DONALEE DESIGNS

SELF-CRITIQUE

A simple, repeatable process for looking at your own work

1. Describe the piece.

Example: "The piece is portrait, approx. 1:1.5 ratio. It has two large circle areas, surrounded by squarish shapes. The colors are soft, the shapes are large and small."

2. Step back or leave the room and squint.

Physically walk away (10+ feet) or squint your eyes. This blurs detail and reveals whether the composition holds together as shapes and values alone. If it falls apart at a distance, the problem is structural, not decorative.

3. Rotate it.

Familiarity hides flaws. A rotated image forces your eye to see it fresh, the way a stranger would.

4. Ask what your eye does first, second, third.

Notice where your eye lands first, it will stop where there is visual tension. Sometimes that's good, sometimes it's not, you decide. Then where it travels next (secondary figure). Is there a clear entry point? Does your eye move through the piece, or get stuck, or exit awkwardly?

5. Check for one dominant area.

Is there a clear figure / ground? Or are three things fighting for equal attention? Competing focal points is one of the most common composition problems.

6. Convert to black and white (or squint for value).

Color can mask a weak value structure. Photographed in grayscale, does the piece still have contrast and clarity, or does it go flat and muddy?

7. Name one thing you'd change, and one thing that's working.

End every self-critique with both, not just the flaws. This keeps you improving without spiraling into only seeing the problems.

8. Does it make you smile?

The simplest test of all. If it doesn't, figure out why not, and if it does, notice what's doing that work.