HUM110CL Module 1 Lecture Notes

All of the arts have some similar aspects or elements or terms. To be able to comprehend and communicate about a work of art not only from an emotional viewpoint, a student must understand some of the special concepts and terminology associated with the arts. We will discuss some terms to help you become a stronger and more advanced art critic.

A general term for the creator of an art piece is artist. However, each art type has a more specific name for its creators. In sculpture and painting, there are obvious names. In sculpture, the artist is called the sculptor, and in paintings, the artist is called the painter. However, in music and theatre, which are more collaborative arts, there is frequently more than one central artist. In music, the artist who writes the music is the composer and the artist who conducts the orchestra or choir is the conductor. In theatre, the artist who writes the play is called the playwright, and the artist who brings the play to life is the director.

All art types can be divided into form and content. Form is the means in which the art piece is put together, or the organization of the elements, the different components of the work. Each art type will have its own specific set of elements. The word "form" also has specific meaning within each art type. In sculpture, form refers to the literal form or shape of a piece. In paintings, form refers to the shapes the lines create. In music, form refers to the configuration of the notes and beats of music. In Western music, a form might be a fugue or an oratorio or art song. In theatre, form refers to the configuration of plot, character, scenes, etc. to create a one-act play or a five-act play or a no-act play as in Performance Art. Content refers to the meaning or subject matter of an art work. Within content are different elements such as plot, characters, setting, etc.

In the painting, *The Marriage of Arnofini* by Jan Van Eyck, the content is from the Renaissance and shows a wealthy couple in their bedroom pledging their undying love for each other in a wedding ceremony.

Form and content contribute to conveying an artist’s intent or theme. The term theme refers to the central idea of a piece, or what the art is trying to teach us. In Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the content of this play revolves around two teenagers from warring families who fall in love. Because of their families’ hatred to each other, the “star-crossed lovers” fall
victim to a misguided plot to elope, and instead both die. One of the themes of this play is about how dangerous and destructive prejudice and hatred can be.

In Diego Riveria’s painting, *Slavery in the Sugar Plantation*, the content of this painting is about the poor treatment of slaves in Mexico during the 1800s. The theme of this painting could be simply stated as man’s inhumanity to man. Or, it could be stated as the white man’s stronghold on people of color through violence. An art work may have more than one theme.

In music, theme refers to a principle melodic phrase or melody. For example, probably all of you are familiar with the theme of Beethoven’s “Fifth Symphony”. Search the web and listen to that distinctive theme.

That collection of notes and beats has often time been referred to by art historians as “fate knocking at the door”. But like the other arts, theme in music can also refer to an intent or purpose to teach.

Originally, when Beethoven wrote his famous symphony, “Eroica,” it was a dedicated piece to the glory of Napoleon’s victories, and was to be titled Bonaparte. When Napoleon glorified himself by self-crowning himself emperor, Beethoven grew disgusted with Napoleon, and renamed the symphony “Eroica,” which means hero. This symphony, instead of music dedicated to extolling the greatness of one individual, praises the greatness of those who are heroic.

Go on the web and find a picture of Seibou Kitamura’s sculpture, *Peace Statue*. This sculpture rests in the Nagasaki Peace Park which is a Japanese commemoration of the dropping of an atomic bomb in 1945 on Nagasaki, Japan. The theme of this sculpture is remembering those who suffered by the use of nuclear warheads in war. Did you identify the content of this sculpture?

This huge sculpture, over 33 feet in height features a muscular man who is primarily naked, and by his hair style, seems to be from a different time period other than 1955, the year it was created. There is actually a great deal of symbolism in the position of the man’s limbs. The statue’s right hand is pointing to the sky, indicating the danger that can lurk overhead
such as an atomic bomb. The left hand’s gesture is one of peace. The folded right leg indicates meditation or relaxation. The extended left leg indicates the beginnings of movement perhaps to act for peace. Out of the content of this man who seems almost godlike, Kitamura makes his point about peace.

The arts rely on the use of conventions. When viewing a play where, on-stage, the bad guy shoots the good guy, do you immediately run out to the lobby for fear of your own life and to call the police?

Of course not, because you understand the conventions of theatre. Theatre, the art of make-believe, like the other arts, asks of its viewers a “willing suspension of disbelief”, that is the acknowledgement by the audience that even if events are portrayed as real, they aren’t. In real life, people don’t sing and tap dance after receiving their first kiss, but we accept this behavior in a play or movie as a convention of the arts. A convention is accepted behavior or device or technique in an art form for the sake of the art.

During the Middle Ages, most of the content of the arts in Western Europe revolved around the Christian church. One intent of this art was to educate the viewer on a new religion, Christianity. With this new religion comes the idea that someone who is “special” within the church, either blessed with the Holy Spirit, or perhaps an angel needs to be recognized. But how do you demonstrate on a painting an intangible idea such as holiness?

Search for the Middle Ages mosaic called Abraham’s Hospitality. In this picture, one of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, Abraham, has been asked by God to sacrifice his only legitimate son. In the middle of the picture are three men with halos around their heads. This Middle Ages artist used the symbol of the halo to communicate with her audience the holiness of these three strangers. As the story goes, these three strangers were angels disguised in human form. The halos demonstrate that they are special in some way.

By substituting a tangible thing for the intangible, for example, symbolizing, the audience understands the idea. Symbols are a tangible thing that stands for an intangible idea or thing to create meaning.
Style in the arts refers to several different characteristics or meanings. Primarily, style refers to eras or time periods of artists who create in a certain way because of the nature and confines of the culture and tastes, and artistic developments of the times they worked in.

Search the web and listen to the following music: Johann Sebastian Bach’s Allegro from his “Brandenburg Concerto No.3 in G major,” 3rd movement and Duke Ellington’s “Take the A Train.”

Both pieces are written with the same intent: They are meant to be listening and perhaps dancing entertainment for a group of people that are preferably in some sort of concert hall. However, Bach’s and Ellington’s style is much different. Bach is one of the fathers of classical music. He wrote during the Baroque period in which music is characterized by busy, complicated, and rich sounds. Ellington wrote in the jazz style of 20th century America in which his music is also complex like Bach’s, but in a much different way. Instrumentation is different: the piano was just being invented during Bach’s era, while Ellington, a classically trained pianist, centered much of his music on this instrument.

It is relatively easy to define sculptures because of the style in which they were sculpted in. Even though the content can be the same for different sculptures, such as, glorifying a king and queen, each individual sculpture echoes the culture and time period they were produced in and reflect a different style.

As we proceed through this class, you will learn about the different periods our giants produced their works in, and how they were influenced by their time period, and how they break free of their culture’s tastes, and create their own styles.