

## THE ROLE OF FELDMAN'S THEORY IN ART CRITICISM: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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### Abstract

Art criticism is a process of reading, studying and analyzing the beauties inherent in works of art, to help specialists in a sound vision of the artistic, aesthetic and creative aspects of the artwork. Therefore, this study aims to identify the role of Feldman's theory in the process of art criticism. The importance of the study is manifested in revealing the role of the art criticism process in highlighting the objective, expressive and aesthetic values of the artistic work of Feldman's theory. This study is an artistic analysis that will reveal information about the role of Feldman's theory in art criticism. The study utilized the qualitative method of research. The researcher analysed the data collected for the study based on Feldman's approach to evaluate artwork that involves the following four steps: descriptive, formal analysis, interpretation and Judgment. The discussion section focuses on the detailed analysis of the artistic criticism method by Feldman. The study concluded that the steps of artistic criticism, according to Edmund Feldman, are sequential, regular and integrated critical steps, because they enter the essence of the artwork and describe the external form, content and meaning within the work, and also describe the different and varied values of the artwork, whether (formal, expressive or functional). These artistic critical steps serve as a means for us to read the artwork correctly and properly in an integrated and systematic manner.

Keywords: Role, Feldman, theory, art criticism.

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### 1.0 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Art criticism is concerned with the aesthetic judgment of artworks and depends on the elements and foundations that allow the viewer to perceive and view the artwork aesthetically. Gazaa (2001) defines art criticism as "the description, analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the artistic work, to judge its aesthetic value and the quality of its artistic production." Art criticism is a process of reading, studying and analyzing the beauties inherent in works of art, to help the connoisseurs or specialists in a sound vision of the artistic, aesthetic and creative aspects of the artwork<sup>1</sup>.

Art criticism is based on well-known methodological methods and steps, because the process of criticism is not just an evaluation of the artwork, it also requires extensive and deep knowledge of art schools and the foundations, as well as the elements and styles of art. This is in addition to knowledge of the materials, tools and techniques used in the artwork. There are many scholars interested in art and art criticism who have suggested critical methods for analyzing and evaluating artworks. The critical methods include: The Rusti method: It is based on three steps: descriptive analysis, formal analysis and meaning analysis. It is divided into two parts: internal analysis (implicit meanings) and external analysis (meanings not implicit). There is also Anderson's model of art criticism. It consists of five stages: First, the reaction; Second, cognitive analysis; Third: personal interpretation; Fourth: Contextual examination, in which the teacher assigns students to conduct research in the field of contextual or historical information related to the artistic work and Fifth, the Installation. There are two aspects to the last stage of the artistic criticism process: the decision phase and the evaluation phase.<sup>2</sup>

There is also the method of inductive criticism, it depends on collecting the visual elements that make up the artwork, then it involves describing the relationships that link these elements, and finally summarizing the critic's impressions. In addition, it is also necessary to describe the method of inferential criticism: where the critic first sets the criteria for judging the work in terms of design, subject matter, materials and function, then the work is examined to see the extent to which the work elements comply with the standards, and finally the critic judges the artwork. In addition to the empathic criticism method: This method is based on emphasizing the emotional

Note:

1. Gazaa, Tariq. (2001). The Nature of Contemporary Art Criticism in the Saudi Press - An Analytical Study. Published Master's Thesis, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah Al-Mukarramah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
2. Al-Mutairi, Safieh. (2014). The extent to which art education teachers apply the principles of educational art criticism in the intermediate stage in the city of Makkah Al-Mukarramah. A master's thesis published in the Department of Art Education, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah Al-Mukarramah, Saudi Arabia.

participation in the emotional interaction with the artwork using similes. Finally, as regards Edmond Feldman's (1982) method of art criticism: This method is one of the means used in criticizing artworks and revealing the beauty that lies within the works. It was developed by the contemporary American writer and critic Edmond Feldman. Feldman's method is summarized in four steps arranged in the following sequence: Description, analysis Formalism, Interpretation, and Evaluation. The Edmund Feldman method in art criticism is one of the very appropriate methods for the principles of art criticism at the educational and academic level. Also, the Feldman method is considered one of the most important contemporary critical methods as it is an integrated, regular and sequential critical method for analyzing artworks. from all its aspects, and many critics, artists and researchers agreed on the idea that the Criticism of works of art must pass through four stages as summarized by Feldman: description, formal analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Furthermore, Edmund Feldman's method is one of the methods most widely used by academic critics<sup>3</sup>.

## ■ 2.0 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This paper is conceptualized to identify the role of art criticism, which undoubtedly plays a significant role in enriching the art's creative and aesthetic state. The paper aims to identify the steps of art criticism from Feldman's perspective. Feldman developed a four-step method to be able to interpret, judge and evaluate artistic works.

## ■ 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the diversity of critical methods, each method has steps through which the critic can access the analysis and judgment of works of art. Khader Salahuddin (2004) says "Despite these multiple divisions of critical schools, each type has its steps leading to the judgment or interpretation of the artistic work, and all these divisions can be summarized into two directions in art criticism, namely: a subjective trend and an objective direction." Khadr (2004) defined self-criticism as "what the artist or others does to criticize the artwork and describe some of its characteristics. As for objective criticism: he defined it as studying all aspects of the artistic process, so the pros and cons of this process are determined, and they are compared and then the judgment is issued." Khader stresses that (2004) "criticism should be objective criticism and not subjective criticism to judge artworks as ugliness or beauty." He defines objective criticism by saying, "It is he who comes after a careful study and understanding of art, its foundations, elements, and methods of tasting it, in order to start judging works of art from a scientific standpoint on codified and studied foundations."<sup>4</sup>

Tariq Gazzaz (2001) confirms it about Feldman's method of art criticism by saying, "There are many ideas that organize the steps of art criticism, but most contemporary critics define the steps of art criticism in description, analysis, interpretation and evaluation. These critics include Hurwitz, Mittler, Smith, Gaitskill, and Madeiga Lankford Hamblen. Whatever the opinions of scholars might be, they differ in determining the steps of art criticism. The researcher agrees with Feldman and others in determining the next steps of art criticism consist of the description, analysis, interpretation, and the evaluation<sup>5</sup>.

One of the most important critical studies presented by Feldman (1970) is entitled "Teacher As Model Critic" this study focuses on the process of art criticism summarized by Feldman in four basic stages: the description, formal analysis, interpretation, and the evaluation. All of these questions revolve around the nature of artistic science, for example: what is the subject of the artwork, what is this work talking about, what are the visual effects of this work, and finally what judgments should be made on this topic. The current research benefited from this study in identifying the methodological steps followed in the process of art criticism and how to apply it, in order to employ it in the practical aspect of the current study related to the application of art criticism based on the Feldman methodology of art criticism.<sup>6</sup>

Dorienne, Rogers (1990) study entitled "A Model for the Integration of Art Criticism into the Secondary Art Classroom" aimed at identifying, explaining, and developing a practical model for teaching art criticism within the high school arts curriculum. This study involves the discipline-based art teaching approach described in the Getty publication in a composite art format, it includes the Art Criticism curriculum of Bloom, Feldman, Hamblin, and Kaelen. This study provides a set of lessons aimed at helping high school students, develop the skills necessary to be informed about art in terms of the history, aesthetic, and critical areas of the artwork. The study concluded that Feldman's method of artistic criticism represents one of the best monetary methods in terms of organization and sequence. It involves four methodological steps: the description, formal analysis, interpretation, and finally the judgment or evaluation of the artwork.

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3. Feldman, E.B. (1982). *Varieties of visual experience*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

4. Khader, Salahuddin. (2004). *Appreciation and compatibility with the comprehensive concept of art education and its relationship to the direction of the teaching profession among its teachers*. The Third Educational Conference - Towards a better preparation for the future teacher, College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.

5. Gazzaa, Tariq. (2001). *The Nature of Contemporary Art Criticism in the Saudi Press - An Analytical Study*. Published Master's Thesis, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah Al-Mukarramah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

6. Feldman. E. B. (1970). *Becoming Human Through Art: Aesthetic Experience In The School*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

This study concurs with the idea of the current study that Feldman's method of art criticism is one of the best critical methods in terms of organization and sequencing to describe, analyze and evaluate artistic works<sup>7</sup>.

#### ■ 4.0 METHODOLOGY

This study relies on the analytical approach to analyze the extent of art criticism that is practised and applied in the required and proper manner in artwork, meaning that this study is a field of artistic analysis to monitor the role of the application of artistic criticism by Feldman. Moreover, this study is an artistic analysis to reveal more about the role of the Feldman theory in art criticism. The study utilized the qualitative method of research. The study analysed the data collected for the study based on the Feldman approach that involves four steps to evaluate an artwork. The four steps include the descriptive, formal analysis, interpretation and Judgment. The discussion section focuses on the detailed analyses of the artistic criticism method based on the Feldman theory.

#### ■ 5.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

After an extensive study, the researcher concluded that Edmund Feldman's art criticism method is one of the most appropriate ways to clarify, explain and interpret artworks, as many art critics and researchers agreed that criticism of artworks must pass through four important stages, which are, as mentioned by Feldman, summarized as follows: Description, formal analysis, interpretation, judgment or evaluation of the work. On the other hand, this critical method follows a linear approach and moves from one stage to another in an orderly sequential manner. This method is also a systematic and integrated critical method for describing and analyzing works of art in all its aspects, in addition to this method, in particular, that enhances the aesthetic experience to understand art, its dimensions and value. In addition, these methodological steps developed by Feldman help to increase insight into the depth and dimensions of the artwork and enhance the aesthetic vision of the content of the artwork. It should be noted that the most important measure, guideline, gauge on which the criticism process is based is as follows: the visual elements of the artwork and the foundations that were used in its construction in order to define the artwork, as well as the relationships that exist between the elements of the artwork that make it a form belonging to one of the types of arts. In addition to the artistic methods adopted by the artwork, it includes the artist's intentions, originality in artistic tools, and the historical, social and cultural contexts of the artwork.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1: Method of Art Criticism – The Critical Process by Edmund Feldman (1993)**

No.	The Critical Process by Edmund Feldman	The Critical Process
1	<b>Description</b> Naming and describing the facts	Naming what an observer sees is part of the overall process of description.
2	<b>Analysis</b> Analyzing the facts	Dealing with visual evidence. It is an advanced type of description.
3	<b>Interpretation</b> Interpreting the evidence	The crucial third stage of art criticism: this is the point at which our search for meaning reaches a climax.
4	<b>Judgment</b> Judging the works of art	Final stage of evaluation of criticism is the evaluation of whole works of art. This sort of judging may seem presumptuous or perhaps it is downright foolish.

#### METHOD OF CRITICAL ANALYSIS (FELDMAN METHOD 1994)

To criticize artworks based on the Feldman method, it relies on four basic stages: description, formal analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.

**First:** The Description stage, through which the visual elements in the artwork are described and realized and an inventory of all elements of the work is listed, for example: the artist's name, the name of the work, the date, the material used, the space, the place, and a note of what is directly visible in it and in an accurate and detailed manner. Feldman (1994) says, "Words are used to draw the viewer's attention to something worth watching, to confront the ambiguous details in the artwork, and depending on the nature of the style, realistic works are easy to describe because they are clear, while many trends and modern art schools find them difficult to understand." Here the role of the critic emerges to describe the works in a comprehensive manner, because a good, clear and expressive description helps to convince people of the artistic work before them, through descriptive definitions of the name of the work, its material, idea, dimensions, production date, work environment, biography of the artist, and his style.<sup>9</sup>

7. Rogers, Dorianne B., (1990). "A Model for the Integration of Art Criticism into the Secondary Art Classroom". UNF Graduate Theses and Dissertations. 313. <https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/etd/313>.

8. Feldman. E. B. (1970). *Becoming Human Through Art: Aesthetic Experience In The School*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

9. See Feldman (1970).

**Second:** The stage of formal analysis, which is the process of analyzing the artwork in terms of its form, shape, colors, lines, sizes, shapes, color relationships, surface textures, shape, floor, composition directions, and the way the artist organizes a set of these elements in the artwork, in addition to an analysis of the most important formal principles and artistic and aesthetic values. Feldman (1994) defines analysis as "the gathering of evidence to interpret and judge a work of art." According to the opinion of Feldman, "the relationship of sizes, colors, textures, and all design elements, have an impact on the overall work of art, because the elements of the artwork interact within a framework and one entity affects one in the other and the parts as a whole". Formal analysis depends mainly on the description, and it searches for the meanings that the shapes reflect, whether they are apparent meanings or implicit meanings, as the apparent meanings relate to the artistic values and external components of the work on the one hand, and on the other hand, the extent to which the artwork is related to a particular style or approach. As for the implicit meanings, they are related to the ingredients within the artwork. Feldman (1994) says that the process of analysis: is to find the relationship between the forms and the effect of one on the other. Similarities within the artwork affect the viewer, so a system must link the shapes, colors and textures that reflect in their entirety the formations within the framework of the artwork. Second: Content analysis: As for implicit meanings, it relates to the ingredients that exist within the artwork, such as, presenting a symbol, an ideological context, or a historical one... and so on, and here is the role of the critic to express what he perceives in those forms, through the idea found within the artwork, to reach an explanation of the purpose for which this artwork was produced. Form and function are the focus of the viewer's attention because they constitute the main subject on which the artist focuses in the process of his analysis. After completing the formal analysis stage, we move to the stage of the interpretation of the work<sup>10</sup>.

**Third:** Interpretation stage. This stage is considered one of the most difficult steps of art criticism, because it is through the interpretation that the meaning and content of the work is clarified, and the comprehensive meaning of the artistic work that the critic has been exposed to is also found based on his formal and implicit analysis. At this stage, the critic presents what he has reached in the artwork by means of verbal expressive language, whether it is spoken or written. The task of the critic at this stage lies in helping others to know the underlying ideas and meanings contained in the artwork and the problems it addresses. The process of interpretation is one of the most complex steps of art criticism because it depends on the outputs of the product of pleasure and preference for the work of art. In addition, the interpretation process depends largely on the critic's vision he has reached through the stage of description and analysis, and this is confirmed by Feldman as he explains "that the interpretation differs from the description, as it includes the viewers' feelings of the content of the artwork and the meanings it contains."<sup>11</sup>

**Fourth:** The stage of judgment or evaluation of the artistic work (Evaluation). This is the last stage. The evaluation stage of artistic criticism is the final result, the outcome the critic has reached through the steps of description, analysis and interpretation in the critique process. In it, the quality of the artwork is evaluated, the artist's mastery of his work in terms of his style, and artistic skill, and the extent to which he is consistent with the use of materials that enhance the content of the idea that is represented by the content of the artwork in a whole. The evaluation stage includes the positive and negative aspects of the various contents inherent in the work. The evaluation of the artwork clarifies the importance of the concepts and indicates the criterion of acceptance and preference for the critic. Also, through this stage, a moral rank or a material value is given to the artwork compared to other similar works of the same direction and artistic style, meaning that the evaluation of the artwork is by giving a rank to the artwork in terms of the formal, expressive and functional direction, and all these patterns are adopted by the critic to evaluate the artwork<sup>12</sup>.

## ■ 6.0 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The study shows that after presenting the steps of artistic criticism according to Edmund Feldman, the researcher finds that these critical steps are sequential, regular and integrated, because they enter the essence of the artwork and describe the external form, content and meaning within the work, and also describe the different and varied values of the artwork, whether (formal, expressive or functional). These artistic critical steps are a means for us to read the artwork correctly and properly, and in an integrated and systematic manner. According to Mahmoud El-Bassiouni (1986) "the principle of art criticism is that it is an entrance to taste and [it] respond[s] to the aesthetic values in the artwork."<sup>13</sup> Feldman (1994) believes that "no one can be a critic unless he is able to speak, so there must be some kind of verbal terms, and the critic must have a language that he can use effectively." There are important aspects that must be taken into account in the process of artistic criticism as Al-Manasrah (2003) spoke of: First: Familiarity with clear definitions of technical terms. Second: Familiarity with technical materials and techniques. Third: Familiarity with visual planning and its terminology.<sup>14</sup>

## ■ 7.0 CONCLUSION

In light of the foregoing, the study concluded that the methodological steps of artistic criticism of Edmund Feldman are among the best contemporary art criticism methods in terms of organization, sequencing, comprehensiveness and integration. Feldman (1982) says, "Art criticism is a written or spoken conversation about art that includes praise, comparison, description and explanation." Feldman (1983) also

10. Feldman, E.B. (1994). Practical art criticism. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

11 & 12. See Feldman.(1994)

13. Bassiouni, Mahmoud (1986). Education of aesthetic taste. Cairo, Egypt: House of Knowledge.

14. Al-Manasrah (2003). Languages of the plastic arts, introductory theoretical readings. Majdalawi House for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan.

says, "Artistic criticism complements the aesthetic experience by making it social or general."<sup>15</sup> Feldman's method of artistic criticism used in this study is formulated on integrated, regular and sequential methodological steps based on description and analysis in terms of form and content, and then interpreting the meanings of the work, up to the final stage of evaluating the artwork, and explaining the artwork. This is in order to discover the meanings, concepts, and aesthetic values inherent in this work and clarify the importance of these meanings. The study also found that criticism of artworks should not be without the four main methodological steps that represent the justifications on which the critic builds wisdom, which Feldman summarized as: description, formal analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.

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15. Feldman, E.B. (1982). Varieties of visual experience. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.