

Mantles in the Museum

by Dr. Jason Cox and Dr. Lillian Lewis

1. Pick A Character

Choose one of the badges below. This is the character you will personify as long as you wear the badge! Read the back to get a sense of who they are. You may also consider some things to make the character more fun to play, such as how they walk and talk or whether they have any memorable habits.

Each character in this game embraces one of five interpretive frameworks for evaluating and understanding art: Expressionist, Formalist, Imitationalist, Institutionalist, and Instrumentalist.



Expressionists believe that art should express the emotions of the maker and have an emotional impact on its viewers.



Instrumentalists believe that art should say something, should have a purpose, and that it should lead to some social good.



Formalists believe that the value of a work of art relies on the relationship between the visual elements in a work.



Institutionalists believe that the responses of people with authority in the art world determine an artwork's value.



Imitationalists believe that art should imitate the actual appearance of things in the world.

2. Critique a Work

There are many different ways to examine works of Art, and you are free to use whatever method you choose. One useful method is Renee Sandell's (2006, 2009) FTC Palette. This Palette focuses on three interconnected qualities (Form, Theme, and Context) that can be used to help formulate questions and ideas about the specific attributes of a work.

Form: What we SEE in a work; the Visual Evidence. Includes the elements of art (lines, shapes, colors, values) and principles of design (balance, volume, and space), as well as a work's media, scale, and style.

Theme: What we can DISCERN from the Visual Evidence. The Big Idea, subject matter, mood, and art historical references. Form and theme help interpret the meaning(s) of a work.

Context: The SIGNIFICANCE of a work. Often refers to what we can't see, such as the history of a work or artist, and provides information on the relevance of a work.

3. Engage in Discourse

While you can critique a work on your own, the process really comes alive when you talk about a work with someone else. This discourse will not only help you understand a work better, it will also let you dive into everything your Interpretive Framework has to offer.

It is important to remember that the purpose of critique in this game isn't to insult a person or idea, or to belittle their worth, but to consider what the work is achieving and what that means to you.

4. Be Someone New!

Whenever you feel like you are done with your character, return the badge to the table.

Feel free to take another character for a spin!

Backstory: You are a meticulous crafts-person, well versed in a variety of techniques for cleaning and restoring artwork to its original state. You see yourself as a collaborator who makes time-spanning emotional connections between an artist and an audience possible.

Name: E. Iwolintshi
Position: Expressionist Restorer

E. Iwolintshi

The Restorer

Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutional Imitationalist

Backstory: You are a community leader from a rural area, and have found that many sticky situations can be tackled by trusting and working with others. You use art to try to understand the different ways people see the world, because you can't trust people if you don't try to understand them.

Name: E. Chengzi
Position: Expressionist Politician

E. Chéngzi

The Politician

Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutional Imitationalist

Backstory: You build spaces as expressions of thought and emotion, like how a home can be a cozy den of memories or a haunted house can be cheesy, creepy and fun. You believe that even static art has immersive potential, if the audience is willing to dive into it.

Name: E. Karaka
Position: Expressionist Installation Artist

E. Karaka

Installation Artist

Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutional Imitationalist

Backstory: You set out to be a performer, not a tastemaker, but your hordes of online followers dig your quirky way of looking at the world. For you it is all about finding the patterns that occur over time to unite works of art, regardless of who made them or when. That pattern is the rhythm of the Universe.

Name: F. Plava
Position: Formalist Influencer

F. Plava

The Influencer



Backstory: You are known for your provocative artworks, though you insist that they are simply drawn from nature. You claim that whatever viewers observe in your work is due to the contents of their own minds, though your interest in achieving sensuous effects through an understanding of visual relationships can't be denied.

Name: F. Urdinak
Position: Formalist Sensationalist

F. Urdinak

The Sensationalist



Backstory: You believe that Art is a universal language that connects all of humanity, and you have travelled the world working to collect artifacts and images that support that belief. When you teach you see yourself as a kind of visual linguist who is giving people the tools they need to hear what the objects have to say.

Name: F. Mavi
Position: Formalist Scholar

F. Mavi

The Scholar



Backstory: Your technology is making virtual museums a reality, allowing the audience to experience what it means to stand before great works all over the world without ever leaving their home. The tech still seems to be missing something though, and you want the next version to capture what it means to be in the presence of true beauty.

Name: M. Berde
Position: Imitationalist Technologist

M. Berde

The Technologist

Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutionalist Imitationalist

Backstory: Just because your art is controversial doesn't mean it isn't disturbing to remake the world in a way that is believable, disruptive, and thought-provoking. If people chooses to look away rather than confront the truth, that's up to them.

Name: M. Wyrdd
Position: Imitationalist Rebel Artist

M. Wyrdd

The Rebel Artist

Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutionalist Imitationalist

Backstory: You foster timeless relationships by matching people with works that speak to them. You love when a customer's eyes look into a melancholy face committed to canvas, or when two people see themselves in a depiction of forbidden passion. The frozen moments in the works spring to life, resurrected by the depth of their feelings.

Name: M. Roheline
Position: Imitationalist Art Dealer

M. Roheline

The Art Dealer

Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutionalist Imitationalist

Name: N. Czerwony
Framework: Institutional Professor
Backstory: Any education that does not include a study of Art is an incomplete one. As a respected Professor of the Arts, you have dedicated your life to making the complex world of aesthetics accessible to your students. It hasn't been easy, but nothing worthwhile ever is.

N. Czerwony

The Professor

    
Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutional Imitationalist

Name: N. Rood
Framework: Institutional Curator
Backstory: You consider yourself to be a "big picture" person at heart. You preserve knowledge and make it accessible to people without your depth of experience. This is an artistic act because you have to understand how pieces in a collection relate to one another, and nurture understandings that emerge from the collection as a whole.

N. Rood

The Curator

    
Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutional Imitationalist

Name: N. Merah
Framework: Institutional Community Artist
Backstory: You collaborate with communities to create large public artworks. Every phone call, town meeting, and permit illustrates the structures and systems of the world. You believe that this process spurs involvement and creates understanding.

N. Merah

The Community Artist

    
Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutional Imitationalist

Background: You are looking to improve lives in your community. You know that the arts contribute 4.2% of the nation's GDP, and have historically been instrumental in unifying a people, so you are keen to see and support works that speak to causes that you feel are meaningful for your people.

Name: I. Sari
Framework: Instrumentalist Activist

I. Sari

The Activist

Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutional Imitationalist

Background: You use the arts to help people think about their lives and experiences visually, rather than putting it into words. For you, the end product is ultimately less interesting and valuable than the process its creator went through to get there. When you look at works of art, you search for tools to use in your practice.

Name: I. Gelb
Framework: Instrumentalist Therapist

I. Gelb

The Therapist

Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutional Imitationalist

Background: You've always been an outsider, and some people didn't think that you belong in arts or academia. Your skill with poems and prose has challenged that perspective, and you've used your work to lift others that share your differences. The work continues though, and you're hungry for new ideas that confront the dominant world view.

Name: I. Odo
Framework: Instrumentalist Poet

I. Odo

The Poet

Expressionist Instrumentalist Formalist Institutional Imitationalist

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