

Audience Discussion

Following the panel presentations, the audience offered comments, questioned emphases, and asked for clarity on issues related to the Feldman Method. Some of these concerns are related here. Feldman's responses are included.

Issue: Form is important to communicate intentions. The organization and balance of the Sistine Ceiling contribute to its magnificence.

Feldman: That is a partial truth--form is real--but analysis that stops with formal description seriously weakens interpretation. The Sistine Ceiling frescoes are an attempt to explain the moral history of mankind. Formal analysis is useful in that it gives us access to works from many cultures without our special knowledge of that culture, but that is only the beginning: to interpret art (which is our central educational task) we have to investigate the impingements of form on the lives of people--the people who happen to be our constituents. We have to find connections between the meanings of art and the needs and interests of our constituents.

Formalist doctrines have become a fetish which has made art educationally impotent, and that is why our profession is in trouble. There is very little you can say about form besides saying that it exists, or that it evolved, or that it is identical to content--all of which is learned nonsense.

The trouble with Bell and Fry is that they have nothing intelligent to say about art as it enters the lives of real people, as opposed to the Bloomsbury crowd. How do you know form is any good? You just know it because you attended Oxford or knew Vanessa intimately. We get no guide or method that reasonably intelligent people can use to determine what a particular organization of form urges, or says, or recommends. When we come to the actual teaching of art according to formalist doctrines, we are in a bind. To say that "it turns me on" is not art criticism, especially in an educational context.

Now, about what you do in privacy, when looking at a Matisse, with a glass of sherry in one hand and a cigar in the other--about that we shouldn't talk or teach.

Issue: Is there a differentiation to be made between criticism and response? Literal/detached--global/involved? Should aesthetic perception be differentiated from aesthetic criticism?

Feldman: Art historians do not handle the issue.

Issue: Aestheticians say that is what is wrong with the approach art historians take.

Feldman: Aestheticians need to look at more art?

Issue: Does critical analysis lead to fuller aesthetic response? (a number of voices on this issue)

1. One can be very analytical and have little aesthetic response.
2. One can have an aesthetic response and not engage in analysis at all.
3. Analysis leads to heightened aesthetic perception--leads to a new looking--it may or may not lead to greater aesthetic response.
4. An aesthetic response is global, not sequential--not A, B, C.
5. Criticism takes place in a context; therefore, it is socially concerned.
6. Historical, critical, aesthetic, emotional, and practical concerns must be considered at the response level of the audience--children and adult alike.

Issue: Should we be concerned that the system (Feldman Method) may be used as law?

1. Those who use the method adapt it to their own needs.
2. Teachers project their own values on the system.
3. Teachers use the system to teach their own values.
4. The system has greater or lesser application according to the cultural-social values of the audience: a network of economic, marketing, and social concerns interface with aesthetic values, but cannot be explained by aesthetics.

Issue: The term, aesthetic value, lacks precision.

1. Is the value in the object-formalism/objectivism.

2. Is the value determined by the audience-contextualism/pragmatism.
3. How does the teacher make use of a knowledge of aesthetic theories?
4. Aesthetic value varies depending on one's philosophy of art.

Feldman: We are trying to use works of art to illuminate people's lives. This is not necessarily an aesthetic concern: It is an intellectual, emotional, and economic concern. One of my educational goals is that people not be used and exploited. Art education has a role to play in preventing emotional and cognitive exploitation. Indeed, art can do this better than many other subjects in the curriculum because so much of our thinking, feeling, and behaving has visual roots.

My system of valuing (Feldman Method) has three grounds: formalism, expressivism, and instrumentalism. These are the grounds that most critics use to determine whether a work is good or not. Formalists say all the parts of a work cohere, get along together, and are harmonious: the work pleases me, and people constructed like me will like it as much as I do. Expressivists say the work is good because it speaks truly about matters that count. Instrumentalists say that a work is good because it aims our emotions and thought and behavior in a direction that church, state, party, or corporation believe is good for us.

Much art is designed to affect human productive activity and purchasing behavior. It tells us who or what to like or dislike, how to spend our money, and what behavior to emulate. These things have little to do with art as art; they have much to do with the organization of our emotions, our social lives, and the physical shape of our collective existence.

Issue: Capriciousness of circumstance affects what is taken as valuable.

1. Luck plays an important part in what is considered valuable.
2. Press and marketing are part of circumstances.

For full understanding, which is idealistic, one needs access to the following kinds of knowledge: experiential, formal, contextual, symbolic, and more.