

## Critical Review of the Learning Process

I was quite apprehensive at the start of this course. Although I had completed (and very much enjoyed) the level 1 “Understanding Art (Western Art)” course, there had been a gap between completing that course and commencing this one. I was also a little concerned at the level of study that might be required of a Level 2 course.

I also believe that the course has helped to broaden my view of art in three major ways. Firstly, that art is a product of its time and environment. Previously I had not really considered the historical context of a work of art, merely admired it (or otherwise). Early on in this course I read Baxendale’s account of artists working in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and this really brought home to me how patronage, politics and other factors can influence how art is produced. My study of the Pre-Raphaelites for my final essay also showed me how social factors and the hierarchy of the Academies and critics can influence the works of art produced.

My second major learning point was the personal/sociological response to art when studying Parson’s Schema. I struggled with this at first and, at the suggestion of my tutor, I reworked the exercise before submitting for assessment. I found the different descriptions of the levels quite clear, but then when trying to apply it in practice the boundaries seem rather blurred – would a particular response fit into this level or the one above? As with much of life, it is more shades of grey than clear black-and-white boundaries. I think that with rereading Parsons work and further study, things did become clearer and I had a better understanding of the concept. Despite my struggles with this part of the course, it was one of the sections that I most enjoyed. It was fascinating to study how different people would respond to art rather than just to consider my own reaction. I also like to think that as my OCA studies have progressed then I have progressed to the upper levels of the schema.

Another area I initially struggled with was a definition of what art is. My early reading on a previous course had led me to Gombrich’s statement that “There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists”. My detailed reading for this course, especially D’Alleva, taught me how much more complex the matter is, with her definition being much more complete. You can, however, understand the definition but still struggle with the concept in certain circumstances. I encountered this when studying works from other cultures in the exercise “Images of unfamiliar works”. I visited the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts as part of my work for this exercise. There I found many works, displayed in cabinets, with labels indicating their material and origin, just as would be the case in any gallery. But what struck me was that few of them had been produced “as works of art” by “artists”. More often they were objects produced for spiritual or religious purposes. I wondered how something produced for such a different purpose can now be classified as a work of art? To my mind, it was more an appropriation of another cultures work to satisfy a Western aesthetic demand.

I struggled with this concept for some time, but began to understand it better when I discovered an essay at the SCVA which explained the process by which such pieces can be regarded as art, that somewhere in the process of appropriation an object becomes endowed with those values that we would regard as artistic. I learnt, therefore, to consider that the intention of the producer of a work of art is not paramount. Something that was not created as art can still be regarded as such if it is considered to possess or be endowed with qualities that make it art.

Perhaps this process is a reflection of my learning style. Some time ago I was assessed for this using the Honey and Mumford questionnaire (Honey and Mumford 1982). This is based on Kolb’s

Experiential Learning styles. I came out quite strongly as a 'Reflector' which is described on the University of Leicester website by Mobbs (ND) as one who likes to "stand back and view experiences from a number of different perspectives, collecting data and taking the time to work towards an appropriate conclusion". I think that my consideration of 'what is art' illustrates this and I also think that the distance learning method complements my learning style.

The scope of this course has also broadened my horizons of what to regard as art. Compared to my Level I Course I studied much more widely, looking at cave art, stained glass, work from very different cultures. I also appreciated the exercise which looked in detail at a particular method. I chose to study how stone sculptures are produced and I think that my knowledge of the methods and tools used has helped me to appreciate the final work more fully.

I learned a lot from the exercise that required me to look at a work of art that I was not initially favourably inclined towards. I chose to study 'Bucket Man' by John Davies. Whilst I can't truly say that I really like this work now, the process of studying it in more detail and researching the artist's methods taught me a lot about contemporary art. Whereas previously I might have been tempted to summarily dismiss works of art that didn't immediately appeal to me, I now understand that there is a lot that I can learn from, and thus start to appreciate, many works that I don't initially think that I like.

I have benefited greatly from having Alumnus access to JStor and RefWorks. JStor has enabled me to access a much wider range of materials for many of my exercises and, despite early struggles with it, I find RefWorks an invaluable aid to citation and Bibliography creation. Neither of these facilities were available to me when I undertook my first studies so it has been an important learning experience trying to get the best out of them. JStor especially, has enabled me to vastly improve my research skills and I am now able to evaluate material from an excellent range of resources. The difficulty comes in assessing what is really relevant to the topic under consideration and what is simply interesting to read. I think I have become much more adept, with practice, at prioritising what deserves the best investment of time.

As I stated, I believe I have become much more capable in forming my own views and confident in my ability to express them. I have also developed a much wider base of knowledge. I think that this is well demonstrated by my annotation exercises and how they have developed and improved as the course has progressed. I think that I am now making much better use of written material and resources and that the course has stimulated me to explore galleries and museums and to study individual works in much more detail than was the case when I first started. I definitely visit galleries more often than I used to and I get more out of each visit.

I am pleased with my progress on this course. I think that my degree of development can best be summarised by my approach to studying a work of art. At the start of this course I would read what others had to say about it and I would then try to understand what they were saying and this would influence, or even form, my own point of view. Now, if I study a work of art, I form my own view about it and then read what others have said to see whether I agree with it or not. I feel much more confident in my own judgement and ability to express my views on art. This has come from the wide reading that the course has encouraged me to undertake – as well as from the structure of the exercises required.

This has all helped me develop an excellent range of subject knowledge. One of my biggest failings, though, has been that I have not updated my Learning Log regularly enough, so I am left trying to catch up with things at a later date. When there is a lot going on it is always easy to think "I'll catch

up later". The danger is that sometimes it never happens. It is not that I haven't learned things, but I haven't always given exercises or reading due consideration by writing them up promptly. Whilst my critical and evaluative skills are good, if I could start again, this is something that I would do differently.

1469 words

## Bibliography

Honey, P. & Mumford, A. (1982) Manual of Learning Styles London: P Honey

Mobbs, R., (ND) <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/gradschool/training/eresources/teaching/theories/honey-mumford> [Accessed 12/03/2017]