



THEORIES OF LITERARY AND ART CRITICISM

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Criticism

Previous Lecture

- Types of Criticism

Lecture Contents

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Meyer Howard "Mike" Abrams (July 23, 1912 – April 21, 2015), usually cited as **M. H. Abrams**,

- M. H. Abrams was an important **American literary critic**.
- He is best known for his book *The Mirror and the Lamp*, which explores different ways literature reflects the world or expresses emotions.
- He also played a big role in shaping **how literature is studied in universities**.

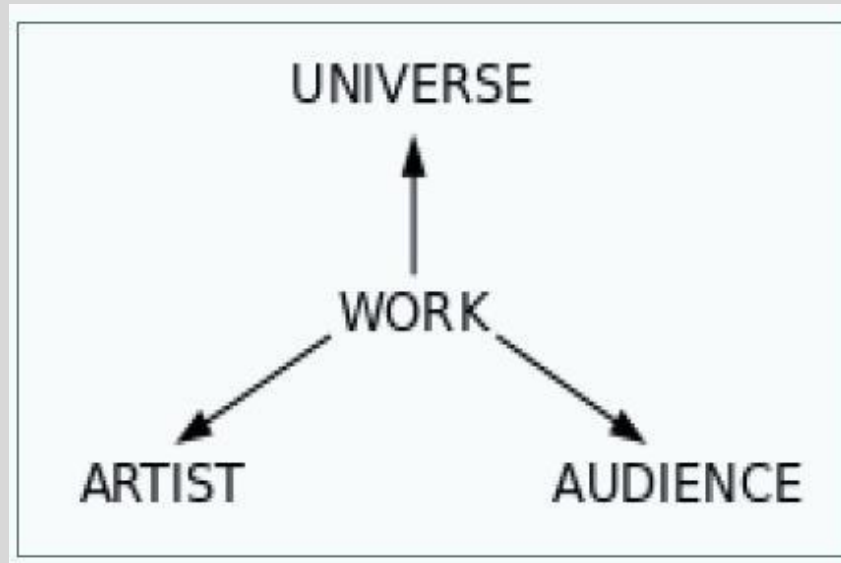


Classification for literary theories

The classification used by Mike" Abrams

Literary theories, Abrams argues, can be divided into four main groups:

- **Mimetic Theories** (interested in the relationship between the Work and the Universe)
- **Pragmatic Theories** (interested in the relationship between the Work and the Audience)
- **Expressive Theories** (interested in the relationship between the Work and the Artist)
- **Objective Theories** (interested in close reading of the Work)



Theories of Art Criticism

- 1 . Simulation Theory (The theory of Realism)**
- 2 . Form Theory**
- 3 . Content Theory**

1. Simulation Theory (The theory of Realism)

It considers:

- Art is a simulation and transferring things from **nature**. **It considers that beautiful art is "a literal repetition of the experience and events."** The artwork's subject should truly resemble the form. The work simulates the image.
- The simulation (realism) theory: is based on the **old Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.**



Jean-François Millet's *The Gleaners* (1857), As an example of the Simulation theory

2 . The Form Theory

The **Form Theory** in art criticism focuses on the **shape, structure, and composition** of an artwork rather than its realism or resemblance to nature.

Key Points of Form Theory:

- It **emerged in Britain** in the early 20th century through the writings of **Roger Fry** and **Clive Bell**.
- It was a **revolution** in art criticism, moving away from **realism and imitation of nature**.
- It aligns with the "**Art for Art's Sake**" philosophy, meaning that **art does not need to tell a story or reflect reality; it is valuable for its form alone**.
- It is closely related to **modernism in art**, which emphasizes **abstract shapes, colors, and composition** over realistic details.



Wassily Kandinsky's *Composition VII* (1913) Uses **abstract shapes and vibrant colors** to express emotions rather than depicting reality. As an example of Form theory

3 . The Content Theory

This theory says that **art is more than just looking beautiful**—it should have a **deeper meaning and a message**.

- **Art is a tool for society** – It can **influence people's thoughts and behavior**.
- **It's not just about looks** – The meaning behind the artwork is more important than how it appears.
- **It can reflect real-world issues** – Art can show **social, political, or cultural messages**, from simple ideas to deeper, symbolic meanings.
- **Critics focus on the message** – They care about **what the artist wants to say**, not just the colors or shapes in the painting.



Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* – A painting that shows the horrors of war and suffering. As an example of content theory

What Makes Content Theory Special?

Different people can have different opinions – Critics can interpret the same artwork in many ways.

• **Encourages discussion** – Anyone, including **artists, critics, art lovers, and regular people**, can share their thoughts about the artwork.

• **Not just one meaning** – An artwork can have **multiple layers of meaning**, depending on who is looking at it.

Contemporary art criticism evaluates artworks using three main axes

Three Axes of Contemporary Art Criticism

1. Axis 1 – Visual Elements & Principles

1. Focuses on the **elements of art** (line, shape, color, texture, etc.) and how they are arranged using **design principles** (balance, contrast, harmony, etc.).

2. Axis 2 – Relationships & Art Types

1. Examines how these visual elements relate to each other and determine the **art style or category** (e.g., realism, abstract, surrealism).








3. Axis 3 – Techniques & Artistic Intent

1. Studies the **artist's techniques, originality, and use of materials**, as well as their purpose and message behind the artwork.

“Art is not Creation but Forming elements "which are characterized by beauty.

The Elements of Design

(the tools to make art)

Line		Horizontal, vertical, diagonal, straight, curved, dotted, broken thick, thin.
Shape		2D (two dimensional)/ flat Geometric (square, circle, oval, triangle) Organic (all other shapes)
Form		3D (three dimensional), Geometric (cube, sphere, cone), Organic (all other forms such as: people, animals, tables, chairs, etc).
Colour		Refers to the wavelengths of light. Refers to hue (name), value (lightness/darkness), intensity (saturation, or amount of pigment), and temperature (warm and cool). Relates to tint, tone and shade.
Value		The lightness or darkness of an image (or part of an image).
Texture		The feel, appearance, thickness, or stickiness of a surface (for example: smooth, rough, silky, furry).
Space		The area around, within, or between images or parts of an image (relates to perspective). Positive and negative space.

Principles of Design

These are the standards or rules to be observed by Artists in creating works of Art; they are how to create and organize Artwork. When elements are utilized with the principles in mind, outstanding Artwork is created.



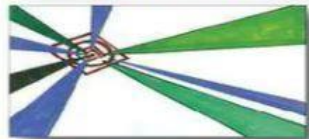
Balance

A distribution of visual weight on either side of the vertical axis. Symmetrical balance uses the same characteristics. Asymmetrical uses different but equally weighted features.



Contrast

The arrangement of opposite elements (light vs. dark, rough vs. smooth, small vs large, etc...) in a composition so as to create visual interest.



Emphasis

Used to make certain parts of an Artwork stand out. It creates the center of interest or focal point. It is the place in which an Artist draws your eye to first.



Movement

How the eye moves through the composition; leading the attention of the viewer from one aspect of the work to another. Can create the illusion of action.



Pattern

The repetition of specific visual elements such as a unit of shape or form. A method used to organize surfaces in a consistent regular manner.



Rhythm

Regular repetition of, or alternation in elements to create cohesiveness and interest.



Unity

Visually pleasing agreement among the elements in a design; It is the feeling that everything in the work of Art works together and looks like it fits.

Mona Lisa

Artist :Leonardo Davinci

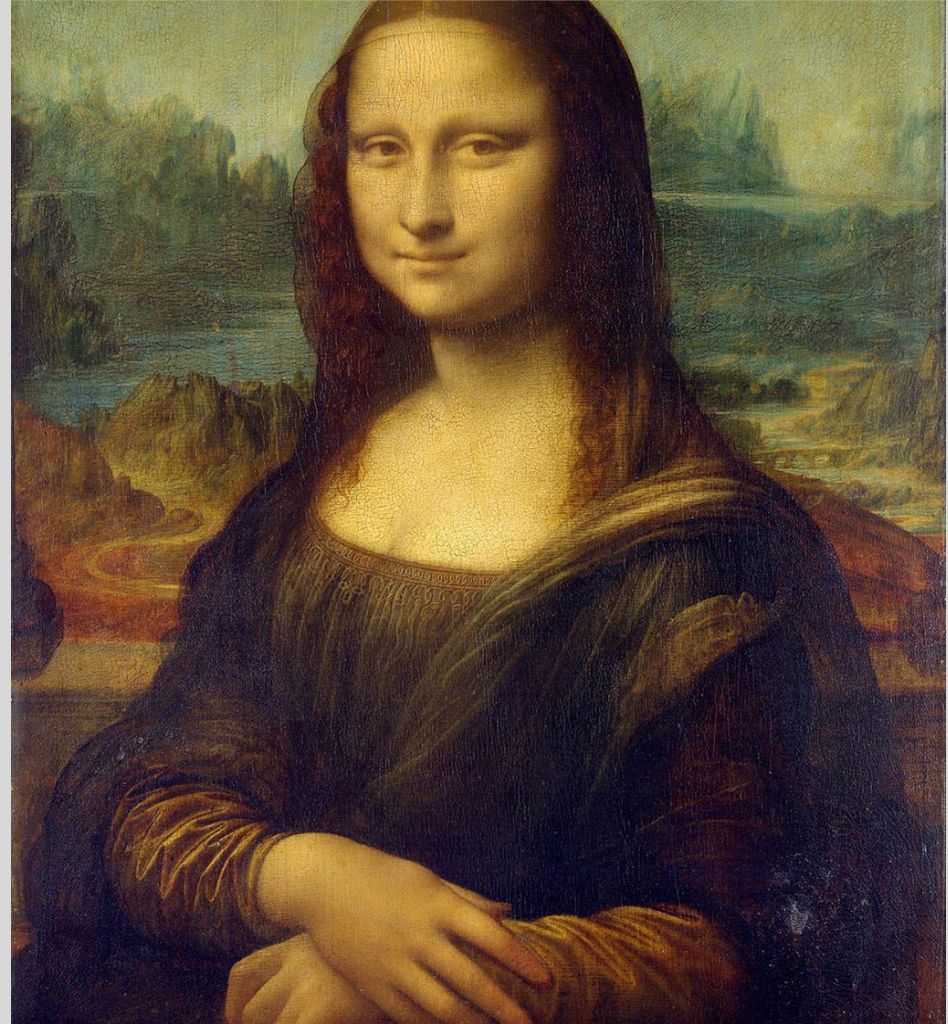
Year: 1503, perhaps until 1519, continuing

Type: Oil

Style: Renaissance

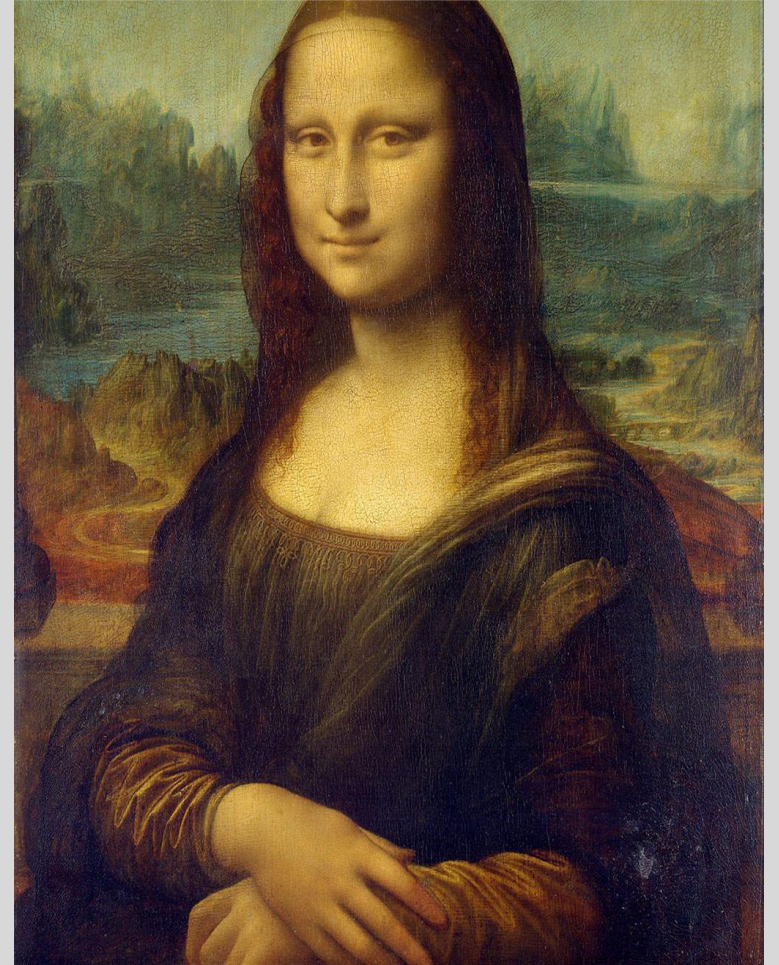
Dimensions: 77cm × 53 cm

Location: The Louvre museum in Paris,
France



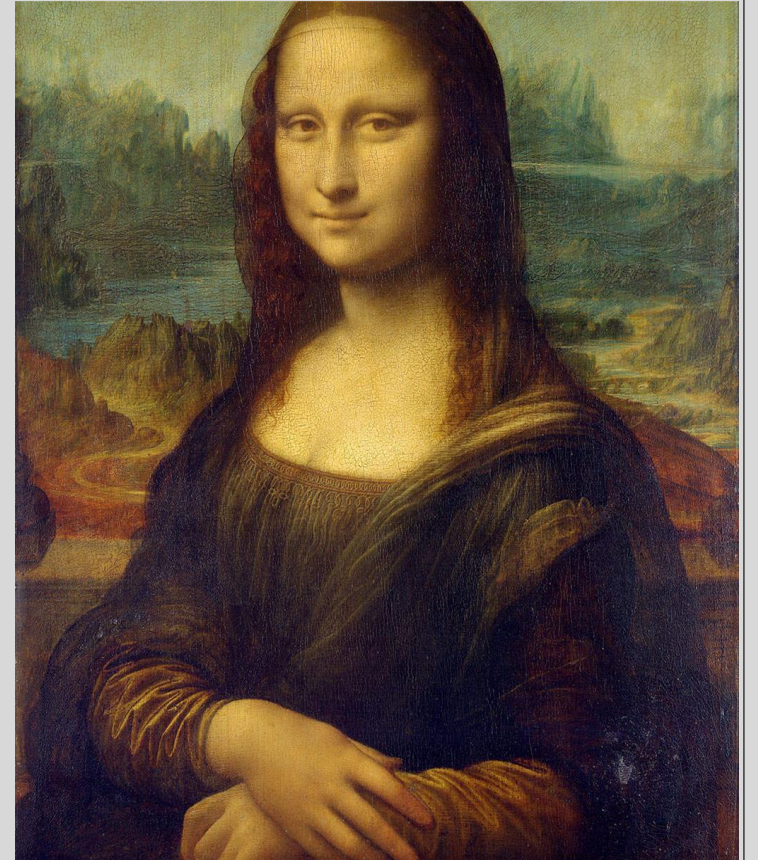
Mona Lisa Painting (Description)

- The painting shows a woman with a mysterious face, sitting in a chair. There are two pillars on both sides. Her right arm is resting on her left arm, which is placed on the arm of the chair. The background behind her shows a landscape going quite far. The center of the attraction is her brightly lit face surrounded by dark hair, background as well as clothes.
- She has long hair, her eyes have no eyebrows, and no eyelashes visible as well. Her clothes depict the timeline of the painting.
- Her smile is quite a mystery, more so considering the lack of eyebrows and eyelashes that make it quite intriguing as well.
- The other is the mystery eyes that are always focused on their viewer despite the angle one takes. The eyes move as one moves around to maintain the look since she seems to be looking directly into the eyes of the viewer.



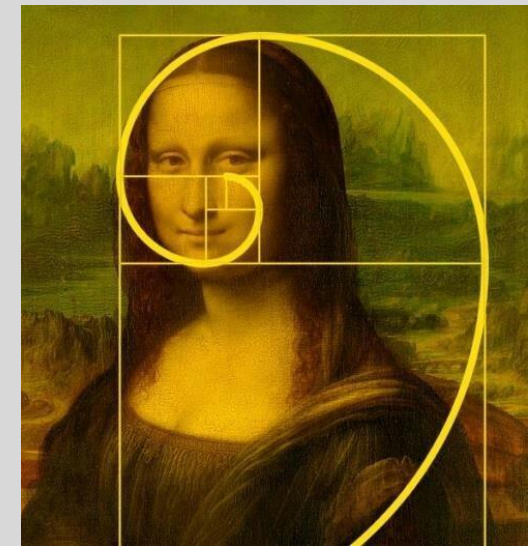
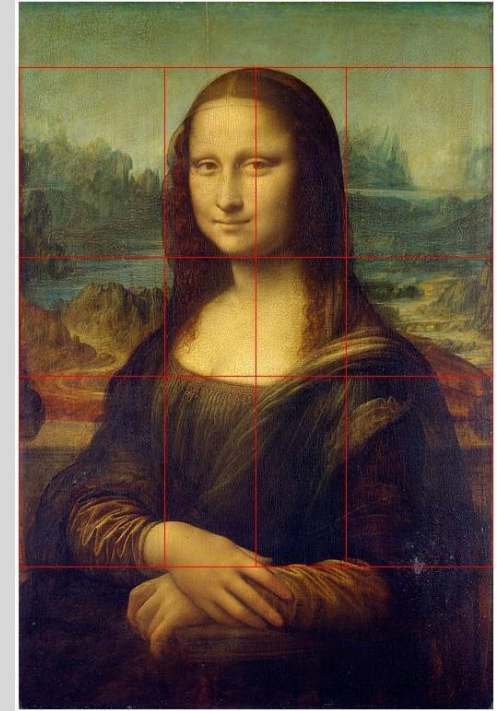
Element of Art in painting (Analysis)- Axis 1

- Expressive **lines** are used in the clothing, face and hair. The mouth, which has attracted the most attention, has a subtle curve. The **zig-zag lines** in her sleeves indicate that the fabric is soft or smooth, like velvet.
- **These lines add texture to the work.** Up close you can notice the cracked, uneven surface of the painting, but from afar, the painting gives the impression of being smooth.
- **Geometric shapes**, such as her **oval face**, are used as well.
- Form is defined as the thing itself. It is applied to give the woman a realistic appearance as she is regarded as being three dimensional the woman represents **positive space while negative space is represented by the background.**
- **Shadows** are shown in the background, clothing and hair, highlighting the face and hands.
- color is viewed through the portrait. The woman is made up of **neutral colors, such as tan and brown**, while the **colors blue and green**, which are analogous colors, make up the background



Principle of Art in painting (Analysis) –Axis 2

- **Contrast** can be seen throughout the portrait. The light colors in sky of the background of the portrait and the skin of Lisa contrast greatly with the darker colors found in Lisa's hair, clothing, and facial features, as well as the remainder of the background. **This principle is used to highlight the face of Lisa.**
- **Proportion** is another principle of design that is used in the picture. The sitter is much bigger than the objects in the background of the picture. **This principle is used to place an emphasis on the body of the sitter.**
- **Unity** is another principle that is used in the Mona Lisa. The repetition of the colors in the background helps to create a sense of unity in the portrait.



Technique in the painting (Analysis) -Axis 3

- The mystery of the smile is achieved through the **sfumato**, which is a painting style without clear-cut outlines. This is done by painting the color to blend in with the rest, which makes it hard for one to notice any difference using shadows that blend in the colors.
- **objects where color goes deeper with distance.** For instance, to show further depth, one can paint darker blue at the furthest distance, while they paint light blue at the nearest object. The color difference will show distance and depth. **In the background of the painting, Leonardo uses this technique to show the furthest distance and density.**



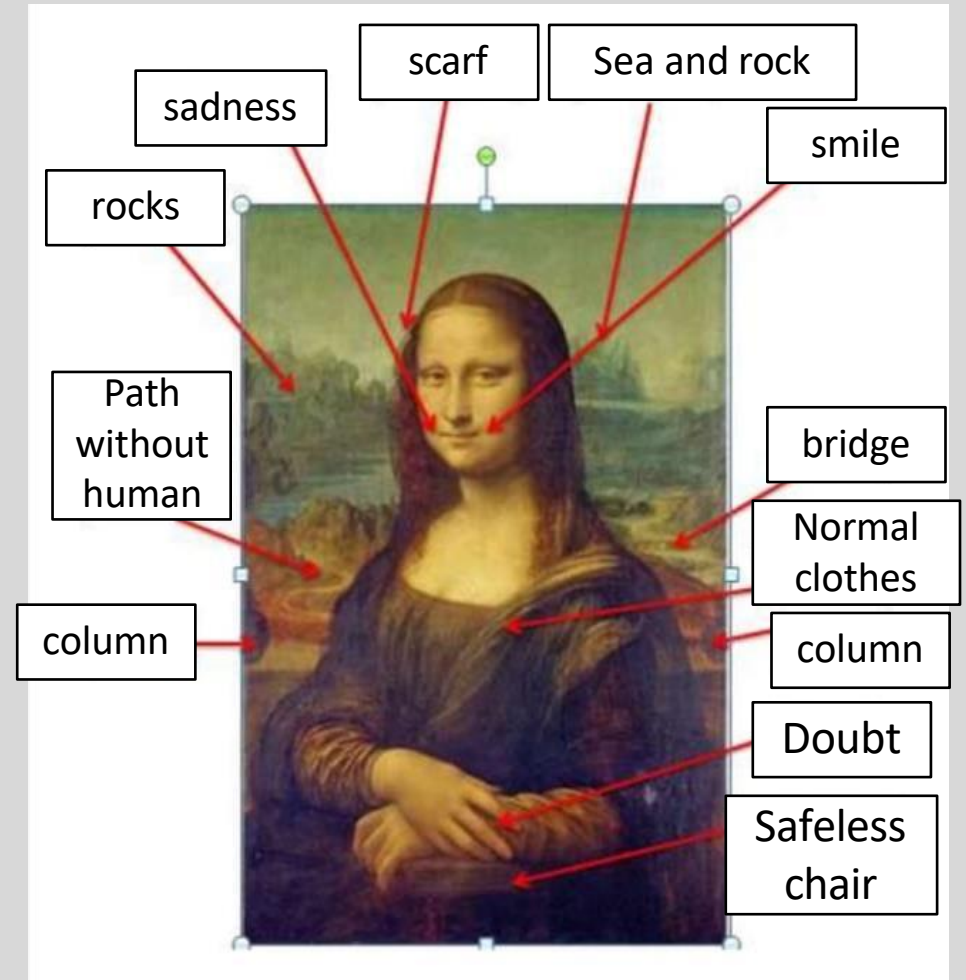
Formal criticism

Da Vinci **divided the painting geometrically**, with the Mona Lisa in the middle as the center.

The right side is higher than the left in background and the sea is between them. There is nothing to convey to both sides. **The Mona Lisa has become a means of communication.** she is sitting in **unmoving chair.** **Two columns are visible on the right and left.** **He gave great importance to human personality,** including the Mona Lisa. The light comes from the left and is in her eyes. **Her clothes are painted in dark colors and reflect the warmer colors in the Mona Lisa.** Background and nature behind her used more cold colors.

Content criticism

on the left and right there is a deserted **road**, a **bridge in the middle of the road**, this is a **symbol** It is the transition of **European art and society from the dark age to the light age.**



Do you have any questions?

References

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