



April 16, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

Today I had the opportunity to observe Trent Olsen, who is currently teaching a section of my lecture, History of Art 2002. During my visit, Mr. Olsen proved to be a well-organized and highly professional teacher, who had good control of his well-thought-out lesson plan.

He began the class by leading a short discussion about the close looking assignment (his students had turned in the assignment this morning), where students described how they thought looking at artworks in person at the Columbus Museum of Art differed from seeing them in slides in the classroom. Almost all of their answers were good ones, focusing on things like the texture of the real painted surface, the physical condition of the actual works, and the differences in color between original paintings and reproductions.

The specific reading assigned for today's section was Clement Greenberg's "Towards a Newer Laocoon," a text that attempts to give historical and medial logic to the rise of abstraction in the visual arts. Mr. Olsen cleverly wove his discussion of the text into his review of the artworks recently seen in class so that the students' understanding of the two might be reinforced in the process. First, however, he set out to explain the text's historical context (New York in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) and the definitions of a few terms (e.g., *avant-garde*) whose meaning was unfamiliar to some of them. By the end of the class, it was clear that most of the students understood Greenberg and his applicability to the art under examination.

As is appropriate in section, Mr. Olsen frequently invited the participation of his students. A good number participated on their own accord. When, on occasion, he wanted to hear from a new voice, Mr. Olsen would choose a student at random from the attendance sheet, a method that proved effective in enlarging the number of participants. I was especially pleased to see that, in a number of cases, students offered intelligent answers that showed that they were invested in the material and were understanding the content he was conveying to them (for example, towards the end of the class, one student was able to summarize Greenberg's thesis about music and painting). Mr. Olsen thinks well on his feet. This could be seen particularly well in how he could turn a bad student answer into a way of exploring something of significance.

I have very few recommendations for Mr. Olsen on how he might improve his



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teaching and I fully expect Mr. Olsen to prove to be an excellent teacher in our classrooms.

Sincerely,

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