

The Critique Handbook

The Art Student's Sourcebook and Survival Guide

Second Edition

Kendall Buster and Paula Crawford

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PREFACE

One can picture the art school critique as a small point, like a rest area, along the continuous line of a student's studio practice. It is a place to stop, check your direction, look at the map if necessary, clear the trash out of the car, and generally refresh yourself for the next leg of the journey. It is neither a destination, nor is it the path itself. But it can be useful, as a kind of systems check and place to reflect on the purpose and progress of your passage.

In the following pages, we have attempted to offer a variety of languages, vantage points, and practical structures for viewing and analyzing works of art. Conceding that there cannot be a single system for the evaluation of art, but rather a network of interlocking languages based on sometimes incompatible assumptions, we've isolated some of the larger spheres of influence in an attempt to both examine and connect them.

This book is derived from our own experiences both as students and as teachers of art and was motivated by the realization that there are no maps or guidebooks for the critique, as far as we know, that really parse and scrutinize this strange ritual with an eye to making participation in it useful and even illuminating. Indeed any good critique relies on a free flow of ideas as they run parallel to, in contradiction with, or are even embodied by works of art. We have structured our book to reflect this, with all of the inevitable overlaps and repetitions. Forgive us for this. If at times this book reads like a laundry list of options, it should be taken in the spirit of the kind of brainstorming that critiques themselves inspire when fresh eyes examine works of art.

The book is organized into two main sections. Section One, *Framing the Discussion*, consists of four chapters that present ways to think about and discuss studio work. Ideas are presented on their own terms and through the imagining or reconstruction of critique situations. Section Two, *Having the Discussion*, examines the critique itself as a complex and dynamic discourse played out by human actors. It offers concrete advice on preparing for, engaging in, and getting the most out of art school critiques.

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A CRITIQUE?

The words *critic*, *criticism*, *critical*, *criterion*, and *critique* all come down to us from a family of words in Greek that refer to judging, distinguishing, and selecting. While art professors often see the critique purely as a place for constructive evaluation, to many art students, the critique is synonymous with judgment day. True to its Greek origins, the critique is seen as the place of reckoning, where the classroom authority blesses or disparages an object in which the student has become personally invested. The professor's job is to give useful criticism, to deconstruct the object and evaluate its parts with an eye to offering the student practical solutions to perceived deficiencies. The student's role is to distance himself enough from the work so that he can constructively participate in its demise. This dichotomy of the evaluative and the judgmental, already inherent in the critique's linguistic history, sets up the predetermined conflict that is played out in the formal art school critique.

This ritual, which occurs in the artificial setting of a classroom art studio, among students and art faculty, often becomes an end in itself, a goal toward which each student's production is aimed. But the critique is not a singular goal or deadline. Rather, it is one of many, part of a series of cadences that partition the semester into sections of creative productivity. Thus, the critique is both a deadline and a marker of a perpetual beginning, a freeze-frame moment in the context of a continuous studio practice. In a sense, this is carried beyond art school into professional practice when the critique is replaced by the curator's studio visit (another ritual of judgment and selection), the subsequent exhibition, and finally the press review.

The idea that the critique is really a small marker in the larger continuity of an artist's practice allows both student and teacher to think of it as a useful tracking device rather than as a courtroom drama. It becomes a kind of cross-sectional look at an ongoing activity rather than a place where items are ranked. This favors process over product, the means over the end, and arguably a belief in a necessary fluidity between the artist, the creative act, and the possibilities of a particular final product.

Nevertheless, as useful as it is to frame it as such, the critique has traditionally operated as a proceeding, where work (and perhaps student) is judged within the often subjective parameters derived from a professor's own art school experiences, aesthetic principles, and even taste. This becomes easy to see in intermediate and advanced studio classes when several professors (or other art professionals) focus on a single work and begin to offer vastly different assessments. While this can be confusing to students, it at least sends the healthy message that the interpretation of art is subjective, and that often winners and losers alike do not necessarily deserve either the censure or the praise they receive. Indeed, the criteria themselves are fluid and contextualized within a historical and current network of conversations about art that occur between the works themselves and the critical voices that surround them.

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SECTION ONE

Framing the Discussion

Chapter One

FORMAL MATTERS

FORM AND CONTENT

When a group of students walks into a critique, first reactions will vary. Some students will initially examine the works of art by looking for narrative content. They will ask, “What story does this image tell? What does that object make me think about when I see it?” Others will try to assess a work through almost unconscious immediate reactions: “How does that painting make me feel?”

These seemingly natural responses are in fact the direct result of the way a work is put together—the formal operations of a work. Formal choices can support or undermine narratives, hide or foreground the mechanics and materiality of a work, emphasize or ignore its relation to history, and, in general, guide a viewer’s reception of the work. And so we begin with formal matters and with the related terms *form* and *content*.

We are tempted to think of *form* simply as a container that holds *content*. But there is slippage between the two terms. Form not only refers to the material delivery portion of a work, as in the physical form of a sculpture, but it also refers to a set of visual elements (formal elements), such as scale, shape, size, composition, and color, whose relationships become the form and structure of a work.

One way of looking at the form/content relationship is to visualize a line with form at one end and content at the other, and to imagine any given work of art as being located somewhere along that continuum. In some works, we immediately see form, and content follows. A monochromatic red painting or a large organic mass of clay will be read first as color or mass. In other works, where the message practically shouts, we are conscious of the formal elements only later, as in a Renaissance crucifixion painting or a sculpture that depicts a group of dead soldiers. Located between these are works in which form and materials are *foregrounded*,¹ sometimes to support and sometimes to undermine a narrative message.

What you see is not always what you get, though. If a red monochrome painting is titled *Untitled Painting #3* or *Red Rectangle*, you will likely see the painting as a formalist, self-referential work that we could place on the *form* end of our form/content continuum. But what if you were to learn that the red monochrome painting is titled *After the Massacre*? How would that affect your experience of it? Would the red suddenly become a symbol of blood? If you were then to learn that the red paint was really the blood of the artist, would you again see the picture differently? This is all part of the slippage that occurs between form and content.

Imagine a grouping of stones arranged in a circle on a gallery floor. They have been neither carved nor cut, simply arranged on the floor. Now also imagine a stone carved to look exactly like a boy holding a stone in his hand, which he is about to throw. The stones arranged in a circle, although embodying an abstract geometric form, still maintain their identity as stones. Indeed, their *stoneness* is an important component of the image. In the case of the carved statue, stone is a raw material, which has been *transformed* into something other than itself. Here, physical form serves a narrative content. And even where the stone material is transformed into the stone, held by the boy, it reads as a *representation* of stone, rather than a *real* stone found by the side of the road.

In critique, we will likely talk about the accuracy of the proportions of the stone figure, how it looks from various vantage points, and the artist's technical mastery over the material. In other words, we will evaluate the carved figure as *mimetic*² image, and make judgments based on how well the formal elements imitate life and thus how successfully the artist transformed the materials into a likeness, which functions as a *narrative*. The narrative is the story we imagine around a boy about to throw a stone. Depending on formal choices made by the artist, we might imagine an angry protester or a child skipping rocks by a creek.

But when we come to the arranged stones, we will discuss their positioning in relation to each other and to the space, what kind they are, what size, the shine of their surfaces, and their relation to gravity. Any discussion of narrative meaning becomes secondary: an exercise in decoding the formal elements in a search for meaning. And even if the way they are formally presented *suggests* a primitive ritual or *evokes* a memorial, they also might be read as formal—that is, empty of any narrative meaning—such that the experience of them is largely derived from the relations of the forms to one another and to the space they occupy.

In both cases, we are assessing the works formally, but the questions change in relation to whether the materials keep their identity or

are transformed into narrative image. Thus, when we talk about form, we are talking both about what is materially in front of us and about ideals of structure and design that exist outside of the work.

In the case of the carved figure, the *ideal* is the human form and the ways that we have seen it represented in art before, as well as a complex system for creating a likeness that also conforms to an array of abstract ideas about things such as symmetry, balance, proportion, weight, and so on. In the case of the circle of stones, the ideal is perfect geometry, the essence and identity of the material, and the formal operations of the stones in space.

Content, in a sense, is that which is expressed or made manifest through form, or even as form. At the extreme end of this—especially within the traditions of abstraction—form actually *is* content and vice versa. An untitled black square painting, for instance, can be seen as a complete conflation of form and content. What it *depicts* and what it *is* are indistinguishable.

Overemphasizing formal concerns in the critique of a work that has a compelling message may seem absurd, as does looking for complex narratives in a black square. These are the far ends of the continuum. But for now let us take a risk and exclusively consider formal matters on their own terms!

Defining Form

For the sake of convenience, we'll define form as *the means by which one gives substance to an idea*. Form operates in ways that are as numerous as there are formats for work. It's easy to see form in sculpture, which has obvious weight, density, mass, proportion, and three-dimensional shape. In two-dimensional works, form is apparent in composition, texture, palette, and line quality. But formal matters are also in operation in the length of a performance or video project, in the way a site-responsive installation is positioned in a specific place, or even in the volume of a sound work. Adding to the complexity of the discussion are the porous boundaries between media and the tendency for most contemporary studio practices to cross over into other disciplines.

A three-dimensional form might feature a two-dimensional pattern on its surface. A canvas might become a photograph by the use of liquid light or be a construction that comes off the wall. A complex installation might be constructed with elements that combine sound, video, built

structures, and silk-screened panels. Critiquing this endless array of formal and material possibilities can be overwhelming, to say the least.

So what *do* we mean when we say that we want to consider a work formally, and how does this operate in critique? A critique that begins by examining how formal elements support or undermine a work might sound something like this: “The story that you present in this scene is interesting, but your figures are badly drawn.” “I am interested in the subject of your photographs, but I am bothered by the poor print quality, and the scale of the prints is all wrong.” “Your installation of letters from war refugees conveys compassion and you present them without any hint of a patronizing attitude or voyeurism, but I believe that you could have been more inventive with the way the images are displayed.”

Yet again, the complaint might be that a well-executed drawing or a perfectly modeled sculpture feels so academic that it does not move us. First responses might be something like, “It is very well drawn but it leaves me cold. Do you even know what this is about or why you drew it in the first place?” This might lead to a discussion of possible visual devices that could be used, even at the sacrifice of accuracy, for the sake of composition or expressive content of some kind.

What if a work’s form and content cannot be distinguished, as when formal choices are strictly guided by the inherent qualities of an artist’s materials, or when qualities such as shape, color, and spatial relations operate with such primacy that these actually become the content of that work? In other words, how do we look at art that is *nonreferential* or truly *self-referential*?

This leads us to consider the terms *formalism* and *modernism*, whose ideas and traditions still inform much of what goes on both in art studios and in critique rooms. It is worth looking, then, at what is meant by these terms and some of the ideas surrounding them.

Looking More Closely at Form

Formalism and Modernism Even though all works of art have formal qualities and clearly are *forms* of some kind, not all works are thought to be formalist. Formalist works tend to be intentionally limited to, or highly focused on, their formal elements, such as, shape, color, and materiality. The term *formalism*, which shares the same etymological root as *form*, refers to an approach to art and art making that emphasizes these elements, often seeing the work of art as a self-referential object as opposed to a vessel for a message of some kind.

Formalism has been criticized, by artists and critics alike, because of its penchant for being self-referential. The disdainful remark, “This work is just formalist,” coming from a figurative painter, is an accusation that the work is lacking in narrative substance. As one original member of the New York Ten³ put it, speaking about Rothko in the old days, “We all thought he was just doing tasteful paintings about nothing!” Whatever your view, it is still useful to examine a work by looking carefully at its formal elements, whether they are pointing to a narrative content or simply pointing to themselves.

All works have formal qualities. Consider how the gesture of a brushstroke can suggest struggle in a painting, whether the image is an expressionistic abstract composition or a bound figure; how the delicate transparent layering of a brushmark-free paint handling might allow for a seamlessness of surface, whether that surface is a milky white color field with gradual tonal shifts or a window into a realist painter’s imaginary world; how a filmmaker might assault our complacency with a fast-paced montage and jarring soundtrack, or seduce us with muted palettes and soft fades. Whether you are looking at a painting of a dog by a pond or an abstract field of color, from this perspective, it is the formal qualities of the work that produce an aesthetic experience for the viewer. Thus, *formal matters* matter. For formalists, it is the most important aspect of a work.

If we accept the formalist proposition that the aesthetic value of a work of art lies in its formal qualities, then any given medium is best judged by its *trueness* to the formal qualities inherent to it. This means that a work produced in a given medium might evolve toward a more and more rarified articulation of its formal particulars. And a work of art could even ultimately *be* just about its formal qualities. Following this logic, works of art become disconnected from representation and increasingly abstracted to the point of becoming entirely self-referential. In other words, a work of art no longer *represents* something out in the world but *presents* itself. The most successful works are those made according to the natural inclinations of the medium out of which they are constructed.

Formalism and Modernism go hand in hand. Modernist thinking about art is predicated on the assumption that art history is a progressive movement toward greater purity in each medium. A painting is judged not by what is happening in an imagined space beneath the surface but as a *thing*, essentially flat and made of physical paint. A sculpture is about space, volume, balance, modeling, materiality, and possibly color.

The idea is that the raw material the artist uses has inclinations of its own, an essence, if you will. It is what it is. The transformation by the artist of the material into something other than itself becomes a transformation from something honest to something dishonest. The rock no longer looks like a rock. The artist's craft was so good that now when I look at it I see a boy. The *rockness* of it has been subjugated for the sake of a narrative image. The viewer has been deceived.

One critic associated with this strain of thinking is Clement Greenberg.⁴ For Greenberg, competence in each art discipline coincides with the unique nature of its medium. Standards of quality are found through purity of the form, and purity occurs through self-definition. What had been for the Old Masters limitations to be overcome—the flat surface, the shape of the support, the natural properties of pigments—became to Modernist painters the essential qualities of the medium to be embraced.

Abstracting and Abstraction In critique, the terms *abstract* and *abstraction* are often thrown around and applied to a range of works from distorted drawings of the figure to sculptures formed from steel triangles. The term *abstraction*, often replaced by terms such as *nonrepresentational* or *nonobjective*, is used to describe forms that don't resemble the real world. But its root, the Latin verb *abstrahere*, from which the English word "abstraction" is derived, literally means "to pull" or "draw away." Thus, abstraction, in the purest sense, begins with *reality* and *draws away* from it, revealing the underlying lines and geometric shapes, transforming a figure or potted plant into something hardly recognizable. What is important to remember is that you can think about *abstract* as a verb (something that you do) that leads all the way to pure abstraction. In the same way that we used a line to visualize form and content, think of representation and abstraction as located on far ends of a line. If you start on one end of the line, with an image that looks just the way a camera sees it and then begin to abstract it into lines and shapes, you will be moving toward the other end of the line. At some point, when the image is completely unrecognizable, you will have reached *pure abstraction*. Much art lies somewhere along the line, maintaining a recognizable reference to the *real* world and also revealing a geometric understructure or foregrounding the materials of which it is made.

Critics and art historians have argued as to whether the term *abstraction* should be used to describe works that don't refer to anything. The argument for the critics is whether the pure abstraction is still in some way making reference to some original figure or potted plant, thus their

preference for terms such as *nonobjective* or *nonrepresentational*. This is a fair criticism, as many artists, especially ones who have seen themselves as formalists, think of their art objects as completely self-referential. Nevertheless, many contemporary works that appear to be formalist claim to *represent* something in the *real* world. Graphic paintings that appear to be geometric abstractions might actually be referencing corporate logos. A series of flat color fields, rendered in skin tones, might actually be portraits of the artist's friends.

Abstraction and Association The British sculptor Anthony Caro once referred to a time when it was very difficult to create a sculpture that did not remind one of something else.⁵ Caro's investigation into the language of abstract sculpture was a function of the specific period in history in which he was working. With this comment, the artist was revealing a problem, as he saw it, not just with *representation* but also with *association*. The very idea of a sculpture (or painting) that resists "reminding one of something else" is the essence of the self-referential work, a work that can only be assessed formally, and where the content *is* its shape, color, material, weight, and arrangement of its parts in composition.

There is an old joke about a psychiatrist who gives his patient a Rorschach test. As the therapist presents card after card of inkblot abstract shapes, the patient insists over and over again that what he sees are images with explicit sexual content. When the doctor reports that this indicates a dangerous obsession, the patient replies, "But doctor, *you* are the one with all those dirty pictures!"

For many students, there is still a tendency to approach nonrepresentational work by first trying to create associations. What does this shape remind me of? That abstract shape looks like a duck or is it a fist? I see a head. The possibilities are limited only by the number of participants willing to play the Rorschach game.

Perhaps this comes from the long history of art at the service of the *mimetic* (or imitative) function. Or maybe it says much about the power of even the most reductive forms to evoke emotional reactions, about the mysterious ways in which our brains function, and about how we humans are symbol-making creatures compelled to make meaning.

The danger in making such free associations in critique is that they can lead to so many subjective opinions, and so many irreconcilable and divergent paths, that it becomes impossible to sustain a critical dialogue. The association game in critique is like the childhood experience of

discovering rabbits and dragons in cloud formations. It reminds me of this. It reminds me of that. Although useful, even imperative, to a complete examination of the experience of a work, if taken too far, subjective associations can dissolve into a full breakdown of discipline.

That said, associations occur and need to be recognized in critique. When looking at work with a formal eye, the shape of a form or the uprightness of a figure may embody a likeness, which becomes the “content” of a work. Here, form slips into content. A shape or form that doesn’t really look like anything but that reminds us of other things adds those identities to it. This slippage of identity can be called the *poetics of meaning*.

Thus, association is not necessarily a thing to be avoided either in making art or looking at art. Indeed, a play with the possibility of complex associations in abstract forms or shapes can be a substantive part of many artistic practices.

Realism versus Abstraction: A Real Issue? In critique, there is often much discussion about realism. Does the drawing “look” like the still life? Did the student manage to model the light in a way that clearly articulates the model’s torso? Is the figure modeled accurately in clay or proportionally rendered in cast fiberglass? Does the wood or Styrofoam carving present an accurate representation of the object? Often, achievement is measured by a student’s ability to make a drawing or painting that approaches the accuracy of a photograph. In sculpture, a figure that can be read as a real person in a room gets an enthusiastic response. Many students equate craft with the ability to imitate nature.

The esteem associated with accurate rendering comes down to us through the history of painting, drawing, printmaking, and sculpture—traditions that began in a prephotographic age. In these disciplines, accurately rendered human figures often operated as characters in narratives. To function as effective narrative, sculpted and painted images had to convincingly look and feel like real people, much the way a character in a Tolstoy novel is crafted with detailed physical attributes and a complicated psyche. The three-dimensional figure, like its two-dimensional counterpart in a painting, operated in a pictorial manner like an actor in a scene. Realism was able to convey a readable story. It was not about the marble or the bronze but, rather, the creation of characters and narrative, much the way a novel works.

What Is Realism? It is worth considering how we define realism. Is it what we can see with the naked eye? Through the lens of a camera? Can

what we see through a microscope or a telescope be considered realism? Vision as we know it is an interaction between a limited portion of the electromagnetic spectrum and our own perceptual apparatus. Does the fact that we can't *see* most of the electromagnetic spectrum make those portions of the spectrum any less *real*? Are the seemingly abstract shapes of the blobs under the microscope less real than a potted plant on a nearby table? Questions like these have been changing how artists have viewed "reality" since the early twentieth century. They have prompted some artists whose images may appear to be abstract to still think of themselves as realists.

It is also interesting to consider how many contemporary realist painters work not from life but from photographs or even projections. Rather than observing *real* people and objects, where the eye and brain become translators from three-dimensional space onto flat space, new realists often work from flat to flat. How important is the source? If David Hockney's recent theories are true and that some of our most revered master painters used mirrors and lenses, does that alter how we think about craft? Many portrait artists work from multiple photographs. Many painting students are more comfortable using photographs as a source than they are working from life. And yet, if you offer them an opaque projector, they feel that would be cheating.

Self-portrait assignments are the staple of traditional figure and life classes. But self-portraits must either be done from a mirror or a photograph. Both of these methods require the artist to transfer a flat image on a flat surface onto another flat surface. What makes realism realistic in all of this? What gives it the mystical aura of the magician's craft? Where does the craft reside? And how relevant is process to the integrity of a finished work? What about sophisticated mold-making techniques used to replicate a three-dimensional form, or computer software and prototype equipment that can scan an object and carve a replica in a variety of materials? How do these differ from works modeled through eye and hand?

The sculptor Constantine Brancusi once said, "When you see a fish, you do not think of its scales, do you? You think of its speed, its floating, flashing body seen through water. . . . If I made fins and eyes and scales, I would arrest its movement and hold you by a pattern, or a shape of reality. I want just the flash of its spirit."⁶ Rather than seeing the work as abstract because it does not resemble the way a fish *looks* to the human eye, Brancusi's realism resides in the way the fish *is*—alive and in motion. One can think of artists like Brancusi as expressing the

object as a verb rather than a noun, that is, the swimming of a fish or the growing of a flower, rather than the traditional *dead nature* that the French term for still life suggests.

Nevertheless, drawing from life, whether it be human figure or potted plant, remains a mainstay in most college art foundations curricula. Figure modeling, though not the staple it once was in art schools and college art departments, has in recent years enjoyed a resurgence, in part because of the figure's seemingly inexhaustible narrative potential. We still have bodies and are surrounded by material objects. In the context of a basic skill-building class, the student's work in critique is usually judged by the accuracy of the reproduced figure to the real-life model. A class with the shared goal of gaining technical proficiency in representing the figure will likely conduct a formal critique centered on how well a student has reproduced the model's complex form.

The challenge in critique in a more advanced course with a wide range of artistic practices is to determine whether this standard of verisimilitude or another standard is appropriate to the work. In other words, in looking at the work formally, we ask how critical it is to the success of the piece that these forms imitate reality.

LOOKING AT A PAINTING FORMALLY

What Makes a Painting a Painting?

What makes a painting a painting? Faced with the diversity of practices within the discourse of contemporary painting, is there a common language for discussing the many forms painting takes? Are there specific ingredients that a painting has to contain in order to *be* a painting? Does it have to hang on the wall? Contain pigment of some kind? Be on canvas or board? Have a picture plane? Be rectangular? Be made with brushes? As you read this, you are probably thinking of many well-known paintings that aren't made this way, that specifically lack at least one of these elements. Are there particular elements that a painting *must* contain to hold onto its identity as painting? Can we talk about an academic figure painting in the same way that we discuss a suitcase sprayed with Krylon enamel? Or a raw canvas pinned to the wall in the way we talk about a color field painting? What about several piles of brightly colored dry pigment on the floor? Or dried latex applied and then removed from a canvas support and then laid out on the floor? Or a video image projected onto a framed canvas?

Are disciplines converging in such a way that painting is at risk of continual slippage into sculpture, into photography, or into the digital arts, video, or performance? Does painting still even have an identity of its own?

Painting as Its Own Context

Ever since painters left the architectural frames of cathedrals and chapels to make transportable oil paintings on stretched canvases or wooden panels, they have tended to accept the four sides of a canvas as natural borders that frame a discrete pictorial space. The real world beyond that space is accepted as extraneous. Thus, the white canvas is a built-in context for a painting, in that it houses, frames, and forms a dialogue with what it contains. In this sense, the white picture plane is to the painter what the gallery space around a sculpture is to the sculptor. Many painters—representational and abstract alike—have accepted the stretched canvas surface or primed board as a neutral ground on which to hang a painting. This view is based on an underlying assumption that a painting occurs on the surface of the canvas or board. The stretcher and the sides of the support are functional necessities and remain, for all practical purposes, invisible.

While we are ignoring the physical aspect of a painting, we might also ask if there can be such a thing as a neutral or ideal picture plane that isn't associated with anything outside of itself. What shape would it be? A rectangle placed horizontally suggests a landscape. Placed vertically, it suggests a portrait. Even so, artists have consistently accepted the rectangular format as relatively neutral, conceding that any implicit meanings have been almost extricated by the pervasiveness of such paintings within the tradition.

A Painting's Internal Logic

Beyond its relation to things outside of itself, such as its place in art history, where and how it is presented, or even the other works of art around it, we can speak of a painting as having an internal logic. When this frames our discussion we can begin our formal assessment by first asking a series of basic questions. How big is the work? What shape is it? How far from the wall is the surface? Are the edges painted or framed? Have the edges been ignored? Are the staples visible? Is it a stretched canvas, a board, a panel, or something else? Is the raw surface beneath the painted surface visible? Is it treated with white gesso or a transparent sizing? Has the surface been altered in some way, cut into,

sewn onto? Is the surface made out of paint, or is it some other nontraditional painting material such as tar, beetroot, or shampoo? Is the paint thin, uniform, or thick? Is it smooth or textured? Are the brushstrokes visible or hidden? Do the brushstrokes present physical evidence of the artist's gestures? What kind of gestures are they? Is there color, and what kind? Are the values close, or are there large contrasts of value? Is the painting high key or low key? What kinds of marks can be seen on the surface? Are they about line? What kinds of lines: are they thick, thin, or varied? Are they about gesture? Do they have a physical presence? Did the artist use brushes, and what size? Were a variety of brushes or other tools used? Are there other elements: collage or found objects? These questions all address actions going on *within the frame*.

Line Line is the most basic mark—a stick pulled through sand, a burnt ember scrawled across the wall of a cave, the tracks of a snail, or fine filaments of a spider's web. Line is considered by many artists to embody the direct channel between the brain and the hand, a means itself of thought. And line *is* content depending on what it is made of, the gesture that created it, and where it resides. A fast-moving, highly pressured line feels angry or aggressive. A thin wobbly line has a tentative message. Think of a large scrawled confident signature as opposed to a small hesitant one. What does it tell you about the signatory? Line can be ordered or chaotic, fast or slow, thick or thin. It can be the product of an emotional outburst or a machine. It can make itself almost invisible at the service of illusion or flaunt its identity as a mark on the page. Line also occupies and divides space and, thus, influences how one reads everything around it.

Color Color is to painting what line is to drawing. Color carries with it emotional content, and the perception of it changes depending on the other colors nearby. Indeed, color is an effect rather than a real property. While students learn the nuts and bolts of color theory in foundations courses, suffice to say that an analysis of color is integral to any formal critique of a painting.

Is the painting high key or low key? Is the palette limited, or are there many seemingly unrelated colors? If it is limited, how so? Were only earth colors used, saturated colors, or a combination of the two? Is there an obvious logic to the color, such as the use of complements or triads? Does the painting have a temperature—hot reds and oranges, or cool blues and greens? Is the painting limited to analogous colors? Is it a monochrome? How are the colors distributed across the picture plane?

Is it a harmonic distribution; that is, has the artist considered color extension in relation to saturation within triadic or complementary relationships? Or is it unbalanced, thus creating an evocative or emotional space? All of these are formal elements and have a bearing on how we perceive a painting.

Composition Composition is generally thought of as the arrangement of lines and shapes within a pictorial space. As with color, there are books on the rules and regulations of harmonious composition that have come down to us from the masters. These are usually covered in foundations courses and quickly forgotten. To many students, thinking about composition in terms of triangles and the golden rule feels like being forced to learn a dead language that no one speaks anymore. Nevertheless, many compositional traditions are based on shared human perceptions. For instance, a composition that forms an equilateral triangle centered in the picture plane feels stable as opposed to one formed from an isosceles triangle, whose longest side runs diagonally from the top right corner of the canvas to the bottom left. The one is static, the other dynamic. A circle in the center of a picture plane, as in the Japanese flag, feels balanced, while one at the bottom edge feels pulled down by gravity. A large shape dominates a smaller one. As the number of marks or shapes on a picture plane increases, each one loses significance, much the way a child who is one of twelve has a smaller presence in a family compared to an only child. Or the general on a battlefield stands out against a mass of uniformed soldiers. In critique, we analyze how the arrangement of shapes, lines, and forms works on us. We also ask how this arrangement affects other formal elements and is affected by them. We can talk about composition in purely formal terms. And we can also look at how it affects the way we make meaning out of the painting. We will take this up again in the next chapter.

Fields Fields in painting are like fields in nature. Imagine a field of green grass. Now evenly distribute purple flowers over the green grass field. Or let us envision a field of red, yellow, and white flowers popping up through a blanket of snow, or a scattering of white flowers coming up through snow. Picture the night sky on a dark night away from city lights, or the flecks of light on an expanse of ocean. These are all fields. Fields are composed as all-over patterns across the picture plane. The composition operates not as juxtaposition, as in a painting of a scene or a figure, but as layering. Imagine a graph with an x and y axis. Fields can lay on the plane of the x and y axes, or can be layered, one over

another, on the z axis. In painting, fields might be made of flung paint, carefully repeated motifs, buttons sewn to a canvas in a grid, a tangle of lines or brushstrokes, or a single color. Fields spread out to the edges of the canvas so that the pictorial space becomes a fragment of an imaginary larger field that exists beyond its edges.

A Painting's External Logic

Whereas a painting occurs on the surface of a support, it also becomes a part of that support. Thus, apart from its physical surface and the image that occupies its surface, the painting is also an object. As an object, it occupies space in relation to the other objects around it. It stands away from the wall to a greater or lesser extent. It has weight and volume. Formal choices that the painter makes can highlight or obscure a painting's *objectness*.

If the painting's edges are thick, causing it to stand away from the wall, its *objectness* is emphasized. The eye moves from the frontal surface to the edges. The surface becomes part of a larger organized whole. The artist is now obligated to think about what the edges mean in relation to the surface of the canvas. Are they an extension of it? Does the image wrap around the stretcher? Should the edges be painted as a continuation of the surface? Do the edges form another related set of surfaces? And if the edges of the canvas are of a standard depth, is the artist obliged to deal with them? Some painters accept the stretched canvas as a neutral ground for painting, which they see as occurring exclusively on the surface. Are they no longer obliged to deal with the edges?

What does it mean if the edges of the canvas become holders of the spillover from the painting process, or if they are covered with staples that fasten the canvas to the stretcher bar? A painting, with untouched edges and of a standard depth, gives the message that painter and viewer agree that the "world" is the surface of the painting. It is its own context. Does this become an active statement by the artist that the painting occurs exclusively on the surface? That she views the stretcher as a neutral place to hang a painting? That she is not interested in the painting as object? The moment a painter calls attention to the support, and the painting reverts to being an object in space, the viewer looks not just *at* the surface but *around* it.

A canvas can also be seen as a plane or membrane, and a rupture in this membrane calls attention to the painting as an object. The canvas can have objects attached to it or be punctured with cuts. These actions undermine a seamless reading of its surface. When a painting begins to

foreground its identity as object rather than surface, it starts to interact with the space that it occupies. It becomes an object in space. The foregrounding of the painting as object changes the reading of the surface, which is now in dialogue with its own constructedness and identity as an object.

Paintings may also showcase their relationship to the exhibition space. Shaped monochromes appear to be floating in the typically vast, white wall space that contains them. In this case, the paintings themselves have become figures on a larger ground, that of the gallery wall. They operate primarily in relation to the wall space that contains them and secondarily as discrete painted surfaces. A group of shaped monochrome paintings by the artist Ellsworth Kelly, for instance, seems almost to become a composition of colored shapes on the picture plane of the gallery wall.

Shape changes the dynamic as well. Once a painting shifts away from the space of the rectangle (painting's most neutral territory), it moves further toward the province of the object. Shaped canvas constructions, while still pointing primarily to themselves, also address the space they occupy by projecting in and out, not only on the x and y axes of the wall, but also on the z axis, which runs perpendicular to the plane of the wall from any given point on the painting's surface.

Edges The first edge is the physical outer edge of a painting. This edge separates the work from the rest of the world, marking off the world within the pictorial space. It establishes agreed-on borders that mark off the painting as a kind of autonomous territory. The next frame is made out of the relation of the image or worked area to the physical outer edge. Consider these edges within the frame. Are they negotiable? Was the painting executed on canvas stapled to a wall and then glued onto a larger surface? What if the artist painted all the way to the edges of a raw canvas, causing the outer part of the image to be wrapped around the edge, when the work is finally stretched? If the edges are painted over, in this case, the image becomes cropped. If the image is left to wrap around the edge, what happens? Now the pictorial space has been expanded into three-dimensional space. What if a drawing was begun on a huge expanse of paper so that it could expand as needed? In all of these cases, the artist has made compositional decisions based on a pictorial space that no longer exists. One way around this is to begin a drawing or painting by first marking off the edges of a pictorial space and work within that. At the same time, expanding and contracting the pictorial space can be solutions to compositional impasses and create surprising results.

Edges also separate discrete areas of color or shape within a painting. They are the transition from one space to another within the picture plane. Are the edges in the work in front of us so clean that they seem factory-made? Are they blurry to the extent that you cannot tell where one area begins and the next ends? Do they look like they were taped or scumbled, carefully painted or accidental? How the artist dealt with the interior edges is all part of the reading of a painting.

Scale Scale weighs in, too. A large canvas tips inherently away from *object* toward pure surface because the depth of its edges is much smaller. The edges of a large painting are slight compared to its surface area. It's hard to imagine holding it. It approaches the domain of architecture. Nevertheless, if we increase a painting's depth or let the painted surface extend over the edges, the work can shift toward object. The edges become foregrounded and cease to be neutral.

Scale refers both to a work's size in relation to the world around it and to the relation of its parts to one another within the internal logic of the whole. The first could be called a work's absolute scale. The second, its relative scale. Large works seem powerful, authoritative, ambitious, and have a seductive potency by their magnitude alone. It is much like the difference between seeing a movie on the big screen, where the close-up shot of an actor's head is eight feet tall, compared to seeing the same shot on a small video screen. The one is larger than life—a vast landscape—the other is pocket-sized. Note also how much less material movie screens are compared to televisions, which are themselves objects. Relative scale can be thought of as the same kind of difference but operating instead within the picture plane itself. Imagine a scene of a small child, perhaps made to seem even smaller by a bird's-eye camera angle. Onto the screen comes a towering bad guy. The relative scale of the two supports the narrative message that this child is weak and vulnerable in the face of a much greater power.

In painting, a large work carries with it associations with the works of that scale that came before it. It seems museum size. Heroic. It already seems important. If it is larger than the viewer, it feels more like an environment or a wall than a picture. One has to step away from it in order to see it. A small work has an intimacy about it. One must be close to it to see it. It seems to belong in a furnished room in an intimate setting. It is an object that can easily be held. It's the size of a lamp, or book, or small mirror. A small painting is naturally a window into an illusion. One feels the frame, even in the case of an unframed work.

Format Format refers to the shape and proportions of a pictorial surface. As discussed earlier, most paintings are rectangular in format. But many are not. Thus, if we are looking at a rectangular painting, we already know one of the following: Either the artist is accepting the rectangular format as a kind of neutral ground on which to paint (and this is precisely the right shape for what the artist has in mind) or he hasn't really thought about it. On the other hand, if we are presented with an odd-shaped canvas, or even a rectangle with extreme proportions, we know right off that the artist is considering the relation of the picture to the picture plane. For instance, an artist might choose an extremely long horizontal support on which to paint a landscape, thus emphasizing the horizon line and a sense of panoramic expanse and tranquility. A nonrectangular support immediately contextualizes a work among the many other works that have challenged the horizontal picture plane. A nontraditionally shaped support becomes a primary carrier of content that immediately asserts the painting's identity as *object* over its identity as *painted surface*.

Painting as Image, Act, and Thing

Mimesis and Improvisation In Book IV of the *Poetics*,⁷ a fifth-century B.C. handbook of sorts for playwrights, Aristotle talks about two natural instincts that motivate the writing of poetry. He argues that poetry sprang from two causes, each of them lying deep within human nature. The first was a natural instinct for imitation (*mimesis*) and the second, an instinct for harmony and rhythm, which through a kind of rude process of improvisation gave birth to poetry. One might easily place the lineage of painting that comes down from the Renaissance in Aristotle's construct as operating from the first instinct, motivated wholly by the desire to imitate nature. The modernist painter, however, came to painting largely from the second instinct, as a kind of improviser. The part of poetry which is rhyme and rhythm, meter and movement, is much like those formal connections, which orchestrate the whole of a canvas, outside of any referential meanings. Where painting has relinquished its instinct for imitation, this second instinct has seemed to motivate and become the full content and experience of the work.

Many figurative paintings operate in both arenas of activity. Although concerned with getting the figure right, the figurative painter may well improvise within the totality of forms, often sacrificing accuracy for expressive distortion or pictorial integrity. To many

modernist and contemporary figurative painters, process cannot be detached from the final image.

Surface, Gesture, and Process Early modernist painters abandoned the traditional idea that a painting had to be a seamless retinal image. Instead, they began to explore a painting's flat surface, turning it into a kind of record of its own creation. The painterly surface, as a result, could be seen as a record of an act and the door was open for relocating the place of aesthetic meaning from the image itself to the activated surface, and ultimately to the *moment* of the aesthetic act. We see this as early as Cézanne's layered patches of color and Van Gogh's directional brushstrokes, where the gestures of the artist's hand have been tied to the implied gestures of a depicted natural landscape or object, as perceived by the artist.

We see this in American abstract expressionist painting where the act of painting is foregrounded to the extent that a painting's success or failure rested curiously on its ability to convince the critic that the moment of its creation was an authentic one. In this way, the artist becomes integral to the equation, no longer separated from the art object. As a result, the artist's *craft* is as concerned with the development and assertion of *the self* as it is about the skill of mixing color or modeling light and shadow.

When *process* drives a painter, the painting takes on a voice of its own as it becomes formed. It even begins to have a say in the choices that culminate in its final form. In other words, the painter discovers what the painting is or will look like as she goes. Process is often self-driven by formal and material choices as they are made. The painter, tuned into an emerging structure of relationships, guides and is guided toward an elusive end. Thus, the painting is, in a sense, *discovered* through the act of painting. The skill or technique for making such a painting then becomes more about a frame of mind, and an ability to see and respond, than about techniques for rendering accurate proportions or mixing color. In formal critique, we look at the painting as evidence of this process.

Hesitation

A student put up for critique a large abstract oil painting, which contained vast areas of color and some calligraphic black lines that seemed to loosely structure the picture plane. The instructor, who was a die-hard abstract-expressionist of the California school, stared for several minutes at the canvas. Finally, pointing to a small area in the lower right quadrant of the picture plane, he barked, "I can see you hesitated there." The student blushed and admitted that he had really worked that area and still wasn't satisfied with it.

Here the instructor, by looking carefully at the surface, was able to recreate the act of painting to such a degree that he could spot the area where the act had broken down.

Surface as Evidence of an Act Indeed, paintings can be read. Their surfaces contain all the secrets of their making. A student can look at a painting in a gallery or museum and *read* exactly how the painting was done. She can detect the kind of ground that the artist put down, whether the work began as a cartoon on a middletone ground with transparent layers of color slowly added, culminating in piled-up opaque earth colors and then whites (as in a Van Dyck or Rubens), or whether it was painted directly without medium in one sitting (as is the case in much turn-of-the-century French painting). Students of painting should spend a lot of time in front of real paintings for the same reason that students of writing should read a lot of good books!

The surface of a painting is where it all happens. The surface differentiates a painting from other things. Whereas the image is transmittable, the surface is not. It is singular. You have to go to it. The surface is a kind of document of the activity that created the painting. The painter controls how much of the act is left visible and how much is covered up. Visible brushstrokes are signifiers of the *act* of painting. A canvas covered with gestural brushstrokes evokes in us the image of an artist directly expressing something onto the canvas. Often it reads as spontaneous emotion or movement. If visible brushstrokes foreground the *act* of painting in the mind of the viewer, they also invoke the artist at a “spontaneous moment of genius.”

Thus, a critique of a painting of this kind might almost sound like the assessment of a performance. “You hesitated here.” “These strokes seem tentative, those bold.” “These layers seem thin, here you stopped too soon!” This approach may not get to purely formal concerns, such as the relative scale of shapes or the variation of red used. But it may get to the larger question, indeed, the very thing that makes the painting tick.

Speaking about Jackson Pollock’s painting, *Autumn Rhythm*, Kirk Varnedoe⁸ described Pollock as procrastinating in front of a large white canvas for days and then painting the entire painting in one seventeen- or eighteen-hour session. “He got onto something and let it rip.” Varnedoe points out the family of marks, hooks, and commas that become the consistent vocabulary throughout the work as evidence of a single, prolonged creative gesture.

Painting as Representation A painting is an object; it is a surface with paint, which is also a record of the process of its creation. But an artist might want to play down that aspect of a painting and emphasize that it also can act as a transparent vehicle for narrative content (*representation* or *mimesis*). To assess this we might ask, "Are brushstrokes and perspective systems hidden the way a magician hides the mechanisms that create a magical illusion?" Is image paramount, and are materials and technique practically invisible, existing only to serve the illusion? With a representational painting in the purest sense, the image is a convincing narrative, standing in for the *real world* and abiding by its visual logic. We would indeed judge this kind of painting by its *likeness* or visual proximity to that which it represents, as evidenced by the deftness and clarity of its perspectival systems, the harmony of its color schemes, and how well the narrative content is carried by the artist's formal choices.

Since representational painting is a natural vehicle for narrative content, our critique may focus on this. Once a narrative intent is established, we might consider how well the formal elements come together to support an intended narrative, much the way a book critic evaluates a mystery writer's plot structure or character development in motivating that plot. Critique comments might sound something like the following: The girl is accurately rendered, but the angle of her head, reflected back in the mirror, is wrong. The table is out of scale with the bed. The skin looks dead; you need to add some cadmium red light to the mixture in the areas around the nose and cheeks. The figure sitting alone on the bed is accurately rendered but I don't feel her isolation and sadness. Perhaps, if you darkened the area around the ceiling, it would create a sense of enclosure, or move the light source from the window to the table lamp to make the scene feel more intimate.

But if the object is to hide the process and materials in favor of a seamless illusion, then does our critique also focus on how well the brushstrokes and other physical aspects of the surface have been subdued? Can we take this a step further to ask, Do materiality and process become irrelevant at some point when image is all important? Can image really be the *only* thing that matters? If so, does the fact that we have a physical painting, as opposed to a photograph or film still, become extraneous? Even if we have no objections to formal choices, which the painting itself presents, we still need to ask whether this is the best form for the work to take.

How critical are material and process to a given work? Is the artist's narrative best served by paint on canvas or might a video projection,

liquid light image, a photograph, or even a film be a stronger venue for some ideas? In other words, could one of these other media tell the story more effectively? And if we stick with painting, how important is it that rendering be done from life? Is it cheating if the artist has used a projector or some other device?

Painting as Presentation How do we talk about a painting that isn't *of* anything? Clement Greenberg said, "The presence or absence of a recognizable image has no more to do with value in painting or sculpture than the presence or absence of a libretto has to do with value in music."⁹ Indeed, pure abstraction presents the operations of pure structure, much the way music does. Rather than representing the perceived world, the painter creates structures that parallel or allude to an unseen understructure or even the structural operations of the brain.

A painting like this might be a single field of color, a group of gestural marks, a repeated motif, or an array of lines and planes of color. The interplay of such structural operations destabilizes traditional dualities such as form/content and figure/ground by blurring the lines between them. Their relative positions become inverted or even conflated. The history of pure abstraction is in many ways the history of the grid. The grid (like a piece of graph paper or a chessboard) refuses narrative by not allowing a perspectival system of any kind.

Greenberg argued for a kind of painting that refuses to be the carrier of a narrative, much the way a symphony is a complex structure whose emotional and expressive content relies purely on the structural relations set up by the composer. Color, line, and repeated motifs are orchestrated across the surface of the canvas much the way melody, harmonic textures, and repeated motifs are arranged by the composer.

Narrative or a lack thereof is not a matter of value but simply a matter of difference, much like the differences between a symphony and an opera. Formal elements, such as color, can exist on their own without being at the service of an image. An artist neither has to make a banana yellow, nor does she have to make yellow a banana. Color is color. We can look at the formal structure of a painting on its own terms, not by how well it serves a narrative image.

Painting as Flat Surface We begin by asking if the painting is operating as a flat surface. Is this a work where the artist has purposely rejected seamless illusion? Rather than *representing* or documenting the world of conventional sight the way a camera might, does the artist explore the relation of image and the pictorial devices that *represent* it?

Rather than covering up the devices of painting, are these exposed in the work? Is the illusion of three-dimensionality undermined, our attention called to the physical surface of the canvas? Does the painting's surface, in a sense, become more like a wall than a window? Painting like this differentiates itself from retinal, transmittable media like photography by calling attention to its own materiality, its presence, its singularity, and its unique identity as both image and object. Whether the painting contains recognizable images or not, the illusion of three-dimensional space is still undermined, and the flatness of the picture plane and the physicality of the surface are still reaffirmed.

How can a painting that strives for seamless illusion and a painting that seeks to undermine illusion be evaluated by the same criteria? One is covering up the devices of painting, while the other is pointing to them. Without a relevant framework for discussion, we end up sampling oranges to appraise apples.

A formal critique of a work that has either moved away from pure representation or transgressed the frame requires us to move our questions away from image and toward object. Focus will be on the physical surface, as opposed to an image that overpowers it. Nevertheless, many of the formal questions remain the same. In the artist's quest for structural integrity, formal elements, such as color, the arrangement of shapes, brushmarks, scale, and surface application, may be at the service of different outcomes. The overriding question in any critique that focuses on formal matters will be to determine if the formal choices that the artist has made are serving her purpose, whatever that might be.

LOOKING AT SCULPTURE FORMALLY

The Object in Space (Figure and Ground)

A good place to begin a formal assessment of a sculpture in a critique is to look at the work in relation to the space around it and ask, "Where does the sculpture end and the room begin?" This question might seem more philosophical than practical, but it allows us to conceptualize a sculptural form as a three-dimensional shape defined by "the edge of the object" and to consider the operation of negative space in sculpture. Such a question also forces a consideration of the spatial context of the work, that is, whether and how it operates in relation to the specifics of a particular site. Any discussion of sculpture made during and after the twentieth century requires a critical look at the work in relation to the

space around it, whether the artist has consciously engaged with the issues of site specificity or not.

Many students are accustomed to the terms *figure* and *ground* in painting, where the figure operates in relation to the surrounding two-dimensional space. But the same principles can be applied to sculpture, especially when we substitute the white cube for the white canvas. The space not occupied by the object becomes the negative space. This is an important formal consideration, because compositional choices are explored not only within the sculptural object but also through the manner in which the sculptural object behaves within the space.

The Discrete Object in Space A discrete object, even if constructed out of multiple parts, can be read as a single form. Indeed, all three-dimensional forms are essentially made up of an infinite number of *shapes*.

For some sculptural forms, a shift in the viewer's position results in a radical change in its shape. Some sculptures are dynamic precisely because one view completely contradicts another. Think of a cannon seen from the side and then head-on, or a friend in profile who turns to face you.

Relief sculpture operates from a frontal viewpoint. This includes sculptures that rest in boxes or other presentation devices that obstruct back and side views. But freestanding forms can also encourage us to look at them from one side, perhaps by creating the sense of *front stage* and *back stage*. Nevertheless, if the back of such a sculpture is visible but unattended to by the artist, it becomes a problem.

Altar

A student presents a freestanding wooden box approximately seven feet high, four feet wide, and three feet deep. Inside are various wax-cast objects including hands, feet, and a small shoe, as well as red lingerie and pop star posters. The inside of the box has been carefully upholstered in red velvet. The outside of the box has been carelessly painted with a wash of flat black paint. A formal discussion of the work includes observations that the sculpture has a definite front and back, but several students object to the poorly painted back and a few suggest that the artist develop the outside of the box with as much care as the inside.

A sculpture and the space around it are adjoining volumes. The sculpture operates as a figure in the "negative space" (or ground) of the room. If you stand at any given point facing the sculpture and draw an imaginary line connecting the outermost points of the work, you can get

a sense of the dynamic of this figure/ground relationship that is so particular to sculpture.

First observe whether you are drawing a relatively symmetrical box or one with extreme convex or concave thrusts. How does empty space *within* this outline of the sculptural form operate (if at all)? How does the empty space *surrounding* the sculpture affect our view of it? Is this imaginary solid shape larger on the bottom or on the top? If it is larger at the bottom, is a stable pyramid-like shape created? If it is larger at the top, does it seem unstable?

What happens when a form is leaning at an angle? Does the extremity of the angle affect our reading? If the angle creates a wedge-like negative space beneath the form, what is the shape of that wedge?

Imagine:

fifty flat steel plates that create a path on a gallery floor.

fifty pillows that create a path on a gallery floor.

stacked steel plates that form a column up to the ceiling.

stacked pillows that form a column up to the ceiling.

What are the proportions of height to width? Are we looking at a long, flat, horizontal work that pulls our eye down and across the room? Does the empty space of the room seem now more noticeable, even hovering above the flat object? Is it a tall, narrow work that pulls the eye up? Does the form almost touch the ceiling? The discrete sculptural object and the space that contains it are part of a symbiotic whole, much like shapes arranged on a picture plane.

Footprints

In a special daylong project, each student begins with a gallon bottle of glue. One student dips pieces of thick string into glue. She attaches one end of each string to the same spot on the wall and extends it out to a different place in the room. The footprints are scattered points around the room.

A second work is made by mixing the glue with blue pigment, pouring it onto plastic sheets, peeling the dried glue off, and discarding the plastic. The footprint is a massive, solid irregular shape.

A third student removes the top of his gallon jug, places a scrap of cardboard on top, turns the jug upside down, places it with the mouth against the floor, and carefully slides the cardboard out. The weight of the jug holds the glue inside as long as the jug is undisturbed. His footprint is a circle, the size of the mouth of the jug.

Every standing sculpture has a footprint. This is the shape created where the work meets the floor. If the sculpture were to magically disappear, what would its residual footprint be? Would it be broad and flat, or a scattered pattern of points?

Ratio Ratio refers to the relative scale of the sculptural form to the room. A small form in a huge gallery draws us in for a closer look. An enormous form in a small space crowds our movement and resists our attempts to see it in its entirety. At times, a sculpture may be so large that its volume exceeds that of the room. Imagine a bright yellow inflatable sculpture so enormous that it fills the space and protrudes out the door.

Gravity Formal choices are often dictated by the laws of gravity. An object's relationship to gravity changes if it extends directly up from the ground or cantilevers out at an angle into the room. Does a work require an additional support, or is the form counterbalanced so that no other support is necessary? Should a support be visible? How do you integrate it into a piece? Should you suspend it? If so, how far does it hang from the floor? Can it be up against the ceiling or an inch off the ground?

Although gravity can be marshaled or defied to give dynamic tension to a work, it can also pose practical problems for the artist. Returning to our earlier discussion of how a formal assessment of a sculpture includes a consideration of where the object ends and the space around it begins, we turn our attention to ways in which a sculpture is lifted off the floor through a variety of devices. These are suspension apparatuses, pedestals, and prop-ups.

Suspension allows the artist to defy gravity. When considering suspended objects in critique, it is important not only to formally assess the sculpture but also the particulars of the suspension.

Suspension devices can be attached to the ceiling or a frame within a large space, which functions as a false ceiling. Possibilities for suspension devices are only limited by the artist's imagination and the physical qualities of the material used to suspend the sculpture. Whether a sculpture is suspended by an invisible fishing line or heavy rusted chain links, elastic nylon cord or a rigid steel bar, we must first ask whether suspension is the best solution, or if the sculpture might be better freestanding. We must also consider if the sculpture is suspended because of flimsy construction, or if suspension is integral to the design and concept of the work.

Next, we should look carefully at the hanging mechanism itself. Is the hanging device a noticeable feature of the sculptural object, or does the suspended sculpture appear weightless? Is the hanging device made of a material that makes it seem like an extension of the sculptural form? Is any hardware used? Is it visually prominent or is it hidden? Is the hanging device rigid or elastic? Is it noticeably thick or thin? Does the sculpture connect to the ceiling at several points or only one?

Notice the relationship of the suspended object to the floor and ceiling. Is the form hung in such a way that it hovers above one's head, or is it at eye level? Is it so flush against the ceiling that it appears to grow from it? Is the hanging apparatus extremely long in proportion to the sculpture, so that the sculpture is hanging only a few inches from the floor?

Suspended sculptures can be positioned in dynamic ways and put in places that freestanding and even pedestal works could not inhabit. Critique of suspended sculptures requires a careful look at the sculptural form, the suspension device, and the uniquely dynamic position of the sculpture in the space.

Pedestals Similar issues come into play when we look at sculpture bases. The conventional pedestal is a device that allows the artist to elevate the work off the floor—anywhere from a few inches to eye level. While the work is seen as ending where the pedestal begins, just as with a hanging device, the pedestal must be considered as part of the formal equation. When we talk about works displayed on pedestals, we have to ask, where the work begins. Is it only above the pedestal, or is the pedestal part and parcel of the whole? Is the pedestal fair game in our discussion? Or can we see it merely as a presentation issue, of concern only when the work is too large for its base or when the paint job on the pedestal is noticeably bad?

Indeed, if the sculpture is to be considered in its *entire* spatial context, we might see the pedestal as an extension of the floor—as if a chunk of the floor has risen up to make the work more readily visible. The most successful pedestal, like the perfect mat selection for a print, must either disappear or operate as a conscious part of the work. In either case, the pedestal is no longer neutral.

Seeing the Pedestal as Art Is the pedestal merely a conventional means of display, or has it been custom fitted to display a work? From what is it constructed? Is the choice of color or material so close to that

of the work that the base becomes an extension of the work? Or is it painted to contrast with the presented work? Does the pedestal visually interfere with the work? Are its proportions unusual? Is it solid or open? What color is the pedestal? Is the color of the pedestal coordinated with the sculpture in some way? Is it transparent, or painted white, black, or gray to echo the color of the gallery walls?

If the work displayed is a series of small sculptures, are they presented on a single large pedestal or multiple small ones? If the work displayed is large, is the pedestal hefty or has it been constructed to be small in relation to the displayed sculpture for possible comic effect?

How high is the pedestal? Does it raise the work to eye level or intentionally force the viewer to stoop in order to see the work? Is the pedestal impossibly high, requiring various sculptural props to allow the viewer to actually see the work? Is it impossibly thin (and secretly weighted at the bottom for stability), making the work feel precarious? Is it so bizarrely broad and flat that it operates as a false floor? Are there so many low flat pedestals in the space that they almost fill the room and allow only a narrow channel for movement around them? Does the pedestal have legs, or is it solid like a wedge, a plate rising from the gallery floor? Is the pedestal a shelf that attaches to the wall or might it be an alcove cut into the wall? How is the shelf attached or the alcove formed? What about size, shape, color, and positioning of these?

As we can see, the common pedestal is infinitely variable and should be carefully considered in critique as integral to the whole experience of any work.

The Room within the Room Some sculptural forms create an empty interior space. Boxes and vessels are familiar examples. But, unlike a conventional box or a vessel, a sculpture with an interior space can be so large that it seems to be as much architecture as it is object. We might think of these as *room-within-the room* sculptures because the sculptural object becomes a room within the gallery room—perhaps a literal room or some other interior space for a viewer to experience.

Imagine a silver bowl:

the size of the palm of your hand.

the size of your body.

the size of your room.

How do we talk about such interior spaces? We might first ask, What is the scale ratio of the interior space of the sculpture to the space of the room? Can we enter it? Does it feel theatrical? Is there a sense of front and back stage? Is the exterior surface of the sculpture treated differently from its interior? Is the outside of the inner room operating in the work like the back of a painting?

How do we read a series of hanging scrims that create a maze in a gallery space? Here the room within the room multiplies and fragments. The sculpture begins to move even further away from *object* and toward *architecture*.

The Decentered Object Another way that an object can reach equilibrium with the space around it is through fragmentation and expansion. Individual parts that make up the sculpture are still discrete shapes, but are now combined into a large composition that fills the space or even meanders out of the room. Here the sculptural form is *decentered*. Such groupings may be made of parts varied in scale and shape, or of identical units. The decentered sculpture may appear as a seamless whole or as a less coherent group of fragments.

Objects and Fields It is tempting to see a painting as either a portrait or a landscape, depending on the vertical or horizontal orientation of the canvas. Just consider the page setup window on your computer. The exception is the reclining figure, itself a landscape of sorts.

But let us consider for a moment the operation of the horizontal and the vertical in sculptural form. For most students, the vertical (a sculpture that is taller than it is wide) brings with it inevitable associations with the upright human figure. Is this merely a function of width being less than height? Not entirely. For a sculptural form that is proportionately the same but oriented horizontally will likely be read as a reclining figure. Indeed, the folklore surrounding certain mountains sees them as sleeping giants because of a rough resemblance to the human figure. In sculpture, anything loosely constructed with human proportions seems to carry that association.

But what if the proportions of our elongated object are made more extreme? At what point does the proportion in relation to the human form stretch so far as to lose all relationship to the original referent? How far could it stretch vertically? If the ratio of width to height is 1 to 100 or 1 to 1000, what happens to the figurative reference? How far could it stretch horizontally? More important, at what

point does the object's width expand such that it becomes a field—like a huge puddle, a spreading mass? When does a work made up of individual parts create a *field*?

Unlike painting, sculpture seems to become landscape when it is read as environment rather than object. When we speak of a field painting, the repeated figure or motif has a uniform relation to a painted ground. At the extreme, figure and ground form a seamless continuum, as in monochrome color field paintings. In the case of a sculptural field, the object either spreads or multiplies to the point that the relationship of the object to the space (the figure/ground relationship) shifts radically. Fields are often realized through a development of the horizontal axis. If vertical sculptures seek to defy gravity by seeming to extend up from the floor, horizontal sculptures seem to hug the ground and expand by spreading across the floor. A small field on a large floor operates as a figure on the *ground* of that floor, even if within its own parameters it operates as a field. But even then, it carries with it the potential to expand to the edges of the space and beyond.

In looking at a field sculpture, observe the edge where the sculpture ends and the room begins—both in terms of the edges around the field and in terms of its depth. (In field sculptures, typically length and width are greater than depth.) We must consider the ratio of sculptural mass to floor space. Is the field of objects so dense that it begins to overwhelm and *become* the floor? What happens when it is so dense that it begins to stack up on itself and fill the room? We must also consider the nature of the field. Is it constructed out of a single unit or an accumulation of multiple units? Are the multiple units identical? If not, what do the units formally have in common, if anything—color, scale, shape, material? What is the size of each unit in relation to the overall size of the field? Are the units connected, and, if so, how?

Many as One

Thousands of tiny figures cover a large gallery floor.

Lavender buds spread across an area eight feet wide, twelve feet long, and four inches deep.

Hundreds of pink baby toys form a sickle shape on the sidewalk.

The Expanding, Exploding, or Meandering Form A field in sculpture is a kind of decentered object that can expand, explode, or meander. But whereas fields tend to appear as seamless wholes, other decentered sculptures are made up of less coherently related parts.

When a sculpture is made out of parts, configuration and reconfiguration are possible. A form can swell to fill a space or even spread beyond the room. A decentered sculpture can also appear as a series of ruptures or as fragments from a larger whole. Parts might be connected visually but not physically.

Sculptures made of multiple parts can be structured like atoms or molecules, where a little mass can create a lot of volume. If, for instance, we were to get a thousand Tinker Toy sets and create small constructions that we then scattered across the floor, we would create a field. If we were to get millions of Tinker Toys and completely fill the volume of a room with our constructions, we would also be creating a field. We have multiplied a single construction unit to the point that it loses its boundaries as object and becomes a field.

However, what if we took a single set of these same Tinker Toys and magically magnified the parts so that each of the tiny discs was five feet in diameter and the connecting sticks as big as lamp poles? And what if we then filled the room with giant interlinking constructions? What if the structure was so big that we were unable to enter the room? Would our enormous Tinker Toy construction operate as a field? What about the inaccessible spaces that would be formed? Are these not part of the sculpture? If we were to use found objects connected by wooden dowels, carved foam body parts connected by steel poles, or baggies of colored water connected by Plexiglas rods, the formal dynamics of our huge Tinker Toy sculpture would be the same.

Parts to Whole

Buckets of white river stones mark paths that lead through the various galleries and hallways of a big museum. The galleries and hallways have dark wooden floors.

Hundreds of pieces of furniture fragments, used plumbing parts, old bicycles, and other found objects are loosely bound together with heavy-gauge wire into a swirling form. The form seems to climb up the wall and then ducks through a window and continues on the outside of the building.

Identical chairs are tied together with bungee cords to create a group of irregular forms. Each of these is then attached to the side of a railroad trestle at various points. Some are connected and some not.

Long rolls of bright paper are pinned, twisted, and repinned to all four walls of a small room until they fill it.

Whether field or exploded object, if the sculpture is constructed out of multiple parts, we should observe how these parts are integrated and attached to one another. If these parts are connected visually but not structurally, we should observe how these parts are placed in the room.

If we accept that no object is perceived in isolation, and that any given part is attached to the whole, then it follows that the relationship of parts to the whole, in a given sculpture, and the sculpture's relation to its site need to be considered in critique. In much the same way, a figure in a painting operates very differently if it resides at the edge of the picture plane or occupies its center. A sculpture, too, can change radically with shifts in placement in relation to a room, a base, or in relation to other forms in a space.

Formal Considerations within the Object

We began our formal critique of the sculptural object by looking at its *relational* formal qualities. We considered a sculpture's relation to the space around it and to other sculptural forms. We then considered how positioning, orientation, and display inform the dynamics of an object in space, and how sculptural objects, by means of shape and accumulation, can operate like fields. But what about the object itself: What it is made of, and by what means?

Mass and Shape Let us begin with a singular form. We can look at it from an infinite number of views. Imagine if we circled around an object taking snapshots and reducing the images to simple silhouettes. This would be one way to observe how the shape of the sculpture shifts with changing viewpoint. Our silhouettes would also mark the edges of the sculpture. Once again, we would consider where the sculpture ends and the space around it begins from multiple perspectives.

To consider how mass comes into play in sculpture, we can go back to our high school physics book. Mass is defined as "a quantity of matter in a body, and is a measurement specifically of the inertia or sluggishness that a body, in the absence of friction, exhibits in response to any effort made to start it, stop it, or change in any way its state of motion."¹⁰ Mass and weight are easily confused because they are directly proportional to each other. Mass is not the same thing as volume, however. Even though we might commonly refer to something large as being massive, a massive object is not necessarily large at all. A solid lead block, plaster block, and a Styrofoam block vary widely in

mass even if they are equal in volume. Density is the relationship of mass to volume, and it is density that most often comes into play in the formal language of sculpture.

A sculpture built with a hollow shell may look like a solid form but is really operating with maximum volume and minimum weight. A form made with an armature that has been surfaced renders a hollow object that appears to be solid. Other examples include inflatables, which are skins, but like cast bronze figures are perceived as solid. Inflatables allow a sculptor to work with very large forms that can operate as solids, but without the problems of unmanageable weight. Large-scale traditional bronze casting is hollow for this reason. A hidden hollow interior reduces weight, expense, and is more compatible with the requirements of the casting process.

For some sculptors, mass and weight are critical to the work and lighter weight, large elements are not acceptable. Indeed, for those sculptors who insist on a certain *truth* to the materials, the very idea of a hidden volume or faux finish on a light material is objectionable. For others, materials and processes that allow for large volumes with little weight offer formal options that would not be possible otherwise.

In critique, these questions will inevitably come up as we question an artist's material choices, both in relation to how well the artist has realized the illusion of solidity and how the use of illusion impacts our reading of the work. If the artist's *intention* is to depict a solid form and the underlying support is showing, this could become a reasonable formal complaint. We might well ask if part of the sculpture's power is in its sense of weight and density. Is this lost when we see the evidence of the chicken wire pattern beneath the surfacing? Are there unintentional holes in the surfacing that allow a peek into an interior that has not been considered? Most people do not like to think of the bronze hero in the park as being hollow.

We should note here that a hollow space can be celebrated and explored in a number of ways. A form can be cast in a transparent material. An armature can be covered in a transparent skin. In this way, the interior space becomes an active part of the sculptural form whether it remains empty or is filled with various materials or objects. Remember the series of *imacs* that were encased in transparent plastic, so all could see to the computers' inner workings.

Materials and Process A *material* is typically thought of as the matter out of which a sculpture is made. And any given material in sculpture

brings to the equation its particular physical properties, which become central to the work. (That materials also carry their own meanings is something that will be considered in the next chapter.) A material behaves, or can be made to behave in a particular way, as an artist works with it. The artist's process is directly informed by the physical properties of the material being used, whether by following its natural tendencies toward a final form or by subordinating it for the sake of an idea.

Thus, material and process are often linked in an improvised dance of calls and responses, resistance and submission. Sometimes the material drives the process in the work. Clay is malleable, stone is hard, steel will bend in a way that is different from wood. Some materials can be cast as liquids and hardened to solids. Others can be tied, ripped, or poured. A material can be chosen because it is the best choice for the artist to realize an imagined form, but material and process can also influence the concept. This can happen when an artist has a personal affinity for a material or process, or when the artist starts with a raw material that guides the sculpting process and, ultimately, the resultant form.

Modeling, Casting, and Carving For many contemporary artists, sculpture still *is* modeling, casting, and carving. Artists continue to employ traditional materials like clay or wax because of the plasticity these materials offer and the ease with which they can be modeled into a range of forms. Since prehistory, soft clay has been modeled and sun-dried, or hardened and fired, to produce sculptural forms. Fired and unfired clay remains a viable material. Oil clay, which does not need firing, can be used to make molds or finished works. Clays that can be fired in home ovens and easily painted have been brought into the artist's studio from the world of kids and hobbyists. The modeling process has been expanded by contemporary sculptors to include pliable materials such as bubble gum, bread dough, and even feces.

If modeling is traditionally thought of as an *additive* process, then carving is *subtractive*. Wood and stone have been used traditionally because of their availability or longevity, but carving is possible with almost any material, including laminated Styrofoam sheets, soap cakes, graphite blocks, and even ice. The surface of a carved form can be left as is, the identity of its material exposed; or it can be treated to resemble some other material, such as cast plastic or metal, or just about any other illusionistic surface imaginable.

Modeled or carved forms can be used to make molds. These can be cast to make sculptural objects out of any number of materials from

bronze, to plaster, to clay slip, to plastics. One can cast and freeze or refrigerate almost any liquid material to produce a solid—water, Jell-O, Kool-Aid, even blood.

If a work that we are looking at has been modeled, cast, or carved, first note the material employed. Is the material readily apparent? Or has it been intentionally hidden? Is it foregrounded or treated as a given?

In critiquing modeled or carved work, we might first ask whether this is operating as a carrier for an image or as a material or both? A simple ball of bubble gum might be more about the material than the particular shape. Would another shape be better? Should it be bigger or smaller? A wooden head, carved with attention to the grain, might lead to a discussion about the way the undulations of the surface operate with the pattern of the wood. The same wooden head, painted and sanded to a smooth surface, would be less about the wood and more about the form and the paint handling.

What about craft? If a sculpture shows evidence of having been skillfully modeled but is so poorly cast that much of the detail is lost, we may take issue with that. If the mold-making process goes well, but poor modeling skills have undermined the original and thus the final product, we have a valid complaint. In looking at works that have been modeled or cast directly, consider how both processes come into play. Has each process worked independently, and how have they been orchestrated toward the final product?

There are as many things to consider in a critique as there are processes open to artists. Was the mold taken from a clay or wax positive, or was it made directly from a live model or a found object? Was the mold made from a found object altered with clay additions, or has it been cast in order to reproduce the original object but out of another material? Is the work in front of us that looks like a kind of crude cocoon made with plaster bandages that have been laid wet over an object or human model, or did the artist model an original positive? Is the work that has the appearance of an authentic artifact made from a mold taken from life? Depending on the artist's modeling skills, there is great potential in the modeled original, not only to invent form but also to play with verisimilitude and scale in disturbing ways. There are no hard-and-fast rules as to which approach is likely to yield a successful work. Thus, a critique, which begins as a formal look at what is in front of us, often becomes a fact-finding mission as to the artist's process and materials.

Construction Construction is a relative latecomer in the Western tradition of sculpture. Many of the concepts that we covered earlier in our discussion of objects in space are relevant in discussing the constructed object. In short, when we think of a constructed object in the most basic way, we are talking about building and joining.

The list of potential materials and processes that fall into the category called *construction* is endless, and we are as likely to use materials from the world of industry as from traditional art suppliers. Steel fabrication has joined and often replaced the bronze foundry. Wood, once carved, is now used to construct. Thin strips of wood are laminated into complex curves. Flat sheets of plywood, foam, and plastic are cut from patterns and then glued and stacked to create forms that look modeled. Dowels are tied, taped, glued, drilled, wired, woven, and more. The list goes on. Anything that can be used to build *is* used—sheets of rubber, felt, fabric, copper, Plexiglas, metal, plastic pipe, wire, rope, and shredded paper. Cast, carved, and modeled parts are often used in constructions.

Given the dizzying array of possibilities, how do we look at constructed works in critique formally? First, list the materials used. Is one material employed or several? Is one construction process employed or several? Next, note the shape of the sculptural object and its relationship to the space around it. Describe this. Consider shape: are there areas of density and open space?

Because each material or process brings its own set of standards to a critical discussion, we should consider each on its own terms and try to determine whether a problem comes from a lack of mastery of that material—the welds are bubbly, the wood is split, the duct tape has hair in it. We should also ask whether these are the most appropriate or only possible materials.

Material and Process as Form With any sculpture, the physical properties of the materials used to make it have an impact on the way it is built and seen. Indeed, the materials themselves seem to drive the process of construction emphatically, for some artists, and they are integral to the final form. These are sculptures in which, for example, wood is not sanded and surfaced to look like plastic, fiberglass is not painted to resemble flesh, steel armatures are not covered in screen and paper pulp to appear as stone, and Styrofoam is not faux-finished to become marble. Rather, the weight, color, texture, plasticity, or other qualities of the material are revealed and even emphasized.

An artist working this way is less interested in using material in the service of an image (even if this image is an abstract form) than in letting the material lead to the final form and the final meaning. The integrity of the materials is as important as the surface appearance. For all practical purposes, in works like these, the material/process *is* the form.

Consider a conventional art material like plaster. In traditional sculpture, plaster operates almost completely at the service of image, such as a three-dimensional hand or bust. But what if a plaster sculpture's sole purpose were to communicate its *plasterness*? What if the explorations of the plaster's physical properties—smoothness and texture, the time it takes to set, and its inherently subtle variations in color—are foregrounded in such a way that the sculpture exhibits all the marks, actions, and stages of its construction? To formally assess works like these, we might find ourselves describing scraping, gouging, smoothing, pocking, and pouring.

Indeed, sometimes in critique, the materials play such a dominant role in our formal assessment that we are led naturally back to descriptions of process. Thus, in addition to adjectives that describe material properties, such as transparent, dense, large, small, heavy, weightless, colorful, dull, textured, or smooth, we can describe the work as stacked, twisted, pinned, poured, torn, ripped, bound, splashed, spread, or woven.

Integrity and Illusion

When we look at a sculpture in critique, we should consider if the artist has transformed one material into the illusion of another. Are we seeing apparent weight or real weight? Does the sculpture in front of us have the *appearance* of density or is the form actually dense? Does that steel plate really lean against the wall or is it attached with hidden brackets? Is that massive bundle of sticks solid or is there an armature hidden inside that gives the illusion of density?

For some artists, the avoidance of illusion is not just an aesthetic choice, but one that is inseparable from the integrity of the work. A sculpture like this formulates its own rules of authenticity. What you see is what you get. Nothing is faked, and there are no disguises. The color of the sculpture is the color of the material. Parts are supported by their own accumulation, not by armatures or frames. The artist allows the properties of the chosen material to take center stage rather than a supporting role.

WEIGHING FORM AND CONTENT

We have seen that a formalist critique is one that limits itself almost entirely to a discussion of structure. The conversation revolves not around *what* the work says, but *how* it is said.

There is value in beginning a critique with a focus on formal matters. Indeed, some works may be so politically or personally charged that objective analysis is almost impossible without first bringing to bear on the work the cool eye of formal assessment. However, any critical discussion that limits itself to formal concerns to the exclusion of relevant content begins to seem absurd. How can we describe a painting in terms of palette and composition if we fail to mention that the painting is a depiction of horrific torture, and that it was painted by an eyewitness survivor? How can we describe the sublime lighting and beautiful sound score of a video installation if we fail to acknowledge that the footage is from night vision shots of aerial bombing? How can we limit our discussion to proportion and light source when faced with a female nude in a clearly pornographic pose? With this in mind, we now turn from formal matters in a work of art to consider its meaning.

NOTES

1. *Foregrounding*, originally coined by the Russian formalist Roman Jakobson for analyzing literary works by breaking them down into linguistic functions, also can be a useful term for talking about art. We use it to refer to that which stands out as unexpected in an aesthetic system—that is, an artist’s general emphasis of one element over others. For instance, if a highly realistic painting of a landscape has a surface that is covered with energetic and thickly gestured brushstrokes, the surface is being *foregrounded*. It is going against our expectations for transparent illusion and calling attention to itself. By noticing what is *foregrounded* in a work, especially at the beginning of critique, we can begin to discover the meanings embodied in its formal structuring.
2. *Mimesis* is simply the Greek word for “imitation.” Plato and Aristotle both use the term extensively in their writings about art, in the sense of *to represent* by means of imitation.
3. In the 1930s, a group of New York artists formed an avant-garde group, calling themselves the *Ten*. The group included Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, Ben Zion, Joseph Solman, and others. Disagreements over political issues as well as abstraction versus figuration caused the group to disperse in the late 1930s. Rothko split off from the Ten to join Pollock and other artists exploring abstraction.

4. In his essay *Modernist Painting* (1961), Greenberg echoes Bell's assertion that form is of primary importance in judging even representational work. He points out the revived reputations of such painters as "Uccello, Piero, El Greco, Georges de la Tour, and even Vermeer," going on to say, "but Modernism has not lowered thereby the standing of Leonardo, Raphael, Titian, Rubens, Rembrandt or Watteau. What Modernism has made clear is that, though the past did appreciate masters like these justly, it often gave wrong or irrelevant reasons for doing so." Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1961 revised 1965), in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 4, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Also found in *Art in Theory 1900–1990*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Cambridge, MA [1992] 1996), 760.
5. *Masters of Modern Sculpture Part III: The New World*, directed by Michael Blackwood, written by Edward Fry and Nancy Rosen (Michael Blackwood Productions, Inc., 1978).
6. Malvina Hoffman, *Sculpture Inside and Out* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1932), 52.
7. *Aristotle's Poetics*, Trans. S. H. Butcher (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 55–56.
8. Kirk Varnedoe, the late and eminent curator and art historian, organized the 1998–1999 retrospective of Jackson Pollock's work at New York's Museum of Modern Art. This anecdote comes from Jeffrey Brown's interview with Varnedoe in a news story about the Pollock retrospective. "Jack the Dripper," *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, PBS, MacNeil/Lehrer Productions, January 11, 1999.
9. Clement Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational, and So Forth," *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 133–138.
10. Paul G. Hewitt, *Conceptual Physics: A New Introduction to Your Environment* (San Francisco: Little, Brown, and Co., 1971), 21–22.