

Explore - The world in the artwork

Content

The content is what you see represented in an artwork. The subject is what the artwork is about – this can be what you see or the feelings or ideas suggested by what you see.

It's useful to think about whether the artwork is representational or non-representational:

- A representational artwork describes something you can recognise or identify.
- A non-representational artwork is composed of materials and elements that don't obviously represent anything in the visible world.

Some questions to think about:

If the artwork is representational:

- What does it represent? What do you recognise in the artwork?
- Does what you see relate to a type of art, for example, portraiture, landscape, still life or history painting, or does it have another focus?
- Is what is represented realistic, naturalistic, idealised, distorted, or symbolic? What makes you think this? Why has the artist worked in this way?

If the artwork is non-representational:

- What is presented? For example shapes, colours, objects?
- Are they presented for their own sake or do they serve a practical or symbolic purpose? What makes you think this?

How does this artwork compare to other artworks of the same type?

Art elements and design principles

Art elements are the visual and sensory language used to make and talk about artworks. These include colour, shape, line, tone, form and texture. In installations or time-based artworks like film, elements such as sound or time may also be important.

Art elements can be used in many ways to create visual and sensory effects. These visual and sensory effects play an important role in how an artwork communicates ideas and meanings.

The way art elements are used and organised in the composition of an artwork to create visual and sensory effects usually involves one or more design principles. These include focal point, space, rhythm, variety, unity and balance.

Some questions to think about:

- What are the most important art elements and design principles in the artwork?
- Where and how have these elements and design principles been used? Why are they important?
- What visual or sensory effects, ideas or other meanings does the use of these art elements and design principles suggest?

Materials and processes

What are artworks made from and how are they made? The visual and sensory effects created by the materials and processes used to make an artwork play an important role in how an artwork communicates meanings and ideas.

Some questions to think about:

- What materials and processes have been used to make the artwork?
- What visual effects and qualities are created as a result of these materials and processes?
- Does the artwork look like it was made quickly or slowly? What makes you think this?
- Has the artwork been made by more than one person, or manufactured? Is this significant?