

# SAMPLE WORKSHEETS AND PROMPTS FOR VISUAL ANALYSIS

These worksheets and prompts for visual analysis can be adapted to suit the learning outcomes of your course. This PDF includes:

- SAMPLE WORKSHEET #1: Informal Visual Analysis Activity
- SAMPLE WORKSHEET #2: Visual Analysis for a Formal Paper
- SAMPLE PROMPTS FOR VISUAL ANALYSIS

## SAMPLE WORKSHEET #1:

### *Informal Visual Analysis Activity: Modern Music and Abstract Art*

These times, activities, and prompts are aimed at concentrated observation and discussion of artworks in pairs or small groups that report back to the class informally. This activity takes about 30-40 minutes for the class to complete (depending on class size/length of reports) and could follow instructor-led observation, discussion, and interpretation of an artwork as a class to familiarize students with this process.

Though this worksheet juxtaposes musical compositions previously discussed in class with abstract paintings on view at the Johnson, the prompts can be adapted to bring various objects of study and class themes in conversation with visual art. In this specific instance, the goal is to help students understand that music and abstract art can call upon similar elements such as association and emotion, and to identify how these elements contribute to a formal language of abstraction.

#### **PART ONE: Select an artwork to discuss (5 minutes)**

With a partner (or in a group of 3), select an abstract (non-representational) work of art that you think best corresponds to your group's assigned musical composition. If you wish, you can pull up the music on your phone to refresh your memory.

#### **PART TWO: Look at your artwork independently (5 minutes)**

Look carefully and *silently* at your chosen artwork for five minutes. Each group member should take separate notes to capture their initial thoughts and observations.

#### ***As you look, consider:***

- What drew you to this work in particular?
- How do you think it was made?
- What feeling, mood, or thought does this work evoke for you?
- Is there a sense of movement in the artwork? If so, how is this conveyed?
- Can you draw a comparison between the notes or passages that you hear and the brushstrokes that you see?

Visual artists use formal elements such as line, color, texture, and space to create and convey meaning. Look at the form of the piece- how would you describe the colors? What words capture the quality of line in this work? What role does surface texture play, if any? How is space depicted?

Does the title of the work provide helpful information for this discussion?

**PART THREE: Discuss as a group (10 minutes)**

As a pair/group, share and discuss your individual observations about the artwork and its possible formal similarities with your given musical selection. What do your observations tell you about how each provokes an experience, association, or emotion?

**PART FOUR: Select and synthesize (5 minutes)**

As a pair/group, select two or three of the best examples of how your musical selection and chosen abstract artwork can be seen as using similar formal strategies and note them here.

**PART FIVE: Groups report back to the class (3-5 minutes per group)**

## **SAMPLE WORKSHEET #2**

### *Visual Analysis for a Formal Paper: Thinking about a Photo in the Exhibition*

This worksheet was created to help undergraduate students compare and contrast literary works discussed in class with contemporary photography on view at the Johnson. In this case, the entire class session was dedicated to concentrated observation and discussion, assisting students in the transition from observation and preliminary analysis to research and interpretation for a formal paper that was due weeks after the class session. The students were able to return to the Johnson and revisit the photos as they read selected texts on works in the exhibition **Sama Alshaibi: Silsila (on view Fall 2017)** and reconsidered the writings of Ibn Battuta (1307–1377).

In conjunction with your writing assignment, this worksheet takes you through steps to start thinking about Sama Alshaibi's photography as a contemporary response to the travel writings of Ibn Battuta. Much of this comparison will rely on your visual analysis or **careful observation and interpretation** of your selected photograph, so use this worksheet as an opportunity to collect your thoughts and start thinking of questions as you look at the work.

### **PART ONE: Select a photo**

With your group, walk around the gallery and observe the photographs. As you look at the photos, think about what draws you in, and what you're interested in exploring in more depth. Together, select a photo that interests you to use as the basis of your writing assignment.

### **PART TWO: Look at your photo; discuss with your group**

Take a close first look at your chosen photograph. Take notes to capture your thoughts and observations, as you will likely want to refer to these notes when writing your paper. No observation is too obvious, and no detail is too small!

***First, take a few minutes on your own to look closely at the photo.***

What stands out to you?

***Next, discuss the work with your group, considering these helpful prompts for looking at art:***

#### **Subject**

- Describe what you see.
- What do you think is happening in this photo, and what do you see that tells you this?
- The title of this exhibition, *Silsila*, means 'link' in Arabic. What are some links that you see in this work between people, places, environments, objects, behaviors, actions, etc?
- What is the role of location or geography in this work? Are there any specific markers in the photo that enable you to locate where it was taken? What effect does this have?
- If people are in the photo, is there a specific indication of who they are and what they might be doing?
- Is there a narrative or story in this piece? How does the artist convey this? If not, what else is the artist focusing on?

#### **Formal elements**

How do you think the artist made this work?

Artists use formal elements such as line, shape, form, color, texture, balance, and light to create their works and convey meaning. How has Alshaibi used these elements to highlight significant elements in the work, convey ideas, and evoke an emotional response from the viewer?

### ***Ideas***

What ideas or themes are being explored in this work? What do you see that conveys them?

### ***Symbolism***

Are there objects, poses, or landscapes that seem to represent ideas or concepts as a symbol? You do not need to know exactly what the symbolic meaning is (this might not even be possible), but think about the properties of the objects, people, and places that you see and think about what they might possibly represent given what you know about Alshaibi's project and her work in general.

### ***Emotional response***

What is the tone or mood of the work? How is this accomplished?

What is your personal response to this work? Why do you feel this way?

### **PART THREE: Consider contextual elements for more information**

Consider information provided on the label: What is the title of the work? How does the title reflect larger ideas within Alshaibi's work?

What is the artist's name and nationality? When was the work created? How do these factors influence your understanding of what you've observed so far?

What was happening in the world when this work was created, and is this reflected or referenced in the work?

How do you think this work is meant to be viewed, and by whom?

### **PART FOUR: Questions**

A good way to move from observation to interpretation is to consider what you can know about the work by observing it and what remains for you to figure out (if possible) with research and other information.

What do you still want to know about this work?

Where might you go to find this out?

Are there elements that might seem intentionally vague in your photo? Why might this be?

What kind of information does Ibn Battuta provide in his travel writings, and is that kind of information present in Alshaibi's photographs? What is the effect of this?

## **PART FIVE: Move from observation to interpretation**

*Once you've completed your research on Alshaibi, consider the following:*

Based on what you've observed so far, what might you conclude about this work?

What specific details do you want to focus on, and how might these details help you compare the photo to the travel writings of Ibn Battuta? Use your observations support your interpretation.

### **SAMPLE PROMPTS FOR VISUAL ANALYSIS (WORKSHEETS AND DISCUSSION)**

These open-ended questions are suggestions for how to start students observing, thinking about, and discussing art and its interpretation.

With a worksheet, you might consider including a list of varied prompts to stimulate thinking, but limit any written responses to one or two questions - otherwise completing the worksheet during class becomes the objective, not the ultimate discussion that it is meant to further.

#### **Initial engagement**

- What stands out to you?
- Why did you choose this particular piece?
- What's the first thing that you noticed? Why?
- Describe what you see:
- What is the tone or mood of the work? How is this accomplished?
- What is the main focus of this work?
- What do you think is happening in this work?

#### **Formal elements**

- What type of work are you looking at? Is it a painting, sculpture, print, drawing, etc?
- How do you think this work was made?
- What materials did the artist use to create this work?
- Artists use formal elements to create their works and convey meaning- line, shape, form, color, texture, and light. What are the formal elements of this piece?
- Look at the formal elements – line, shape, form, color, texture, and light. How has the artist used these elements to create meaning and evoke an emotional response?

**Contextual elements:**

- Consider information provided on the label: What is the title of the work? What is the artist's name and nationality? When was the work created? How do these factors influence your understanding of what you've observed so far?
- What was happening in the world when this work was created, as is this reflected or referenced in the work?
- How do you think this work was meant to be used or viewed, and by whom?

**Personal response/ interpretation:**

- What feelings does this work evoke for you? Why?
- What is your personal response to this work?
- Does this work remind you of experiences that you've had or something you've read or seen?
- What ideas are being explored in this work? What do you see that conveys them?
- Is there a narrative or story in this piece? How does the artist convey this? If not, what else is the artist focusing on?
- What is your interpretation of the meaning of the work? What observations support your interpretation?

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To schedule a session for your course, please email **Alison Rittershaus** at [akr73@cornell.edu](mailto:akr73@cornell.edu) and allow three weeks' notice to arrange a visit.