**Analyzing Works of Art**

When analyzing works of art, students must think critically about form, content, context, and function.

From the AP Art History Course and Exam Description:

1. **Form** describes component materials and how they are employed to create physical and visual elements that coalesce into a work of art. Form is investigated by applying design elements and principles to analyze the work’s fundamental visual components and their relationship to work in its entirety.

***Line****: horizontal, vertical, diagonal, or curved lines?*

***Shape****: height, width, geometric, or organic?*

***Space****: positive, negative, or three-dimensional?*

***Color****: hue, value (light or dark), or intensity (dull, bright, warm, or cool)?*

***Texture****: two dimensional or surface texture?*

2. **Function** includes the artist’s intended use(s) of the work, which may change according to the context of audience, time, location, and culture. Functions may be for utility, intercession, decoration, communication, and commemoration and may be spiritual, social, political, and/or personally expressive.

*Why did the artist create the work?*

*For religious worship?*

*To entertain or please the eye?*

*To tell a story?*

*As a form of scientific study?*

*Where did the artist originally intend to place the work?*

*Made for a competitive exhibition?*

*And many more…*

3. **Content** of a work of art consists of interacting, communicative elements of design, representation, and presentation within a work of art. Content includes subject matter: visible imagery that may be formal depictions (e.g., minimalist or nonobjective works), representative depictions (e.g., portraiture and landscape), and/or symbolic depictions (e.g., emblems and logos). Content may be narrative, symbolic, spiritual, historical, mythological, supernatural, and/or propagandistic (e.g., satirical and/or protest oriented).

***Subject****: what/who does the work depict?*

***Iconography****: what do the figures and objects in the work represent?*

***Narration****: what event or series of events does the artist present?*

4. **Context** includes original and subsequent historical and cultural milieu of a work of art. Context includes information about the time, place, and culture in which a work of art was created, as well as information about when, where, and how subsequent audiences interacted with the work. The artist’s intended purpose for a work of art is contextual information, as is the chosen site for the work (which may be public or private), as well as subsequent locations of the work. Modes of display of work of art can include associated paraphernalia (e.g., ceremonial objects and attire) and multisensory stimuli (e.g., scent and sound). Characteristics of the artist and audience – including aesthetic, intellectual, religious, political, social, and economic characteristics – are context. Patronage, ownership of a work of art, and other power relationships are also aspects of context. Contextual information includes audience response to a work of art. Contextual information ma be provided through records, reports, religious chronicles, personal reflections, manifestos, academic publications, mass media, sociological data, cultural studies, geographic data, artifacts, narrative and/or performance (e.g., oral, written, poetry, music, dance, dramatic productions), documentations, archaeology, and research.

***Artist****: Who created the work?*

*What is/was the artist’s status in the culture?*

*What else is known about this artist?*

***Culture****: When was the work created?*

*Where was the work produced?*

*Religious beliefs? Political or philosophical ideologies?*

***Impact****: Inspire or influence other artists?*

*Seen by a large number of people?*

*Cause controversy? Alter fashion or taste?*

***Function:*** *See function above.*