



# Tips for Inquiry about an Artwork



## Subject Matter

Some artworks have subject matter and others do not. Subject matter refers to anything real or imaginary that is depicted (shown or represented) in an artwork.

People	Places	Things
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## Elements of Design

Traditional elements in Western art include:

Two-Dimensional Elements	Three-Dimensional Elements	Four-Dimensional Element
line	form or mass	time
shape	space	
value (light and dark)	texture	
color		

## Design Principles

Ways artists organize elements of design to create interesting and unified compositions.

Some Traditional Principles:

Balance	Variation	Focal point	Pattern
Harmony	Repetition	Movement	Transition
Emphasis	Rhythm	Direction	Proportion
Contrast			

Some Postmodern Principles: (Gude, 2004, pp. 6-14) O.

Appropriation	Juxtaposition	Hybridity	Gazing
Recontextualization	Layering	Representin'	Interaction of text & image

## Technical Features

The technical features of an artwork are the results of how it was made physically.

Tools	Materials	Processes
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## Function

Artists make artworks that serve a great many diverse traditional and new functions, such as:

Capturing the beauty of a place in nature	Memorializing an important event
Demonizing or glorifying a prominent person	Experimenting with visual possibilities
Challenging traditional perceptions	Promoting a belief
Celebrating the artist's heritage	Adding aesthetic interest to something ordinary
Many more	

## Reproduction Vs Original

Some reproductions can look pretty different from the originals. Common differences between originals and reproductions are:

Size	Colors	Surface texture	Luminosity
Angle of view	Lighting	Other	

## Care/Condition

The condition of artworks can deteriorate over time for many reasons, among them:

Perishable or fragile materials	Damage in storage	Accidents
Mounting, matting, or framing	Temperature and humidity	Vandalism
Display case or pedestal	Other	



## Tips for Inquiry about an Artist's Background



### Artist's Life

The personal lives of artists can affect their work, including such factors as:

Family	Work	Education (not art education)	Travel
Personal life experiences		Other	

### Physical Environment

The physical world, both natural and human made) can inspire their work:

Natural environment (plants, animals, climate, landforms, etc.)  
Constructed environment (buildings, roads, bridges, vehicles, furniture, consumer goods, etc.)

### Culture

Artists can draw ideas for their work from their cultures:

Values and beliefs situation	Hobbies and entertainment	Politics	Economic
Language	Heritage and/or ethnicity	Other	



## Tips for Inquiry about Shared Art Experience



### Art Education and Career

Artists get ideas and support from other people involved in art, through:

- Art education or apprenticeships
- Positive judgment by specialists in the artist's art form (tattooing, quilting, fashion, architecture, ceramics, portraiture, product design, cartooning, etc.)
- Representation by art galleries
- Contact with art patrons and collectors
- Acknowledgement through art awards, prizes, and other art honors
- Adding their work to museum collections
- Receiving grants and commissions from private and public art organizations

### Style

Style is a set of distinctive qualities ("family resemblance") that are shared by more than one artwork.

Artists develop their own style and incorporate aspects of the styles of artists from their own or other times and cultures.

- Artist's style
- Style of art movement or period
- Cultural style

### Art Influence

Most artists are influenced by artists who worked before them, though some self-taught artists, called "outsider artists," work in isolation, largely unaware of the work of other artists. Influences can include:

- Technical and aesthetic achievements by other artists
- Other artists' ideas, innovations, commitments

Traditional or historical art ideas to follow, extend, or break away from



## Tips for Inquiry about Meanings and Goals



### Artist's Intention

Artists decide how they want their artworks to look. Their intentions may be:

- |                     |   |               |                   |
|---------------------|---|---------------|-------------------|
| Personal or private | Traditional   | Revolutionary | Boundary breaking |
| Unconventional      |   |               |                   |
| Evolving            | Focused on collector, patron, funder, or other viewer |               | Other             |

### Art Specialists' Understandings

The considered opinions of art specialists direct viewers' attention to aspects of artworks that they judge to be worthy of that attention. Art specialists include:

- |         |              |                 |             |                |        |
|---------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|--------|
| Artists | Art teachers | Museum curators | Art critics | Art historians | Others |
|---------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|--------|

In some visual worlds, specialists sometimes include such experts as:

- |                    |                     |               |               |        |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------|--------|
| Ceremonial leaders | Master craftspeople | Tribal elders | Guild members | Others |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------|--------|

### Cultural Understandings

A viewer's cultural understanding draws upon a set of ideas, beliefs, and standards shared broadly within a culture. These are learned, not by special effort and instruction, but simply through growing up as a member of a culture.

### Your Own Viewpoint

Viewers' responses to artworks are affected by:

- |                          |                       |   |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| conscious thoughts       | unconscious reactions | personal preferences (likes and dislikes) |
| careful viewing and more | thoughtful reflection | relevant information                      |



## Tips for Inquiry about Shared Themes



### Theme

Some broad, cross-cultural themes have been the focus of many artists throughout history and across the globe:

- |                    |                |                    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| People and nature  | Cultural pride | Conquest           | Overcoming obstacles |
| Strength of family | Love           | Fantasy            | Social order         |
| Harmony            | Chaos          | Revisiting history | Heroic adventure     |
| Religious devotion | Many more      |                    |                      |