

The Importance of

Content & Context

Formal qualities: refer to the object, it's about looking closely

- What decisions did the artist make?
 - What role does the size of the piece and the material play?
 - How did they deal with composition?
 - Where is the artist placing the key pieces, how do they relate to each other?
 - What does the artist want you to look at, and how are they making you look in that direction?
 - Is the artist creating an illusion of depth and how are they doing it?

Subject Matter/ Content

what's it telling you?

What is the story?

And what in the work tells you that story?

Context: what was going on in history when the piece was created?

Who commissioned the work, and why did they want it?

- It's also good to think about how your personal context, your age, family, economic status, and surroundings impact the way that you view and respond to works of art.

Video

Exercise 1: select a work of art that you don't like, because you don't get it.

Maybe you don't understand why it's considered art, or good, or why anyone ever made it.

A: start by looking at the formal qualities and describing what you see.

- Think about the size, material, color choice, and make some kind of a guess as to why the artist created the piece.

Not sure where to find a work: start by looking up the following:

- Colorfield painters
- Dada Art
- Action Painters
- Minimalist Art

Now turn to the context: You're going to need to do some research

- It helps if you have the artist name, and the year that the piece was created, and where the artist was living at the time. (For example, September 11, 2001, was a huge traumatic event for people living in the United States, especially those in New York City. So if an artist was living and creating during the time, it's likely that event influenced their work. While an artist living in, let's say Peru during 9/11/01, wouldn't be greatly affected by that event)
- Do some research, what was happening where they lived during the time that the work was created. Can you make any connections to how that may have influenced their work?
- What was happening in their personal life around the time that the work was created? What effect might that have?
- What was happening in the art world?

After learning more about the context of the work, does that change your feelings about the piece at all?

Exercise 2: Take photos

You're going to need a camera with a self timer, or a selfie stick, or someone to take photos for you.

Place yourself in at least 3 different environments, snap a photo, and then reflect on how the CONTENT of the image changes the story about you.



Exercise 3: Making collages with junk mail.

In these collages you're going to play with the formal qualities as well as the content.

Select two or three images, these can be from magazines, newspaper, or junk mail.

1. Take a photo of each piece before you start to cut it apart. Make some notes about each piece before you cut it up. What do you think the message is, what is the feeling of the piece, what is the purpose.
2. Cut the pieces apart, and put them together to create a totally new image. Bonus points if you can create something that has a totally opposite feel, message, and or story from how it started.
3. Take it one step further and put your new piece into context for the audience. Tell them what's going on in the world or your life that inspired you to create what you did. You can even draw from the pieces that you cut apart. What's going on in the world that caused those images to end up in magazines, advertisements, newspapers, and mail.





