

Toronto Focal Forum Supplement to Moderator Training Session 2023

Critique – constructive evaluation of an artistic work

- useful commentary and suggestions
- deconstruct the work and evaluate the parts

Outcome – practical solutions to perceived deficiencies and reinforce the decisions the artist made that positively contribute to the overall work.

The Three Parties

The commentator must remain cognizant that the maker has creative and emotional investment in their images. Commentary therefore should always be respectful.

The maker should, in the moment, try to distance themselves enough from their work to be open to the comments and suggestions put forward.

The moderator must guide the commentary to ensure useful feedback for the maker as well as to ensure that any misguided statements are addressed and corrected.

There are various ways to deconstruct the work being viewed and the commentator usually will focus on one specific aspect. If comments are not being volunteered, the moderator can pose questions, without opinion, into any of the following areas:

- 1) **First impressions** – what was your initial impression? What elements triggered that response?
- 2) **Objective Description** – describe the work as if the others cannot see it. What do you see?
- 3) **Formal Matters** – consider the contributing and detracting elements such as composition, palette, presentation elements, etc. For example, how important to the composition is the placement of the bird at the edge of the frame?
- 4) **Narrative** – Does the work tell a story? How does the title inform us? What associations does the work evoke?
- 5) **Connections** – How does the work connect to other work and/or artists? Does the work pay tribute to or is it influenced by well-known work, subject or style?

By asking questions to clarify a commentator's words, the moderator can improve the overall feedback to the maker. At times no one in the group will be volunteering input. The moderator must keep the dialog going. Asking a neutral question to a non-volunteer can bring forth valuable comments. Often one comment will lead to another.

Over time, as a member of the Forum, you will recognize that some members will have insight into specific genres of work. Draw upon them if you think they can elevate the commentary on a specific image.

-Stephen Gilligan 5 January 2023