

VISUAL ANALYSIS

In the previous module we did a step by step visual analysis. You can refer back for revision, or **use the table below to guide your process.**

These steps are a guideline to help you organise your thinking and gain confidence when analysing artwork. As you become more familiar with the elements and many more artists and artworks, you will find your own steps and method for visual analysis.

When you analyse an unseen artwork, you work from your existing knowledge. That's why it is best to throw observations together in a group - between two or more people there is so much more knowledge and perspectives. In this module we are taking it one step further. You will be required to research and find out more about the artist, their concerns, influences and the context in which they lived and produced art.

So a formal description is very important; but you must include how the artist manipulates elements to pull a certain reaction from the viewer. You can include your own emotional response to the piece, however, be sure to back it up with evidence and mention the formal qualities that caused the reaction.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE ARTWORK

'Context' in artwork provides visual links that helps us to fully understand what the artwork is about. It may be beautiful without us knowing its context – we can enjoy the dynamic brush strokes, emotive colour, the lyrical forms, etc. However, its full meaning will not be fully appreciated without us being able to 'read' the visual links or clues the artist included. Knowing something about the making of the artwork can also help.

If we employ contexts to understand and appreciate art, we can see how artists incorporate a range of influences and layers of meaning.

These questions can guide your learning:

- What country or region was it made in?
- What was happening in the artist's life and the world around them at that time?
- Does it belong to a particular movement, age, or school of thought?
- What artistic influences can be seen in the artist's work?
- Is this work typical or atypical of its period, style, or artist?

ELEMENTS OF VISUAL ANALYSIS

▼ OBSERVATION

▼ LISTS & NOTES

▼ RESEARCH & ESSAY WRITING

STEP 1 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Read the label

Find the name of the artist, their nationality, title of work, date that work was made the materials used (medium) and the dimensions.

Explain the possible social/cultural influences you can identify from the empirical evidence (facts)

STEP 2 SUBJECT MATTER

What can I see in this artwork?

Make a list of the things you see and how they appear.
Describe the parts of the picture in detail: objects, subjects, shapes, colours, textures, etc.

Discuss the artist's choice of subject matter. What is the artist trying to express or show?

STEP 3 STYLE

How does this artwork make me feel?
Why?

Describe the mood of the artwork.
Explain how the artist used: objects, subjects, shapes, colours, textures, materials, etc., to create a certain effect or atmosphere

Analyse the choices the artist made to express a mood or tone.
Describe the artist's individual style.
Which existing art styles influenced the artist?

STEP 4 COMPOSITION

How are the objects and shapes organised in the picture space?

Describe how things are placed in the format.
Discuss what has been cut off, left out, emphasised, repeated, contrasted, etc

Explain why the artist made these decisions.
Discuss the effectiveness of the composition.

STEP 5 MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUE

Why did the artist choose to use this material and why in this way?

Identify the materials and the process the artist used.
Compare how the material or medium was applied in parts of the artwork.

Discuss the effect of the artist's individual way of working.
Explain the possible stylistic influences on the artist's technique.

STEP 6 MEANING

What could this all mean?

Consider all the information you have gathered thus far.
Identify the themes and ideas that recurred in your discussions.

Discuss possible messages/meanings and explain or substantiate your findings.