

# Analyzing Art Work

Analyzing a work of art is an important skill within the art discipline. When investigating a work of art, examine the work from multiple perspectives. The categories and sample questions below can act as a guide for the type of questions you should ask yourself when looking at a work of art.

## A. Content

- Why has the artist made the work?
- What is the subject matter of the work? If there is more than one, which is dominant? How do I know?
- What is the artist trying to tell me about the subject?
- What is the major theme of the work? Are there minor themes?

## B. Sensory Properties

- Elements of Art (Line, Color, Shape, Form, Texture, Value, Space)
- Which art elements dominate the work?
- What kinds of lines are used? How does the line quality affect the work?
- How is form indicated?
- How is space felt? How much dimension is present in the work?
- Is there texture? How is it created?
- Are the colors used bright or dull? Is there a color scheme? Which color(s) dominate?
- Are there areas of contrasting values? How is light indicated?

## C. Formal Properties

- Principles of Design (pattern, balance, movement, rhythm, unity, variety, emphasis, contrast, proportion)
- What (if anything) is the center of interest? How did the artist establish a center of interest?
- How does my eye move through the work? Where is the focus?
- Does the work have a sense of rhythm? Why, or how is it created?
- How does time and speed impact the work? Is the motion even or choppy? Is there a break or a pause? How does the flow impact the content and the emotional quality of the work?
- How does the sound impact the work? How does the sound interact with the motion present in the work?
- How is balance achieved?
- How is unity achieved?
- Are certain elements or shapes repeated? Is a pattern evident?
- Does the artwork use rules of proportion?

## D. Technical Properties

- Tools, materials, techniques
- What materials and tools were used to make the work?
- Do the materials used add to the impact of the piece? For example, does the film grain and low lighting positively impact the overall composition?
- How does the medium used impact the finished look of the work? What kinds of brush strokes or pencil lines were used? How does the computer program used affect the overall feeling of the work?
- Is it a finished work or a sketch for a later work?
- Are all parts treated with the same amount of detail? Why?
- Are there limitations based on the materials used that impacted the finished product?

## E. Expressive Properties

- What does the work say – metaphorically? symbolically? literally?
- What is the mood of the piece? How does the way the work was made communicate the opinion of the artist about the subject? What is the artist's opinion of the subject?
- Is the work timid or bold? Serious or comic?
- Does the work establish a time of year? Season? Time of day?
- Does the work have social or religious significance?
- Is it a literal statement or a symbolic subject?
- How does the artist feel about the subject?
- How do I feel about the subject and its treatment?

## F. Context

- What is the social context in which the work was made? Does it have an impact on the finished product?
- How is the work a reflection of the society or culture which produced it? If the work is shown in another culture or context, how will it be received differently?
- Why was this work made?