring of intentionality and artistic motivations to a more active procedure that takes into consideration aesthetic concerns as well as the often fragile nature of the artist. The critique method follows Kramer’s (1971, 2001) criteria for formed expression, beginning with an exploration of the motivation and intention the artist brings to the process of art production. The second consideration involves devising procedures that explore the quality of the art both from an aesthetic standpoint and from the personal growth garnered from the art process. Finally, the critique attempts to identify how the art can be used as a point of departure for future explorations so the artist has a sense of direction in which to launch new initiatives. Moving now to several case vignettes may bring these ideas to life.

Balancing Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

The first task undertaken during the critique process is to discern intentionality by learning something about the artist’s motivations. By understanding what forces fuel the art into being, the hope is that both artist and critic will gain insight into the nature of the art. Two concepts are central to the quality of investment brought to the art experience: “intrinsic motivation” and “extrinsic motivation.” Lepper (1988) defines the intrinsically motivated individual as one who undertakes activity for its own sake—for enjoyment, sense of accomplishment, and satisfaction, all of which enhance the outcome. An example of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can be found in the 5-year-old child previously described in Henley (1994b).

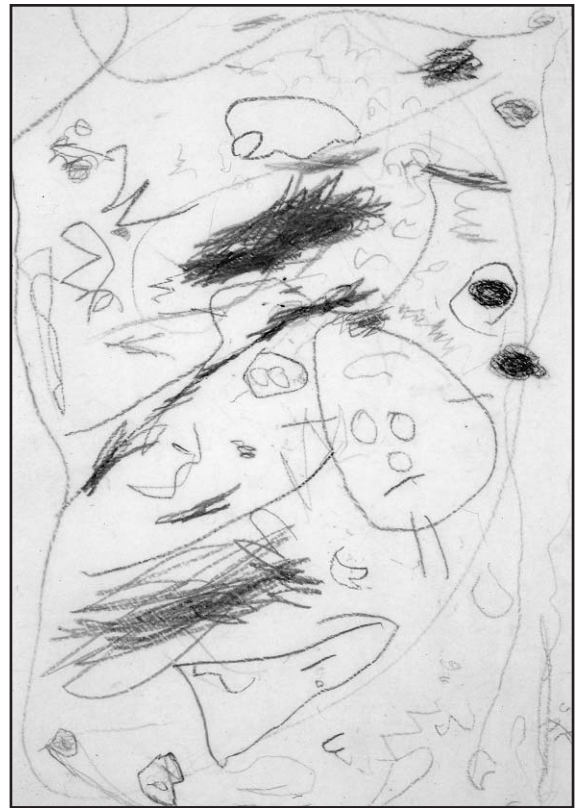


Figure 1

This little boy’s drawings consisted of playful controlled scribbling when produced at home for his own enjoyment (Figure 1). However, these same drawings became more developmentally advanced when they were brought into school where they continued to be worked on. In the classroom his scribbles morphed into figures and other more complex forms. The shift, from purely intrinsic motivation that resulted in doodling and scribbling at home to the extrinsic motivation that seemed to prompt his move to figurative art, appeared to be tied to the expectations of the changed venue. Perhaps he anticipated greater rewards or approval from his teacher if he drew in a figurative and narrative style. He might have felt an early form of competitive peer pressure to draw in a more mature way when among his classmates. In a sense he was responding to art “theory,” not unlike the most sophisticated art student, as his inner world took in the external influences and expectations of his culture. In criticizing this work from an aesthetic, developmental, and even postmodern standpoint, we find the multiplicity of meanings, intentions, and sensory impressions that existed simultaneously in the art helped it to fully blossom. With the change in venue came greater motivation and investment in the art process.

Condry and Chambers (1978) have found that those who are exclusively extrinsically motivated put forth the minimal amount of effort necessary to achieve the maximum rewards, such as gaining recognition. While much of the art that is created to gain attention of others often remains stunted, especially if art is seen as a form of com-



Figure 2

merce, this author's early studies found that even in animals, extrinsic motivation is not exclusively negative. When, for instance, the extrinsic rewards were based on satisfying relationship needs or other forms of attention, motivation could be intense and outcomes quite remarkable. Process notes (dated September–November, 2002) from 14 sessions with special-needs college freshmen who were taking a 3D studio-enrichment class revealed that seeking out romantic relationships among this age group is sometimes a motivational enhancer. One particularly gifted freshman was an experienced clay sculptor who created a piece consisting of a series of sensually formed interlocking rings (Figure 2). While working, he would banter with a young woman with whom he seemed quite taken, which was distracting to both. For almost an entire session, he was observed stroking and smoothing the gooey slip around the clay loops in a suggestive way. Eventually this behavior became so blatant that it required a cue from me to set limits on his “process,” which seemed more akin to foreplay than sculpting. Despite its seductive process, the finished art production was a well crafted linking of ceramic loops whose rhythmic composition moved the eye and offered rich metaphors given the work's reflective title “Forever.”

In analyzing this work, we are certain that the young man's inner needs were gratified as he displaced and perhaps even sublimated strong libidinous feelings. Extrinsic gratification was also achieved given the peer attention that was garnered by his sculpting prowess. During the critique, I attempted to engage his motivations by responding to the formal elements as a bridge to the metaphors and issues involved. He was asked whether he felt there was a sensual quality to his piece, and if so, did it connect with any inner thoughts or feelings. He responded that the title “Forever” referenced a romantic relationship that “had its ups and downs” and that relations with women were sometimes like “roller-coaster rides.” I then asked whether the patches of rubbed off glaze were intentional or significant. Interestingly, it reminded him of the “emotional scars” of past relationships that had been rekindled by this young woman in his class.



Figure 3

In these verbal interventions, acknowledging the artist's efforts was accomplished by linking formal elements to feeling states and personally meaningful metaphors. In remarking that artists routinely explore their relationships including issues of attachment and loss, I attempted to empathize with his adolescent longing for romantic companionship, peer acceptance, and male vitality. Exhorting him to aesthetically challenge the viewer supported these artistic goals. The critique emphasized communicating these ideas via strong craftsmanship and design sensibility. With such support, he was able to meet his intentions without lapsing into sentimentality, obvious sexual content, or other attention-getting behavior—hence extrinsic and intrinsic motivations formed an effective balance (Amendolari, 2003).

This student's next sculpture (Figure 3) was carved from a block of polystyrene (Styrofoam) then dipped into hydrocal plaster, creating a skin with a rock-hard finish. It was later sprayed in metallic silver and white. We might designate this work as approaching Kramer's concept of fully formed expression, as the student was able to retain the sensuality and lithe movements of the female form without acting out in the process. The work seems to meet Kramer's first criteria for formed expression, “evocative feeling.” In this sculpture, libidinous feelings have been transformed with subtly and sophistication. The second criterion, “inner consistency,” is also suggested. By honestly giving form to his needs and feelings without denying or misleading the viewer, he has remained true to himself and

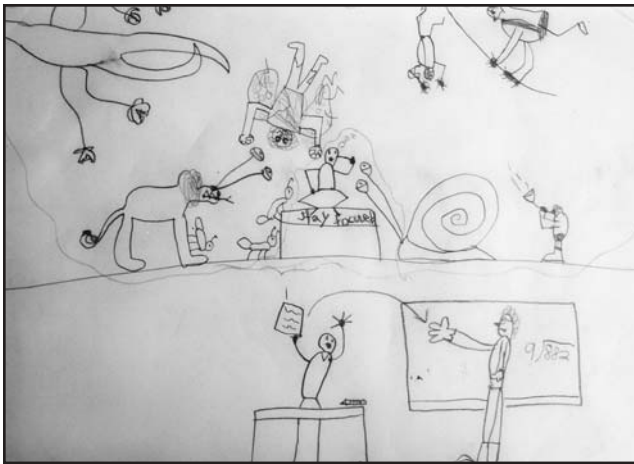


Figure 4

his audience. Finally, the sculpture possesses what Kramer (1971) would term an “economy of means.” The seamless fit between form, content, and surface treatment is devoid of superfluous decoration—nothing need be added to or taken away from the composition.

It is no coincidence that the young man decided this piece was his strongest. As a product of sublimation, the outcome can be explained by drive theory, which celebrates the pleasures of releasing drive energy while producing a work of truth and beauty. As in all true sublimations, drive energy had been discharged through constructive, expansive means, yet was also partly neutralized in accordance with social norms. In the end, ego emerged energized and strengthened given the productive blend of intrinsic and extrinsic satisfactions. Still, the work also contains much postmodern *sous rature* (under erasure), as the figurative form has a sense of fragile amorphousness that suggests it is still in gestation; its enigmatic gender and sexual muscularity exist nicely in opposition. The artwork’s authenticity and inner consistency lie in its lack of theoretical self-consciousness.

During the critique, it was important that such naiveté and adolescent vulnerability be met with empathy. As critic and facilitator, I functioned not unlike the benign mother during the rapprochement crisis. I allowed the student to confront success and failure, chaos and order, confusion and clarity, all the while remaining emotionally available when his creative energies required guidance and refueling.

The Clinical Sphere

Similar issues surface in the studio during art therapy practice. One 14-year-old with Asperger’s syndrome created images that were symptomatic of autism for his own intrinsic satisfaction. However, in the initial phases of our sessions, he created pictures that his teachers and parents would approve, such as stick-figure compositions showing him diligently reading his social studies book, which he assumed was what his therapist also wanted. Eventually this defensive position gave way to pictures that were more consistent with his true nature. The pictures that followed

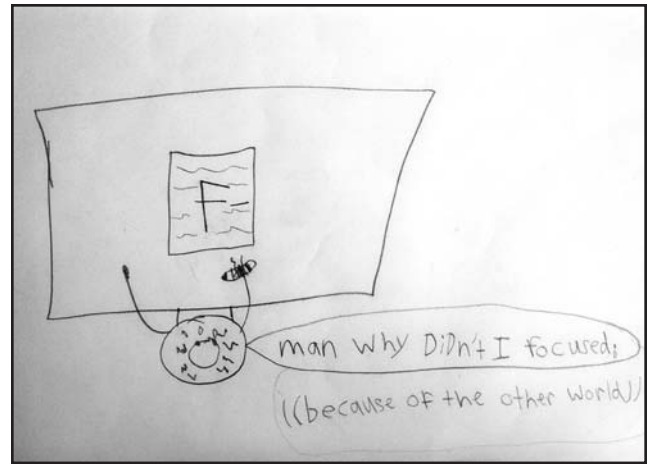


Figure 5

depicted what he termed his “other world.” This entailed elaborating bizarre ideas and perceptions that were rooted in the primary process. He displayed extraordinary trust in allowing the author a glimpse of this secret realm that remained shut off from others. Dreamlike images reigned as the boy depicted his struggles to keep his focus in the real world of school while myriad creatures beckoned him to withdraw into autistic fantasy. In the example shown (Figure 4), man-eating plants, goggle-eyed snails, and lions cavort as winged “mad grandmothers” (exact quote) buzz around the boy’s head. Meanwhile, tiny mischievous creatures he referred to as “wheezers” crawl about, swing on vines, and toot their horns to complete this odd scenario. In comparison to these strange goings-on, the boy’s self-representation remains quite schematic, crouching oddly upon his desk, trying hard to stay focused on his work. For this child, his delusional world is apparently more normal and more gratifying than that of outside reality, which caused him distress by placing demands and expectations upon him. Yet we are faced as clinicians with viewing his inner, more gratifying world as being tied to the pathological autistic state. Communing with this world remained at the expense of lessening his adaptation to reality. Art criticism in this instance took place within the transitional space where drawings linked to the outside world (see Figure 5 in which daydreaming results in a failing grade) are markedly less elaborated. Hence, interventions were offered encouraging him to further embellish those aspects of the outer world that he felt were interesting. Given our strong therapeutic alliance, the boy tried quite hard to please this therapist. We find, however, that the pictograph (at the bottom of Figure 4), which he drew in response to my suggestion, pales in comparison to the richness of the spontaneous dream-image. Inner and outer worlds are not in balance, which impacts the aesthetic outcome.

Yet even in these circumstances, postmodern ideas permeate our analysis. Because this was a clinical setting where the goal is centered upon accepting clients and their images on their own terms, such inner consistency problems are the norm rather than the exception. As postmodernists, we accept the boy’s fragmented worldview and empathize with

his preference for his “other world” as an existential statement of who he is. We also acknowledge our incapacity to fully decode its meanings. However, given our mission to pursue the developmental goals of reality testing, independent living skills, and relationships with others, we strive for balance between acceptance and change.

Art for Art Therapists in Training

The problem of inner consistency made its way into another critique, in this case, the art of a graduate student named Michele who was studying painting with the author as part of art therapy training. A productive and gifted artist, Michele showed a series of multimedia works that involved painted and burned paper mounted on flat-black wood panels. Despite an impressive showing of lovely abstractions, I felt somehow unmoved by most of the works. Their abstract quality seemed too calculated and precious. They appeared too conscious of the burning process as a novel decorative device. However, one piece did evoke a response (Figure 6). It used the black negative space as a silhouette to give the hint of a figure. With this figurative reference, the burned edges seemed to have more consistency with the concept. The burned-edged paper seemed to part like a theater curtain, revealing a shadowy form that evoked a sense of mystery; like the residue of a figure missing or lost, it suggested ambiguity, contradiction, and tension. Despite these postmodern elements, the image possessed a comforting sense of object constancy as the missing figure with its charred outline maintained a sense of presence.

During the critique, I struggled to convey these ideas while carefully navigating between the artist’s own intentions and what seemed to work for viewers and critics. With the success of this particular work, I encouraged Michele to advance the narrative in her work rather than settle for nonobjective decorative elements of design. Although I acknowledged that the other works in the oeuvre were a critical part of the exploration of technique and vital to her art process, I felt that the imagery took on a life only when suggestions of content were conveyed. In dialoguing about the work, Michele remarked that the more abstract pieces focused on her exploration of the constructive power of fire. As the critique wore on, however, Michele felt that the process had led toward a deeper reflection of the defended nature of her work. In her journal, Michele later wrote:

Abstraction can be beautiful, decorative and yet lead to avoidance. Showing works to a critic who is also a well known teacher and therapist is a different unsettling experience. During the critique I was called on my defensive stand, albeit gently: that despite their beauty the pieces were somewhat empty, denying the viewer an opportunity to fully interact with the work. While my initial instinct was to be guarded, I found that by trying to be less defended and more open to criticism, I was able to walk away without the usual post-critique anger, mostly because I was able to “hear” the truth in the commentary. (M. Amendolari, personal communication, 2003).



Figure 6

This truth involved Michele’s defended stance toward self-disclosure and need for self-protection through her use of abstraction. Abstraction perhaps provided Michele with a protective “stimulus barrier”—one that permitted a free reign of expression of her feelings and ideas while limiting the amount of information about these works to be gleaned by the viewer (Hanes, 1998). In this way, potentially disturbing or personal material became obscured by decorative elements. Like our autistic artist, Michele remained true to this intention, and thus her art remained inner-consistent through her need to self-protect. However, being bright and psychologically healthy, Michele was able to take away from the critique a gentle exhortation to take new risks and thus stretch her art beyond experiments with decorative devices and novel techniques. As a response to this critical nudge, Michele sought to increase the thematic content in her art while also preserving a sense of mystery and economy. The anxiety and angst Michele experienced during her critique was crucial as it provided a catalyst that prompted her to tolerate ambiguity, celebrate her exploration of material and process, and clarify her intentions as an artist.

Graduate Study in Art

In the last case example, I shall attempt to apply the same methods to advanced Master of Fine Art (MFA) students for whom art theory and criticism are a highly pres-

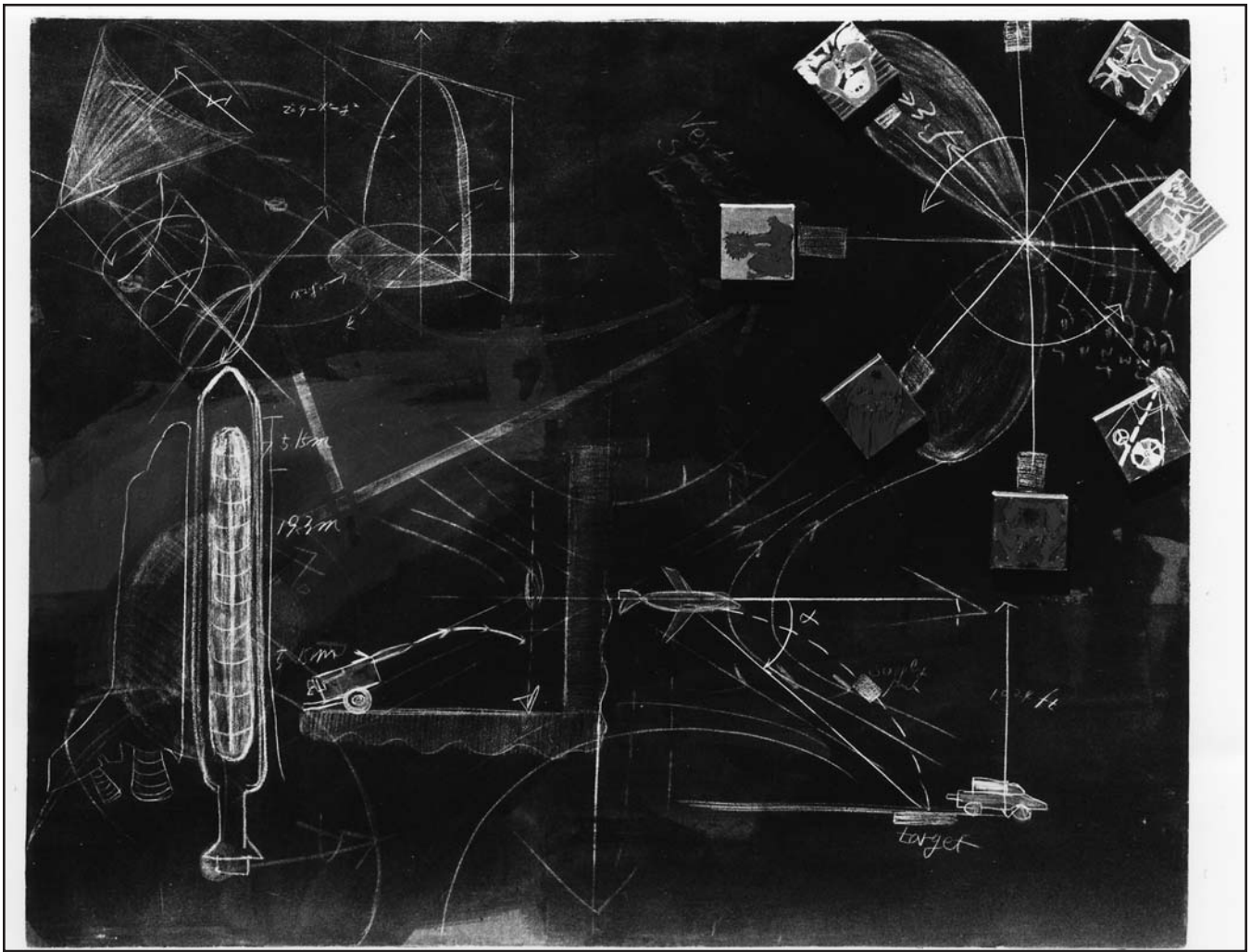


Figure 7

surized and competitive process. MFA students have made the commitment to be professional artists in a competitive market-driven environment. Their work must be conceptually and technically superior with theoretical ideas that connect to current fads in the contemporary art world. The most difficult aspect of this process, perhaps, is that their art must somehow become noticed. By seeking out external attention through their art, however, artists run the risk of compromising the integrity of their inner vision. Nonetheless, working with theory, ideas, styles, or media that is novel enough to attract the attention of critics and consumers (or both) remains the arena in which the professional artist-to-be chooses to compete.

To illustrate these dynamics, I have chosen a case that perhaps epitomizes the postmodern art student: a young Korean artist named Jee whose work has sought to integrate current art theory with a very personal visual vocabulary. Early in her university work she utilized cosmetics as a medium in paintings—a conceptual reference to the pioneering postmodern artist Joseph Beuys, who viewed art as a “language of the everyday” (Temkin & Rose, 1993).

Due to the expectation to be cutting edge in her art, Jee has attempted to utilize Derrida’s *The Truth in Painting* (1987) as a structural and theoretical framework from which to work. Because this philosopher/critic is notoriously impossible to understand, our tutorials have consisted of using her imagery as case material to help comprehend some of his more accessible conceptual ideas and, in the process, to contribute something meaningful to her art.

In one work (Figure 7), a large oil montage utilizes a startling range of symbolic images. Emerging from a pitch-black ground that suggests deep space are sketchy schematics of missiles or rockets that show their launch trajectories. Lightly drawn in oil-stick, they intermingle with figurative vignettes—postage-stamp sized elements that can be read as various sexualized and lascivious cartoons revolving around a pinwheel-type form. The composition also includes fragments of mathematical equations and random scribbles that contrast with patches of viscous red pigment robustly knifed onto the canvas.

Jee’s rich celestial landscapes recall Derrida’s notion of a “multiplicity of difference,” which can “flourish into an

infinite dissemination of meanings" (1987, p. 64). Postmodern psychoanalyst Jane Flax (1990) writes:

We should abjure any attempt to construct a closed system in which other or the excess is pushed to the margins and made to disappear in the interest of coherence and unity. The task is to disrupt and subvert rather than (re-)constructing grand theories. (p. 10)

Flax also cites Derrida (1981) who calls for partial and fragmentary multiples rather than universal totalities.

In our critiques, Jee and I discussed how the multiple images of rockets and their targeting equations based upon parabolic curves seemed viable as postmodern devices. At once cerebral and formally sophisticated, their skeletal treatment speaks of Derrida's (1987) "elliptical shard" with their highly fragmentary and interrogative treatments of marginality and presence.

Also contributing to a sense of marginality were the loose doodlings and scribbles that embellished her paintings. In speaking about these elements, Jee revealed that as a child she would hold back her speech, speaking only to a few people—much to the concern of her parents. Her tendency to scribble with any material on any surface (explaining her later use of lipstick as a drawing medium) constituted a "secret language," one that compensated for her reluctance to communicate through verbal language. Her paintings have since utilized this personal graphic speech in a mature version; fragments of text, geometric formulas, and strange pictographic scratchings convey personal iconography and contribute personal narrative to the work. Jee noted, however, that the style of her images is often intentionally immature. For instance, the rockets and other technological images take on a cartoon style that is suggestive of the latency stage. Thus the child and adult are inextricably linked, each informing the other in an exchange of ideas over time. With regard to postmodern theory, each of these fragmentary elements has a life of its own, possessing their respective truths along with their own histories, dreams, and cultural inferences. These elements remain linked in form and content but are in no way integrated or homogenized. Rather, they create their own logic and exist on their own terms.

It is clear that the context of these artworks dwells within both inner and outer reality. Yet both realities are affected by world concerns such as the recent war in Iraq documented by omnipresent televised images of precision-guided rockets and bombs that have left all of us at once mesmerized and horrified. As South Koreans, Jee and her family literally stand on the brink of war-madness themselves, which of course links her work with the annihilation anxiety that we so often see in trauma victims. The need to regress, to seek oblivion and comfort in pitch black, to remain spirited and playful despite the ominous threats around us, all are obvious restorative forces at work in this art process.

Developmental concerns are also evidenced by the constellation of sexualized and morbid elements that revolve around a pinwheel form. These strange images refer

to Jee's first experiences with sex—both in the media and, later, on a personal basis. As a demure Asian woman, confronting an increasingly Westernized, sexualized, and violent culture at the same time as pursuing her first love became part of the artist's larger universe. Jee attests to the intended phallic quality of the recurring rocket forms. Yet their sexualized nature has a range of differing targets—from dealing with sex with lovers to family members and friends—all of which morph into larger concerns of world conflict. Each of these metaphorical fragments is inner-consistent as both inner and outer worlds hold their own respective truths. In the postmodern vein, these realities exist once again side-by-side without the need for integration or logic. They float freely through the abyss of human experience in a private language of metaphor. Still, this language is balanced by so many readable references that the viewer can access the wealth of playful ideas in Jee's rich artistic vision. In this way, Jee has reconciled the need to sublimate emotional material with meeting the demands required by her profession.

As an artist for whom English remains a second language, Jee made use of our critique tutorials as a means of developing her verbal skills to articulate the conceptual and formal aspects of her work. By mirroring and modeling my analytical comments, Jee eventually became more confident during group critiques in her painting class because her ideas were conveyed with greater clarity and authority. This increased capacity to convey meaning encompassed both personal references and conceptual ideas.

To summarize, this then is our task as critics: to empathize with artists and their intentions and to respect egos under siege by the primary process as inner and outer visions are given form. Meaningful critiques support artists' bids to reap inner satisfactions while helping them summon the discipline to both challenge and reach their viewers and critics. The stories of this incredible spectrum of artists suggest that responding to art is not about tearing down but is about building up both the art and the person.

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C a l l f o r J o u r n a l C o v e r A r t

The AATA Journal is seeking submissions of artwork from art therapists who have not previously had their art featured on a journal cover. The art must be in **vertical format** to be considered but may be in either color or black and white media. Please submit a slide, a 5" x 7" glossy print, five (5) photocopies, and a brief description of the work (title, dimensions, medium) and its content (meaning, inspiration, process). Also include pertinent information about yourself as requested by the "Attention Authors" form on the last page of this issue.