

Art 1

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Modern to Contemporary Art

Due Date \_\_\_\_\_

You earned \_\_\_\_\_ out of 25 possible points.

### **Methodology Matrix 2**

#### Using Formalism and Iconography as Methodologies

Review "Approaches to Art" from the book, Looking at Art by Laurie Schneider Adams and read the sections on "Visual Description," and "Iconographic Analysis" on Marjorie Munsterberg's website, <http://www.writingaboutart.org/index.html>.

On the Writing About Art website, Munsterberg explains fundamental principles to using a formalist approach,

"Formal analysis is a specific type of visual description. Unlike ekphrasis, it is not meant to evoke the work in the reader's mind. Instead it is an explanation of visual structure, of the ways in which certain visual elements have been arranged and function within a composition. Strictly speaking, subject is not considered and neither is historical or cultural context. The purest formal analysis is limited to what the viewer sees. Because it explains how the eye is led through a work, this kind of description provides a solid foundation for other types of analysis. It is always a useful exercise, even when it is not intended as an end in itself.

As well, the author defines an iconographic approach,

"There are many other ways to relate a work to history, involving different elements of the period from which it came. One of them is an iconographic analysis, which establishes the meaning a work of art had at the time it was made. This may or may not include what the maker of the work intended or, usually a more important factor, what the person who paid for the work wanted. Any particular time or place provides different possible audiences, each of which will demand specific kinds of information and make certain assumptions. The iconographic argument always depends upon assembling historical evidence to reconstruct these things.

Like all types of art historical analysis, an iconographic analysis must begin with what can be seen in the object or objects being considered. On the basis of these observations, the objects are related to other visual images and, probably, texts. This process may involve considerable historical research (and) the result may be more than one interpretation. If they are mutually exclusive, the historian and the reader must decide which one seems most convincing. More often, though, different interpretations address different aspects of the work, so all of them can be historically accurate."

Find a work in your textbook (made after 1945) that has a number of visual elements (not necessarily recognizable objects, but textures, lines, and compositional interest) and provide contextual information on the reverse (title, artist, date).

- Begin by listing at least four words or phrases that meaningfully describe the visual elements of the work like "somber tones," "encaustic on canvas" and "provocative" rather than "colorful," "painting," "controversial."
- Next, carefully track your gaze across the work's surface; what element is your eye is first drawn to, what element draws your gaze away, is there any part of the work that catches you by surprise or continually draws your eye back to it?
- Look back to your list of adjectives, and describe your experience looking at the work with those words. What larger meaning for the work do you develop from this process? In other words, what does your formal description help you to understand about the work?

Title, artist, date - \_\_\_\_\_

Descriptive Words or Phrases for the Visual Elements:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

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Find a work in your textbook (made after 1945) that has a number of representational elements that can be identified and provide caption information.

- List at least four of the things in the work that catch your eye. For example, a brooding philosopher, a globe, an Ancient temple, a shiny compass).
- Next, explain the meaning of each element at the time that the photograph was made.
- Finally, consider the meanings of each of the elements you have outlined. Together, do they help you to better understand the work? Discuss how they function in the work to communicate possible meaning.
- Remember, you will likely have to conduct some research on the work, the artist, and the historical context in which the work was made in order to interpret meaning.

Title, artist, date - \_\_\_\_\_

Visual Elements:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

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What distinguishes a discussion of a work's form from a discussion of its iconography? What kinds of artworks generally lend themselves to a formal approach or an iconographic analysis?

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