

Reading the Image - Some questions to help guide you

Composition

- What is the main point of focus? Which part of the work draws your eye the most?
- Is it complex or simple?
- Asymmetrical or symmetrical?
- How is it arranged? Vertical/horizontal, vertical/diagonal, or does it use a grid?
- Is it balanced?

Colour

- Describe the colors - primary, monochrome, hot, cold, contrasting, realistic?
- What colors are dominant?
- Do the colors create an emotional response?
- Do the colors flatten the picture space, or do they establish depth?
- Could there be a cultural or symbolic reason for the choice of colors?

Tone

- Describe the tonal values of the work - light, dark, contrasting?
- Is there a full range of tone?
- Is tone used to guide the viewer to an area?
- Is tone used to create an emotional effect - dark, dramatic, gentle, peaceful, mysterious?
- Describe the quality of light - shadow, soft, dark, non-existent, dramatic, atmospheric, musty, diffused, dull, chiaroscuro, contrasting, strong, harsh, or subtle.
- Where is the light coming from? Is it consistent? Is it a single light source? What effect does this have?

Form

- Describe figures and forms.
- Are the forms/objects naturalistic, distorted, simplified, exaggerated, proportional, graceful, monumental, formal dramatic, idealized?
- Do the forms look solid and show volume, or are they flattened? How is this achieved?
- Are the forms geometric, organic, mechanical, simple, complex, and/or imaginary?
- Has perspective, and/or foreshortening been used to create realistic forms?
- Do the forms have solidity, mass, transparency? How is this created?
- Are the forms static or convey movement? How?
- Do the forms convey an emotional content - anger, sadness, excitement, calm etc?

Shape

- What is the relationship between the object (positive shapes) and surrounding spaces (negative shapes)?
- How do the shapes relate to the edge of the picture and the shape of the picture plane?
- Do the shapes create repetition, rhythm, movement, patterns etc? How is this created?
- What natures are the shapes - geometric, organic, simple, complex, fragile, solid, etc?
- Do the shapes have symbolic connotations - cross, circle, dove etc?

Space

- Is the picture space deep or shallow? How has this been created?
- Are perspective devices used - linear perspective, overlapping, placement?
- Is there a vanishing point? Where is it placed? Why?
- What effect does the depth of the picture have on the viewers' response?

Line

- Describe the quality of line (the edges of shapes and forms) in this work - long/short, hard/soft, jagged/smooth, continuous/broken, straight/curved etc.
- What effect does the use of line create - diagonals/curves for movement, horizontals for calm, opposing lines for tension/violence?
- What emotional effect do the lines create? Vigorous and animated or controlled and technical?
- Are the lines used to guide the viewer to particular parts of the picture?

Surface

- How are the surfaces of objects treated - generalized or very specific detail?
- How naturalistic are the surface textures like fur, glass, stone, wood? How have these effects been created?
- Has attention been given to creating patterns and/or textures? How? Why?
- Is detail used to guide the viewer (more detail on the important parts of the picture)?
- Are the textures differentiated (to separate parts of the picture) or mostly the same (to unify the picture)?

Pictorial Proposition

- What is the intention of the artist? What is he/she trying to communicate?
- Why have they chosen a particular theme, subject?
- Why have they chosen to include particular objects? What do these objects mean?
- Is there a social message the artist is trying to communicate? What?

A wider context

- How has this work been affected by the artist's personal background, beliefs, experience?
- Has the age, gender, ethnicity, or religious beliefs of the artist influenced this work?
- How has the artist been influenced by social/cultural/historical/political/environmental events?
- How does this work relate to other work by the same artist? What is similar and/or different?
- How does this work relate to the work of other artists? What is similar and/or different?
- Where/who did this artist get his/her ideas from?
- Has this work influenced the work of later artists? Who and how?

Symbolism

- What do the objects in this picture mean?
- Where do the objects come from (appropriated)? Which culture, time period, location?
- Are the symbols personal, culturally specific or universal?
- What are the relationships between symbols - clashing, harmonious, sympathetic, contrasting?

Personal Response

- How do you respond to this picture? Do you like it? How does it make you feel?
- What do other people you know think about this picture?
- Does society think this is an important art work? How do you know this?
- What aspects of this work would you like to use in your own work?