Questioning Visual Art

**What is this object?** What type of art form? Major or minor art form?

**What materials (media) have been used?**

**Who made this work?** Unknown or known artist?

**When was this work made?** How old is it?

**What is the subject matter and content of this work?** Religious, mythological, landscape, portrait, genre, etc…? What or whom does it represent?

**Where was this work created?** What can it tell us about the society that produced it and the time period in which it was created?

**Who paid for this work?** Who is the patron?

**What likely purpose or function did this work serve?** *(see Purpose of Art)*

Purpose of Art

- **Art for Delight:** created for enjoyment, pleasure, decoration, amusement
- **Art as Commentary:** a source of information about the visual appearance of things
- **Art in Worship and Ritual:** to enhance religious contemplation
- **Art for Commemoration:** as an aid to memory, both personal and public
- **Art for Persuasion:** to influence action and opinion
- **Art as Self-Expression:** to convey information about one’s personality, feelings, or worldview

Art and Reality

**How does this work present itself to the viewer?**

- **Representational** (to present again), depicts the appearance of things (realistically, naturalistically, stylized, idealized); when human form is the primary subject it is called figurative art; non-figurative art is objective art.

Abstract art refers to works that depict natural objects, or that reference the natural world, in simplified, distorted, or exaggerated ways.

Nonrepresentational art, sometimes also referred to as nonobjective or nonfigurative art presents visual forms with no specific references to anything outside themselves; absence of subject matter.

What elements of design are in this work?

**Compositional Elements**

- **LINE**
- **SHAPE**
- **MASS** *(showing something has weight)*
- **VOLUME** *(amount of space occupied by a 3-dimensional object)*
- **SPACE**
- **TIME AND MOTION**
- **LIGHT**
- **COLOR**
- **TEXTURE**

How does the artist arrange the elements of design in this work?

The principles of design describe the ways that artists use the elements of art in a work of art.

Principles of Compositional Design

- **Balance**
- **Emphasis and Subordination**
- **Directional Forces**
- **Contrast**
- **Pattern/Rhythm and Repetition**
- **Scale and Proportion**
- **Unity and Variety**
Principles of Design Defined

**Balance** is the distribution of the visual weight of objects, colors, texture, and space. If the design was a scale, these elements should be balanced to make a design feel stable. In symmetrical balance, the elements used on one side of the design are similar to those on the other side; in asymmetrical balance, the sides are different but still look balanced. In radial balance, the elements are arranged around a central point and may be similar.

**Emphasis and Subordination**

Emphasis is the part of the design that catches the viewer's attention. Usually the artist will make one area stand out by contrasting it with other areas. The area could be different in size, color, texture, shape, etc. Subordination is the part of the design that is of less interest and does not distract the viewer.

**Directional Forces or Movement** is the path the viewer’s eye takes through the work of art, often to focal areas. Such movement can be directed along lines, edges, shape, and color within the work of art or it can be implied.

**Contrast** is the juxtaposition of strongly dissimilar elements.

**Pattern** is the repeating of an object or symbol all over the work of art. **Repetition** works with pattern to make the work of art seem active. The repetition of elements of design creates unity within the work of art. **Rhythm** is created when one or more elements of design are used repeatedly to create a feeling of organized movement. Rhythm creates a mood like music or dancing. To keep rhythm exciting and active, variety is essential.

**Scale and Proportion** is the feeling of unity created when all parts (sizes, amounts, or number) relate well with each other. When drawing the human figure, proportion can refer to the size of the head compared to the rest of the body.

**Unity and Variety**

**Unity** is the feeling of harmony (cohesion) between all parts of the work of art, which creates a sense of completeness. **Variety** is the use of several elements of design to hold the viewer’s attention and to guide the viewer’s eye through and around the work of art.