

SCRIPT

ART CRITS: 20 QUESTIONS – Talking About Talking About: An Introduction to Visual Art Critiques – by Giles Bunch.

PART FOUR READING AN ARTWORK AND PUBLIC SPEAKING TIPS

(Narrated scene)

Giles Bunch: Jheni, what process do you go through when you look at a piece of art?

Jheni Arboine: I suppose first I'm looking at its content, its media...

(Talking heads – facilitators, participants and industry professionals)

00.34

READING AN ARTWORK

David Moore: So to begin with we're just talking about very simple things, it's "what are we actually looking at?"

Sarah Rowles: What colours are the artist using? Why is he using them? What scale has the artist chosen to use? Why has he chosen to use that scale?

Katherine Fishman: I can talk about what the work reminds me of

Sarah Rowles: What materials is the artist using and why? What textures is the artist using and why?

Garry Barker: Is it vertical? Is it horizontal? Is it like you standing vertically?

Sarah Rowles: If they've titled it, what significance does the title have?

Garry Barker: Is it bilaterally symmetrical? Is it in balance, or stand on one leg?

Sarah Rowles: Do we think there's some kind of story or narrative going on?

Katherine Fishman: A lot of the time I give artists or contextual references I think are relevant and interesting for the person to look up

Sarah Rowles: All of these questions, I think, you know, only once in my education I remember someone going through that with me

Kelly Chorpening: I kept saying last week when we had this critique that everyone was getting into clever language, and I kept saying, "yeah but what we're looking at here, is a circle in a piece of paper".

Sarah Rowles: In my head, I need to go through some of the basics of, “OK, so I can see this object. OK, it's blue, why is it blue? What does it mean if it's blue? It's shiny, why is it made to look shiny? OK, it's large, why is it large?” If you see what I mean, so all these, the basics of reading all of these visual qualities in order that I can try and build up an understanding of what is it that they're trying to do.

Miraj Ahmed: Because they're thinking of the overall concept and the various layers but they forget that actually these are marks on paper

Sarah Rowles: But, before I could have the time to do that, immediately, in their first line someone would say, “Oh, this work reminds me of”, and then, announce some really famous artist, so, Kippenberger's whichever, piece, or Koon's whatever, and then half of the room will carry on the discussion around that work, but if you didn't know that reference, you're immediately prevented from taking part in the discussion. It's really rare that that person then unpacked it, or anyone has the guts to ask

(Narrated scene)

Giles Bunch: We've heard some of the questions that an individual might think about when they begin looking at a piece of art, and some of the issues that can emerge when talking about an artwork in group situations. Here are some of the methods that people use when starting up discussions, and analysis round and art work, these can be particularly useful in critique situations

(Talking heads – facilitators, participants and industry professionals)

Jim Hamlyn: There was this idea to get people to describe what they're seeing as if they're describing it to someone that's listening on the radio.

David Moore: Talk about it even in terms of gestures or sounds or, you know, which at first, using humour, things that surprise the students. You say well, that looks a little bit like “Pop” (*makes popping sound*), or something like that, so they're like “What? What does he mean by that?!”

Garry Barker: We start the analysis of visual literacy through an awareness of the body

David Moore: It just kind loosens them up a bit, and gets them used to the idea of talking all the time

Garry Barker: We can start developing conceptual thinking through the reality of the body and making, as a starting point rather than setting it somewhere over there

Jim Hamlyn: It's good to start critiques with the most basic things, just to start with the description

Kelly Chorpening: This year I did a matching game where I had artists' writings about work without visuals, and asked people to guess what they thought the work was. Usually their guesses were way off from what the person had written

Nathan Chenery: The work's visual. The way I think about technical literacy, so actually, my part when students come and, they say, "I've got this idea but how do I do it?" They need to understand the technical aspects of it. I know there are some places where they go to the technician, and they get it built and they come back and they go with it, but if they're not building it, they're not understanding it, and they come to a crit situation, and get asked "so what are you doing here, why have you done this?" And if they don't know the answer to that, then they're going to struggle. So it's kind of, yeah, equips them with the knowledge they need to talk about that work

(Narrated scene)

04.55

Giles Bunch: We're in the final section of the video,

Jheni Arboine: We've all done really well to get this far. Let's give ourselves a round of applause, it will be a good morale boost for the final segment

(Various participants are shown clapping once imitating a director's cut)

Giles Bunch: Jheni, I feel much better after that.

Jheni Arboine: Me too.

05.15

SPEAKING IN PUBLIC

Giles Bunch: Let's talk about public speaking. As we know, being good at presentations, or public speaking, isn't a prerequisite for being a successful artist. But this isn't to say that it is not important to be aware of these techniques that allow you to communicate better with people, especially in critique situations, and as Alison James points out, it's assumed that everyone picks it up along the way: an incorrect assumption that means that many people never develop these skills at all.

(Talking heads – facilitators, participants and industry professionals)

Alison James: What we do is we assume that by the time people get to university, or especially if they're mature students, they've got enough life experience that they'll know how to do these things. So I think we rely on the fact that somebody else will teach them somewhere.

Laura North: There are so many times as a creative student, and as a professional that you need to speak, whether it's in class, in a crit, in meetings

Arthur Watson: I think it's always going to be important that students can articulate their ideas,

Laura North: And then pitching for business, there's so many scenarios

Arthur Watson: It is important that they learn to discuss things, not just among their peer group, but with others

Laura North: You need to feel OK about doing it

Arthur Watson: Because sooner or later people are going to be interviewed or something

Laura North: It's very easy to go "Oh, I just won't participate, or won't speak, or I won't do that meeting". But people that do, tend to get ahead, and the truth is, whilst you're in study, it's fine you can probably, you don't always have to participate, and you can learn quite a lot, it's fine, but if you're a professional in the creative industries, if you're a freelancer, and if you don't go and talk about your work, and you don't pitch your ideas, it's going to be really hard for you to get work. I really believe so much in trying to create some sense of equality. And if you're talented, it's really important for you to give yourself a better opportunity to do well in life, because otherwise you'll look back and go "Oh God, there's all this stuff I didn't do when I could have done"

(Narrated section)

Giles Bunch: It's important to be able to communicate the things that you do, so here are some tips to help improve this.

(Talking heads – facilitators, participants and industry professionals)

Alison James: Number one is believe in your subject. If you believe in your subject, you're interested, you're keen, you've researched it, you're thinking about what your position is in relation to it

Roddy Hunter: Ask the students to do a one-minute presentation on something that they are interested in and are knowledgeable about

Alison James: It may have raw edges, but that belief, that interest, that passion, that comes through, and I think that's really, really important, because that will inform all the talking you have to do. And I know we don't always have that luxury of being able to love a subject we need to talk about and there are things we just need to communicate, even though they're not, terribly interesting.

Roddy Hunter: So you give someone something to talk about that they know about, and people are very apprehensive, but I think, pretty much by the end of the first year, you then take that one minute and then you make it five minutes, and then, you know, people make presentations on their essays...

Laura North: Partly preparation, if somebody doesn't have the chance to prepare that makes them nervous,

Nim Kook: I think preparation is, the key thing that made me feel really confident

Alison James: I think quite often also if we're nervous, we're nervous because we've had a bad experience, and so we rehearse that bad experience. So any techniques that are going to help you get rid of you replaying in your head that terrible time are good. Visualisation is a really good technique, so instead of rehearsing "Oh my God, wouldn't it be awful if I fluffed, dropped things", it's in visualisation: you just think about what is it, what is the best possible outcome, and imagine it, but imagine it in such a real way that you can imagine the temperature of the room, the gaze of the people, how you're feeling inside, how your material is coming across, and you just conjure, in your head, this kind of picture. So you know,

it may sound a bit funny but elite sports people do it all the time. It's that psychological management that you're doing to get in control of your mind and your nerves

Katie Streten: Body language is incredibly important when you're presenting

Kristine Omandap: I found myself at some points, with my arms going all over the place and I was playing with my hair and I was just doing things. So I try to keep quite calm

Katie Streten: There are sort of three ways of using body language. If you are a very animated person, you speak a lot like this and your hands are all up in the air and a lot of emphasis is going on, you immediately start to cause tension, anxiety, and it all feels a bit kind of hectic. On the other hand, if you stand with your hands by your side, and you don't move, or you stick them in your pockets like this, and you don't speak, there's an instant kind of withdrawal, there's an instant kind of removal I suppose from the audience, and there's a sense that you're a bit static

Kristine Omandap: But at the same time still be excited about my work because, you know, if you don't speak with some excitement and some sort of, I don't know, movement in your story; then people get really bored

Katie Streten: So what you want is for your hands to move in the central part of your body. This part of the body, and your hands in this part of the body, actually makes people feel very relaxed. So if you find that you're the kind of person who holds your notes, and grips them like this, or wants to put your hands in your pockets all the time, or fold your arms or whatever it is, the easiest thing to do, and it will feel very strange, is to take your notes, anchor your elbows into your waist, and practise doing this (*moves forearms left to right without leaving anchor*), as you speak, and, when you practise it, you will feel like an idiot, but, the net effect is that you get used to having your hands in the right space, you start to move them in a slightly more fluid way; and gradually your elbows start to come out of the side and you get to a more comfortable space. It means that you're not rigidly like this, or kind of madly like this and what it does is, it makes you more relaxed, and it makes your audience more relaxed

Alison James: I think the presentational mechanics are often things that get overlooked, because people see them secondary to the delivery of the content, or the talking about the subject. But it's amazing how many lost opportunities there are when people don't understand how to make eye contact with the group, how to make sure that you're talking to everybody, how to make sure that your voice can be heard at the back, how to project a kind of confident and engaging persona even if you're really not feeling it inside

Nim Kook: When they have no expression, yeah, it's I think the point, yeah, then it makes me nervous

Alison James: I joke with them. I say, "look at your smilers and noddors, because if you're out there, if you can see a smiler or a nodder, then, instantly you've got somebody who's a friendly face in the room. If you haven't got any smilers or noddors, and you're too nervous to make specific eye contact, look at a point just above their heads; because, you know, it will look like you're looking at them, but you'll feel like you're giving a sweep to the room, and you're not just"... (*looks down at her extended hands over her lap*)

Katie Streten: Write everything out long hand, then condense it down into notes.

Alison James: What are your three key messages? What are the three most important things that you want people to remember from what you're going to talk about?

Katie Streten: Smile and say hello. I really think it changes a room dynamic, and it makes the experience a lot more pleasurable. And smiling has a physical, psychological effect on you. You know, this is a well known fact, it makes you feel more happy and when you feel happy, you feel relaxed, and then the audience starts to feel relaxed and then they sort of start to come with you

13.39

(Narrated scene)

Jheni Arboine: *(Yawns)* So that's the end of the crit then?

Giles Bunch: Really? Tell me it's true

Jheni Arboine: Silence, it must be. How long have we been here?

(calendar shows that they have been there for four days)

(Yawns) Let's go home

Giles Bunch: Yes, I want to go home,
What are you having for tea?

14.58

CREDITS

END