

Visual Analysis for Art

Visual analysis typically focuses on discovering and explaining a deeper meaning of an image. In this sense, a visual analysis is sort of like an argument paper: you argue your interpretation of an image based on certain features.

Questions to Consider

As a brainstorming tool, consider answering these questions about the visual text you are going to analyze:

- What is the mood, tone, or atmosphere?
- What colors are used? How do they affect you or make you feel?
- What elements—images, shapes, forms, colors, movements, words, notes—stand out?
- What elements are repeated? Are they modified when they are repeated?
- What context surrounds the image (e.g. time period, creator, purpose)?
- Evaluate the success of the piece: does the artist/creator achieve their goal?

Answering these questions should give you some solid evidence to work with as you make your argument about the visual piece.

Example

Let's work on an example piece. Here is an image of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Katsushika Hokusai.



Hokusai, Katsushika. *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*. 1829-32. *Totally History*. Web. 17 Nov. 2015.

What are we looking at?

Consider the purpose of the image. Background information about the piece can offer insight to the purpose of the artwork. For instance, this piece is special because the artist used a limited palette that includes indigo and Prussian blue (MetMuseum). Based on that information, you can determine that color is an important component to this artwork as a whole.

What's going on here?

Now that we have some background information for this artwork, we need to look at the image itself and see how it is composed. This is where we start looking at the elements of art and principles of design. With this piece in particular, you can easily pick out elements such as color and line.

Ex: Color - The main colors here are shades of tan and blue. What do these colors do together? One answer is that they provide contrast: because they are contrasting against each other, the eye can easily move within the scene from the sky to the water to the boats.

Ex: Line - What is the first thing you notice about lines in this picture? It should be the sweeping line of the main crest going from right to left. How can you tell line influences a picture? Note how your eye travels through the piece; line guides the direction the viewer takes through the image.

Pick out some elements on your own and explain how those elements contribute to the artwork. Then, you can evaluate their effectiveness to the overall goal of the piece.

Works Cited

Hokusai, Katsushika. *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*. 1829-32. *Totally History*. Web. 17 Nov. 2015.
“Under the Wave off Kanagawa.” *The Met’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Web. 17 Nov. 2015.

Contact

Want to talk about how to analyze art? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

(972) 883-6736 WritingCenter@UTDallas.edu
www.UTDallas.edu/StudentSuccess/Writing