

Beyond Words

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Course: English 101

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Essay Type: Artistic Analysis

Art is often defined as a creation of beautiful or unique things. It can play a large part in everyone's life and in different ways. I believe art is quite important because it not only expands the imagination and makes us more thoughtful, but it also opens our eyes to see the hidden things of life; the artwork in Southeastern Louisiana University's Center for Contemporary Art does just this. In particular, Sue O'Donnell's *First Memory* represents notions of memory and truths, which reveal connections to new paths of life.

Imagine seeing a piece of artwork with many words on canvas that cannot be distinguished from a distance. There is a brownish, blackish background consisting of white writings. As the viewer approaches, he or she realizes these words are not meaningless. When evaluating this work, the viewer realizes these are thoughts and memories of life placed in bubbles on the canvas. The writings describe situations from O'Donnell's past that link up to form a new path into another direction. This particular piece of artwork explains how memories and truths—what is seen and unseen—are revealed.

By thinking about her past life and events, O'Donnell created her work of art. She placed representations of her thoughts and memories in a visual diagram, connecting each situation to another and leading to a new path of experiences. Some events are positive, while others are negative. For instance, shortly after her mother died, her father married her mother's first cousin. The artist considered this deceitful and wrong. Many other experiences changed her life as well, such as a mere visit to the beach. Before leaving for their day at the shore, she and her siblings

applied suntan lotion. After a while, however, their skin started burning, and they removed the peeling surfaces; to this day, the artist states she has problems with her neck area. Some memories and events seem distressing, such as how she dangerously accepted a stolen watch from a boy at a bus stop. Other memories appear less significant, such as the times she always felt left out by her siblings because she was the quiet one and was frequently teased. From all of these experiences, O'Donnell learned it was acceptable to be different, but life is not always fair. She also realized that choices have long-term effects. By reflecting on her life and portraying this through her art, O'Donnell not only gained a better understanding of herself, but also offered an enhanced understanding of her life to her viewer.

In addition to helping the viewer better appreciate the artist, the piece invites the viewer to more closely examine his or her own life. While perusing this piece, I found my thoughts randomly connecting to my first memories. For example, once, when I was young, my sister and I were fighting, and in the midst of our argument, someone was hurt. We were at my cousin's house, which had doors that swung back and forth. While my sister was running, I held the door, and as soon as she approached, I released it. The door struck her above the eye, and she thus acquired a scar for life; my mom still does not know the true origins of that scar. So the ultimate meaning of this piece is to show how we all have things in life that, at the time, seem unexplainable and meaningless, but eventually become memories that can create a better understanding of life and each other-the sum total of who we are.

Sue O'Donnell's *First Memory* represents notions of memory and truths that reveal connections to new paths of life. This piece has changed the way I think of life and my life, in particular. It made me realize that every moment is important and should not be wasted, such as the times we spend with family and friends. I once thought of artwork as something people

created out of boredom, but when I took the time to go beyond what I saw and feelings and emotions began to play a part, I realized art is deeper than what the eyes can see. Evaluating this particular work makes me believe in art more and in myself, as well. This experience proves a picture is truly worth a thousand words, especially if the picture is more than a thousand words.

Ms. Acosta's Comments: *Brinetta wrote a captivating analysis of an otherwise elusive piece of art.*