

# Teaching For Art Criticism: Application of Feldman's 'Method of Art Criticism' to Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings

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**Abstract:** This study collected artworks from 30 first-year art education students and conducted critical analysis using Feldman's 'Method of Art Criticism'. Visual data were analyzed quantitatively; descriptive statistical techniques were used. Scores are viewed as mean scores and frequencies to determine how students' critical abilities are reflected. Use the Pearson correlation coefficient to find correlations between students' expressive ink figure drawings and art critical ability scores. Research indicates, Most students performed slightly better than average in critical analysis and performed best in selected analysis among the four areas of assessment (Description, Analysis, Interpretation, Judgment). In the context of students' expressive ink figure drawing and critical skills, the findings indicate that there is a certain connection between students' art critical skills and expressive ink figure drawing.

**Keywords:** Feldman, Art Criticism, Expressive Painting, Ink Figure Paintings, Critical Analysis.

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## 1. Introduction

In the current university art teaching, the basic knowledge of art education refers to students' ability to deal with art production problems. This ability includes Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings and critical knowledge. From a teaching perspective, Art Criticism is an important quality cultivation content and a key factor related to the quality of university art teaching. Teachers can impart this knowledge to students through theoretical subjects such as art history, art appreciation, art criticism, and aesthetics. Based on the importance of Art Criticism and the inevitable need to cultivate students' Art Criticism at the university level, college art teaching should recognize the characteristics of students' Art Criticism and the actual needs for cultivating this ability. It should start from college art teaching and formulate targeted training measures. Relying on Feldman's 'Method of Art Criticism', It enables students' thinking ability to be paid attention to and cultivated, and improves the overall effect of Art Criticism training to meet the training needs, so that the Art Criticism training of college students can achieve the expected goals, improve the overall quality of university art teaching, and meet the actual needs of university art teaching. Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings can be taken directly through the practical subjects of painting creation. Based on this, this research mainly discusses the Application of Feldman's 'Method of Art Criticism' to Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings.

In the long development process of Chinese art, Ink Figure Paintings has experienced repeated evolutions. Artists continue to explore and innovate, making Ink Figure Paintings develop in a more liberal and diversified direction, integrating more personal feelings and novel expression methods into their works, forming Expressive Ink Figure Paintings. Expressive Ink Figure Paintings have played a role in promoting an important branch of Chinese painting art. Painters are good at observing the phenomena of social life and seeing problems through their essence, so as to embody

their inner thoughts on the painting paper. They also keep up with the development of the times in terms of subject matter and explore new phenomena and things.

One of the common ways to improve students' critical knowledge in art teaching is to teach them art criticism. In this approach, students not only learn the appropriate steps of how to critique, but they can also apply correct critique strategies and apply them directly to Ink Figure Paintings. Tollifson(1990) made the argument in a NAEA consulting publication that writing notes in art criticism allows students to gain deeper learning that improves their language and perceptual skills. In addition to this, students' written criticism enables teachers to provide more detailed guidance, better evaluate critical activities, and assess students' growth in the art criticism process(Johnson and Cooper, 1994). According to a well-known art theorist, the pedagogical function of art criticism is to help students participate in the chain of seeing, analyzing, and experiencing, and then applying what they have learned about art to the world at large(Eisner,1988). Art criticism is important because it provides students with the opportunity to learn to perceive, explore, and describe the visual world in highly individual and unique ways. Such processes and encounters will inevitably be based on aesthetics(Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990).

Art Criticism is a field that examines the formation of artworks based on critical reflection. Shanks(2016) defines critical self-reflection as the process of analyzing and judging personal experiences("conscious exploration"). It is adopted as a method of analyzing the nature of knowledge in a subject. Mezirow (1991) states that "transformative reflection" is "...understanding an experience; we interpret it. Creating meaning becomes learning when we subsequently use this interpretation to guide decisions or actions.". He also mentioned that "critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based."Critical self-reflection allows us to correct cognitive shortcomings and problem-solving errors; new discoveries and conceptual understandings are achieved by locating and re-situating

images and ideas in contexts outside of familiar settings to challenge existing assumptions and enable new ideas and images to emerge from the process (Sullivans, 2009).

Art Criticism is crucial because it is an evaluative tool for analyzing, evaluating, interpreting and studying works of art and transforming the intangible into the tangible. The systematic approach of Art Criticism in this research project applies the art criticism model created by Feldman(1994), which is more suitable for the study of art practice.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Feldman E.B. (1994) ‘Method of Art Criticism’

Feldman's "Art Criticism Method" is a form of method for criticizing and evaluating works of art, guided by the structure and steps of four principles: description, analysis, interpretation and judgment.

#### Description

Description is the first aspect of art criticism. The words used in the description are like pointers, while they must be neutral and the descriptive language should refer to the visual evidence in the work. In other words, do not use words such as strong, beautiful and harmonious, weak and disorderly, ugly, funny and so on. If we're not sure how to describe something in the work, don't give it a name. For example, It may not be clear to us whether we are looking at a man or a woman. In this case we should say seeing "some people". It is wiser to be vague about certain details rather than make mistakes that could affect the final interpretation. Description is by observing the visual qualities of the work and making explicit/direct comments, The first involves recognizable, objective images(such as people, trees, lakes, grass, children, animals, sky); Second is the visual elements(i.e. line movement, space, shape, color, texture) and their qualities(Contemporary abstract and non-objective works rarely show us things with generic or proper names, so we must describe visual elements); The third is the technical quality of the artwork(i.e.tools, materials, instruments). Try to describe how the artwork was made. See if we can identify which media and tools were used. Tell the story of how they were manipulated to create their work. It includes content and themes in representational works as well as abstract elements in non-representational works(Feldman,1994).

#### Analysis

Analysis is the second step in the art criticism process, understanding how the various parts of the work interact. What do they do to each other? How do these parts influence or affect each other? Focus on the formal aspects of how the artwork is constructed and the message to be conveyed within the organization of the complete composition. Analysis relies on the critic's knowledge of artistic elements and design principles to illuminate the messages seen in a work of art, thereby expressing size(comparing sizes allows us to understand the importance of a part), Shape(research and describe how shapes are combined in a work), Color(notice whether shapes are similar or different in color, whether they are slightly different or strongly contrast, look for value relationships), Textured surfaces(note whether the texture treatment is real or illusory), Space(looking for clues about the placement of shapes when analyzing artwork), relationships between elements such as volume and other formal considerations. Examining an artwork as thoroughly as possible, slowing the viewer's tendency to jump to

conclusions, and reshaping ideas, meaning, and emotional qualities by analyzing the artwork's surface qualities (Feldman, 1994).

#### Interpretation

At this stage inferences are made from the visual evidence. An interpretation is really a set of inferences(a "good guess" or hypothesis) about the meaning of the visual evidence. The interpretation aspect focuses on identifying the individual ideas or concepts that determine the meaning of the work based on the information obtained from Steps 1(Description) and Step 2(Analysis). It combines the concept, the idea of a work of art(can you identify one big idea or concept that seems to sum up or unify all the individual features of the work), Feelings and feelings(explaining what we feel and feel when looking at a work of art) and representational content are unified into a whole, Therefore, the content and expression that the artist intends to convey in the artwork may create visual communication with the audience (Feldman,1994).

#### Judgment

The reasons why a work is judged as good or bad always have to do with some context and purpose. Any broad judgment about art should be based on the philosophy of art, not on our personal preferences(likes or dislikes). Judging is the final step of review and discussion based on the overall strength/merit/success of the work versus the philosophical context of the artwork. Feldman identifies and describes three philosophies of art that appear to help justify critical judgments, These are respectively: Formalism, which emphasizes the formal qualities of art and the importance of visual elements. Expressionism, which emphasizes the importance of communicating thoughts and feelings in a convincing and powerful way. Instrumentalism, which emphasizes the importance of a work's social purpose or utility(Feldman, 1994).

All of the above critical methods and the Feldman method of art criticism are used holistically and consistently to explain and illustrate the techniques and context of ongoing works of art, and to examine and interpret completed works of art.

### 2.2. Expressive Painting

In a narrow sense, the term Expressionism specifically refers to the art movement that emerged in Germany from about 1905 to 1925, which influenced the entire Europe. Broadly speaking, expressionism in the 20th century involves all fields and schools of modern art. All modern artistic creations that emphasize the artist's personality and subjective emotions and oppose traditional objective realism methods belong to expressionism. Including American Abstract Expressionism in the 1940s, German Neo-Expressionism in the 1970s and 1980s, and New Representational Art in the 1980s. Expressionism emphasizes the importance of communicating thoughts and feelings in a convincing and powerful way(Gao Minglu,2021).

China's "expressive" originates from Western expressionist aesthetics. Since Western modern art entered the historical stage at the end of the 19th century, the frequent changes in conceptual forms of modern and contemporary art and the impact of the digital image era have made it difficult to determine the factors of artistic creation. With the exchange and spread of human civilization, a new expressive painting method emerged in China. It incorporates the methodological perspective of phenomenology to reveal the essential

meaning of the art of painting, and painting becomes more variable and subjective. Expressive style paintings do not have the primary purpose of restoring visual reality and reproducing nature. They reflect a special perspective in the way of viewing. Expressive painting has brought new standards for artistic creation. From now on, art is no longer a description of the objective world, but focuses on the communication of the artist's personal emotions. Early Chinese paintings mostly imitated Western expressive paintings, showing strong inner spirit and abstract personal style. With the discovery of traditional culture and the awakening of national character, Chinese painting began to be based on the tradition of its own nation and take the road of nationalization. The first batch of expressive artists such as Lin Fengmian and Liu Haisu played a positive role in promoting the development of early Chinese painting art. Their paintings are called early Chinese expressive paintings. Formally, it adopts Western painting techniques to express Eastern themes. It uses brushstrokes and geometric color blocks to organize the picture, which is full of Eastern feelings and expressionism. Since then, Chinese painting has gradually embarked on a Chinese expressive path of its own, and its expressive language has a certain degree of traditional painting aesthetic connotation. Chinese painters started from the Western classical realism tradition, then entered the wave of Western modernism, and finally returned to the exploration of local culture(Gao Minglu,2021).

After the unremitting efforts of generations of painters, today's Chinese expressive paintings have a considerable number and scale. The third generation of expressive painters stands on the shoulders of their predecessors and fully demonstrates the spirit of the new era and traditional aesthetics in their paintings. Modern Chinese painting is rooted in traditional cultural soil, and its expressive characteristics are Chinese classical artistic conception aesthetics. Chinese painting neither imitates natural objects like Western realistic paintings, nor does it focus on personal expression like Western modern art. It is the collective emotion of literati, a blend of emotion and scenery, and a combination of meaning and image. The painter focuses on exploring the relationship between man and land, the nature, simplicity, and the intensity and depth of human vitality. They emphasize the intuitive experience of people's living conditions and feelings, the expression of spiritual impulses and emotions, and the uniqueness of painting as art in thought and language. The themes of the works may come from reality or transcend reality. Such a group of contemporary artists continue to actively explore and make suggestions for the development of Chinese expressive painting(Zheng Xinyan,2015).

### 2.3. Ink Figure Paintings

The impact of open culture has given new meaning to ink art. People with different experiences have different interpretations of the pictures, which proves the diversity of ideas of 'Ink Figure Paintings'. On the whole, painters attach great importance to the expression of the inner world and personality. People's self-awareness and reflection and criticism of the current social situation are the main characteristics of Ink Figure Paintings. Painters also pay attention to philosophical thinking, thinking about human nature and society through pictures, and exploring and expressing the deeper social nature. The various personal experiences of painters in real life and their understanding of

life are all sublimated into deep thinking about themselves, using exaggeration, deformation, bright color contrast and other techniques are reflected in his paintings. Expressive Ink Figure Paintings also have a critical function. On the basis of paying attention to personal emotions, painters make cultural criticism of reality and "uglify" objects to express people's stress, depression, pain and other negative emotions in real life. These criticisms are not the painter's dislike of society, but arouse attention and reflection by paying attention to some issues in society(Liu Jia,2016).

Ink figure painting breaks the traditional "applying colors according to category". The colors of the paintings are also richer under the influence of expressionism, rather than simply being dominated by ink. It can be divided into two major systems, one is a relatively strong color effect, and the other is mainly light and soft effects. From the perspective of modeling characteristics, expressive ink figures absorb not only the subjective, simple and expression-focused modeling style of traditional freehand figure painting, but also the exaggerated and deformed techniques of Western expressionism. His paintings retain the spirit of expressionism, emphasizing subjective feelings as the center, putting aside stylized and theoretical modeling constraints, and are constrained by perspective and volume. All characters are determined by the inner feelings of the painter. Expressive ink paintings mostly show simplification and exaggeration of shapes, which largely absorb elements of Western Expressionist shapes(Huang Hui,2015).

## 3. Methodology

Experimental research, a one-time case study discussed follows a standard form: the purpose of the experiment and the rationale for choosing the proposed study, the sample, the instrument, the variables in the study, and the data analysis and interpretation(Creswell,2011).

The study used a sample of 30(n = 30) first-year art education students. The sample was selected using purposive sampling technique(Fraenkel & Wallen,2009). A one-time case study design was used and students were tested to assess the effectiveness of the test. Because the study remains exploratory in nature, the sample is viewed as a case analysis rather than as representative of the population to which the findings can be extrapolated. For this study, the method plan involved two main activities. These two activities were designed to organize the procedures for collecting data.

With the assistance of two of the researcher's colleagues(associate professors at the university), the researcher followed the planned procedures to complete the task of monitoring, collecting and critically analyzing the works of 30 students. Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings and critical analysis by 6 evaluators to prevent possible bias in grading student work. This study employed a quantitative technique in the design of interpreting the research data. Descriptive statistics utilize frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores to determine student performance and identify differences in influencing factors through comparative means. Use the Pearson correlation coefficient to simply predict which dimensions of art criticism may affect Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings scores. Level is set to alpha 0.05.

## 4. The Research Findings

The overall performance of the 30 students' art critical

abilities is shown in chart 1.

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
30	44.00	77.00	62.267	7.830

chart 1. Students' art criticism ability assessment scores

Calculated based on a total score of 100 points, the average student knowledge level was 62.27 points. This shows that

according to general standards, students have a good grasp of art criticism knowledge and belong to the B- level. Although the overall score is not high, the students' understanding of art criticism is generally high. Of course, judging from the huge gap between the highest score of 77 points and the lowest score of 44 points, it seems that the students' abilities are uneven.

To further understand the students' scores, details of the score distribution are shown in chart 2.

Grade	Percentage (%)
A	0
A-	6.7
B+	13.3
B	23.3
B-	20.0
C+	20.0
C	13.3
D	3.3
F	0

chart 2: Students' art criticism skills assessment score percentage

Table 2 shows the score distribution of students' art criticism evaluation. The distribution is observed in terms of the percentage of students who received grades A(excellent) to F(poor). Out of a total of 30 students, no one achieved an A grade and only 6.7% received an A- grade. 13.3% of students received B grades. The majority of students received a B grade, with a maximum of 23.3%. 20% of students received grades of B- and C+ respectively, while the

remaining 3.3% received grades of D.

Having seen students' performance in art criticism, it is interesting to examine this performance from four aspects according to Feldman's model of art criticism, namely: description, analysis, interpretation and judgment. Figure 1 below shows the average student scores on the critical analysis exercise using a dimensional bar chart. The total score for each dimension is 20 points.

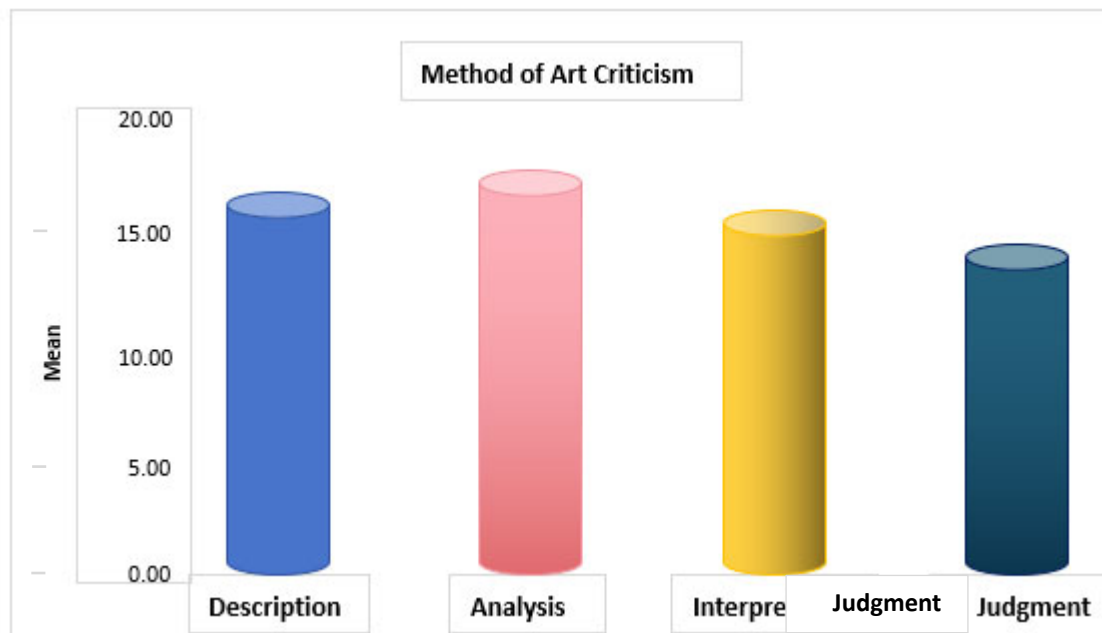


Figure 1. Bar chart of average student critical performance scores relying on the four critical aspects of Feldman's model of art criticism.

As shown in the figure, students showed fairly equal abilities in the four aspects of art criticism. However, a closer look revealed that students were highest in analytical skills, with an average score of 16.6. As expected, students performed worst on judgment, with an average score of 13.73. Meanwhile, they scored an average of 16.27 on description and 15.6 on explanation. From the results, students performed well in analysis and description. Pupils' skills in interpretation

and judgment appear not to be well developed.

After examining the performance of students' critical skills, the question now is, does this performance correlate with Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings? Now use the following results to answer this question. chart 3 shows the results of a correlation test using the Pearson method to determine whether such a link exists. Scores on Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings are linked to scores on Art

## Critical Skills.

Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings Score			Art Critical Ability Score			
N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	R	P
30	65.2	17.509	62.27	7.830	.436	<.05
*p <.05						

chart 3: Results between Students Expressive Ink Figure Paintings and art critical skills scores

As shown in chart 3, students' scores in Expressive Ink Figure Paintings (M = 65.2, SD = 17.509) were higher than those in critical ability (M = 62.27, SD = 7.83),  $r(28) = .436$ ,  $p < .05$ . Interestingly, there seems to be some form of connection between students' level of critical knowledge and their Expressive Ink Figure Paintings. It turns out that the Pearson correlation matrix,  $r(28) = .436$ ,  $p < .05$ , appears positive. From this statistics we can believe that students with good critical knowledge will perform well in their Expressive Ink Figure Paintings and there is a positive linear relationship between alpha.05 scores.

## 5. Conclusion

This study attempted to examine students' ability to relate art critical knowledge to Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings. The researchers drew some conclusions from their experience studying art criticism with 30 students, which also guide future research in art education. To a certain extent, art criticism provides students with the opportunity to better understand themselves, local culture, and foreign cultures, thereby bringing understanding and enjoyment.

After the students completed part of their research, their Ink Figure Paintings were evaluated by six higher education art educators. The score sum is then compared to the student's critical analysis of the assignment on a given topic against the four elements of Feldman's 'Method of Art Criticism'. At the end of the study, the researchers found that students only focused on two of the four elements to the expected standard. In terms of analysis and description, 30 students performed relatively well and achieved the expected standards for completion according to the Feldman's 'Method of Art Criticism'. Through their Ink Figure Paintings, two-thirds of students described the meaning of the subject of their work. Some of these students used technical terms to help them describe what they were seeing. Additionally, most students' interpretations were thoughtful, personal, and showed a deep connection to the artwork.

However, students did not perform well in the two areas of interpretation and judgment. The researchers found that although they described certain elements of the art using critical analysis, there was no further explanation of why and how the artist used these design elements to emphasize ideas, themes, or meaning in the artwork. This means that students do not make connections between their interpretation of the meaning of the artwork and the role of the artist in creating it. If students were forced to do so, they would make very personal judgments about works of art. The results showed that every student omitted such insights from their written responses.

Based on this study, we can conclude that it is not a natural reaction for college students to express their judgmental opinions in general situations, unless specifically asked to do

so. In summary, Students' Expressive Ink Figure Paintings only successfully touches on two of the four principles of Feldman's 'Method of Art Criticism'. Without prompting from the researcher, these two aspects of interpretation and judgment would not have been fully explored by students. However, students must have the knowledge to appreciate the beauty of art, identify local and international artists, and appreciate art when viewing art works (Description, Analysis, Interpretation, Judgment). The research results also remind us of the importance of carrying out Art Criticism activities in schools or colleges. We can improve students' abilities in this area through various ways. For example, students are encouraged to visit art galleries, museums, workshops and artist/designer talks. Of course, these activities require the support of schools, teachers, parents, artists, art critics, curators and all sectors of society.

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