

# THINKING ABOUT AND DISCUSSING ART

## **SUBJECT MATTER** “What do you see?”

Refers to the persons, objects, places, and events in a work of art.

### **Potential questions to ask:**

What visual things does the viewer identify in the work?

## **CONTENT** “What is it saying?”

The emotional or intellectual message of an artwork.

The expression, essential meaning, significance, or aesthetic value of a work of art.

Content refers to the sensory, subjective, psychological, or emotional properties we feel in a work of art.

Content is not just a description of the subject matter.

### **Potential questions to ask:**

Is there a narrative present?

Are there symbols to interpret?

Are the images metaphoric?

What were the artist’s intentions?

Does this work ask questions or provide any answers?

What did the artist hope people would experience from this work?

Is this work emotional or intellectual?

## **FORM** “How is it saying it?”

The arrangement of visual elements

The artwork’s composition

Elements: line, shape, texture, value, color

Principles: unity, variety, balance, emphasis, rhythm, proportion, scale

How the artist presents subject matter (or excludes it) by means of a chosen media.

### **Potential questions to ask:**

Would I describe the composition as harmonious or discordant, simple or complex, easy or confusing . . . ?

Is the organization pleasingly accessible or confrontational?

Is the composition flat or layered?

How is line, shape, texture, and color influential or important?

What principles of design can be applied here? Unity variety, balance, emphasis, rhythm, proportion, scale?

Is the way media is used influential on the form?

**CONTEXT** “What else might matter?”

The set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc.

This could include when a work of art was made, where, how, and for what purpose.

This could include historical information on the artist or issues or things the artist references.

**Potential questions to ask:**

Does any personal information about the artist affect how the work is interpreted?

Is why the artist made the work valuable?

Is this particular time in history of value to interpreting the work?

Are the things that inspired this work important?

**TECHNIQUE** “How was it done?”

The manner and skill with which artists employ their tools and materials to achieve an expressive effect.

**Potential questions to ask:**

Does the audience understand how the work was made?

Does having an explanation about how the work was made contribute to appreciating the work?

Does the media in any particular way influence the subject or content?