

Using form, theme and context to develop student analytical writing in the DP Visual Arts course

BRIAN REVERMAN

The IB Diploma Programme (DP) Visual Arts course requires students to analyse art from various times and cultures. This qualitative study describes the implementation of an approach to analysis (based on the concepts of form, theme and context) intended to improve the depth of students' thinking and writing about art. It describes the integration of this approach across some year 10 and DP art courses at the International School of Beijing, explains specific instructional strategies and explores samples of student work that demonstrate increasing analytical competence. The approach holds promise for developing students' thinking skills across IB programmes.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most effective teaching instruments of the DP Visual Arts (VA) course is the Investigative Workbook (IWB). Utilized effectively as a research tool, it provides students with a vehicle to help develop higher-level critical and creative thinking. While important in developing artistic ideas and skills, the investigative intent of the IWB's design also requires students to "respond to and analyse critically and contextually the function, meaning and artistic qualities of past, present and emerging art, using the specialist vocabulary of visual arts" (International Baccalaureate, 2007, p. 7).

The purposefully designed flexibility of the VA curriculum allows for a multitude of pedagogical approaches. This presents both opportunities and challenges for teachers and students. Doing meaningful research, making connections between context and function, finding meaning and discerning quality in a wide range of art requires students to use complex and strategic thinking. Whether choosing an appropriate method for developing this type of thinking and writing manifests itself as an opportunity or a challenge will be determined by the background and experience of teachers and students, and their interpretation of and approach to critical and contextual analysis.

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

As a teacher and a DP examiner in the Visual Arts, I have seen student approaches to research and critical writing that range from simple biographical reporting on artists to first-rate analytical thinking that certainly meets the highest levels of achievement described by the VA IWB assessment grid. Generally speaking, however, the predominant area of comfort for student writers, even the most proficient ones, seems to be in the analysis of visual form. What appears to be more problematic for student writers is placing the work in historical and cultural context and making connections between these contexts and the visual form. Understanding conceptually complex artworks like Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, J.R.'s photographic installations, or Maria Abramowitz's *The Artist is Present* requires students to address the theme and contexts of these artworks as well. The DP VA course presents these connections as a critical part of understanding art, and a newly proposed research requirement for the next VA curriculum update indicates that the level of analytical writing in the IWB may be a weakness of the current programme. Whatever form the VA course adopts for research and analysis of art, the primary issue explored in this paper is helping students make these connections.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Teaching students to analyse in a deep and meaningful way requires giving them a collection of critical strategies. While there is much literature on teaching art criticism, effective approaches provide students with a practical and flexible analytic framework. Karen Hamblen and Camille Galanes (1991) outlined six instructional approaches to teaching aesthetics that cover a gamut of perspectives including historical/philosophical, perceptual, experiential, developing cultural and multicultural literacy and social-critical consciousness. Their theoretical approaches inform teacher practice but do not provide students with specific strategies for writing art criticism.

One of the most widely cited strategic frameworks for the formal analysis of art is the “Description, Analysis, Interpretation, and Judgment” model by Terry Barrett (1989, 1994). In Barrett’s model, description is “pure description of the object without value judgments, analysis, or interpretation” and analysis is “determining what the features suggest and deciding why the artist used such features to convey specific ideas”. Both of these categories focus primarily on the physical form of the artwork. He deems the interpretation aspect of his approach as the most important. Interpretation answers the question, “Why did the artist create it and what does it mean?” (Barrett, 1994). Although he warns of an over-emphasis on judgment in working with students, he defines judgment as, “giving it rank in relation to other works and of course considering a very important aspect of the visual arts; its originality” (Barrett, 1989, 1994).

For some time now, some art education theorists have been calling for a new set of “foundations” for teaching art to replace the ones of the Bauhaus era that form the basis of many current art curriculums. These new foundations incorporate aspects for understanding art that go beyond the Bauhaus emphasis on the physical form of the art. Olivia Gude (2000) wrote, “The elements and principles of design were never the universal and timeless descriptions they were claimed to be. In fact they are not even sufficient to introduce students to most modern art.” Paul Duncum (2010), Renee Sandell (2009) and Kerry Friedman (2003) also wrote about the need to reorganize the foundations of art curriculum so that they encompassed the context in which art is made and interpreted. These writers saw that a new paradigm was needed to help students make sense of the constantly expanding nature of art and its role in contemporary culture.

This emphasis on context may come into conflict with Barrett’s framework if teachers and students take his approach at face value, es-

pecially in the areas of analysis and judgment. For much non-Western or postmodern art, Western principles of visual composition are not the primary consideration of the artist, value is context-relative and originality is not a desired outcome. Visual form is only one criterion, and not necessarily the predominant one, in understanding art in the twenty-first century. An emphasis on it may distort the analysis of the function of the art and mislead students in their attempts to understand it.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

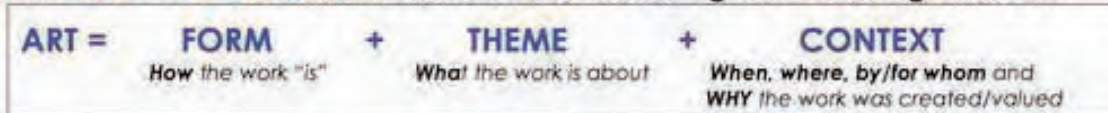
When I began teaching art, Barrett’s framework was the one I used with my students. This worked well if the thrust of the artwork was primarily visual, but I found that if we were exploring art that was primarily conceptual or process-oriented, students were unable to easily let go of a reliance on visual descriptions and analysis of formal elements in their writing. This is not necessarily a fault of Barrett’s framework as much as my application of it, yet I felt that this structure was not leading my students to explore the context of the work enough.

THE INTERVENTION

One particularly effective model that I have been using for the past few years to develop student analytical writing is an approach developed by Sandell from George Mason University. Based on the categories of form, theme and context, Sandell has developed a rubric she calls the FTC Palette (Figure 1). Originally developed as a way to address the complexity of contemporary art, the FTC palette presents clear criteria for each category to help students formulate meaningful questions. In the past three years I’ve been applying the FTC approach in both my DP and year 10 courses at the American School of Bombay and now at the International School of Beijing (neither school offers MYP). I have found the level of analysis and synthesis in my students’ critical writing enhanced considerably. Below are some tools used to support the FTC approach and a description of how they are integrated into the curriculum.

In each of my year 10 Visual Art courses the first order of business is to introduce and define the concepts of form, theme and context. For this I created a series of VoiceThreads (VTs). VoiceThread.com (<http://www.voicethread.com/>) is a website for the creation of multimedia slideshows that allow participants to write or record a comment on each slide. An avatar pops up as comments are saved to identify each participant. Students can work through the VT at

Form + Theme + Context... FTC Palette for Decoding and Encoding Visual Art



Title: _____



How does a balance of formal, thematic, and contextual aspects reveal layers of meaning?

FORMAL	+	THEMATIC	+	CONTEXTUAL
<p>Actual Composition:</p> <p>Art Elements (line, shape, color, texture, value, space):</p> <p>Design Principles (emphasis, balance, harmony, variety, movement, rhythm, proportion, unity):</p> <p>2D&3D Qualities:</p> <p>Size/Scale:</p> <p>Media/ Materials:</p> <p>Processes/Methods:</p> <p>Skills:</p> <p>Style:</p> <p>Other:</p>		<p>Broad Subject/BIG IDEA:</p> <p>Subject Matter:</p> <p>Point of View:</p> <p>Visual Sources:</p> <p>Art Historical References:</p> <p>Literary Sources:</p> <p>Other Arts Connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Music ⊕ Theater ⊕ Dance ⊕ Film & New Media <p>Other Subject Areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Math ⇒ Language Arts ⇒ Science ⇒ Social Studies ⇒ Physical Education ⇒ Vocational Education 		<p>WHEN:</p> <p>WHERE:</p> <p>BY/FOR WHOM:</p> <p>WHY: Intention/Purpose(s):</p> <p>Significance/Relevance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Personal ◆ Social ◆ Cultural ◆ Historical ◆ Artistic ◆ Educational ◆ Political ◆ Spiritual ◆ Other

© 2009 Renee Sandell, Ph.D.

FTC Insights, Assessments and Questions:

Figure 1: Dr Renee Sandell's FTC palette.

their own pace and read or hear each other's thinking in real time as saved comments appear on each slide. Each VT defines either *form*, *theme* or *context* and then examines and compares Jacques Louis David's *Death of Socrates*, Piet Mondrian's *Composition in White, Red, Yellow and Blue* and Chris Burden's *Through the Night Softly*. At the end of each VT, students follow a link to the Khan Academy's SmartHistory site (<http://www.smarthistory.khanacademy.org/>) and watch a short video where two art historians discuss a famous work of art. Students are then asked to return to the VT and comment on how the FTC criteria help them understand the artwork more clearly. When students have finished their comments they also view the comments of their classmates. They are encouraged to engage their peers in debate and change their responses if they are convinced by new information. At the end of the three VTs, students are asked to comment on why understanding the interaction of form, theme and context helps reveal meaning in a work of art (Figure 2). The VT also allows me to follow each student's thinking on my computer screen and redirect students who need help or clarification.

Now that form, theme and context have been defined and the students have had some experience working with them, these concepts become the cornerstone of each subsequent studio project. Each project has a thematic emphasis like "The Death of Art" (Dada) or "Off the Wall" (performance and installation art) and so a parallel aspect of art history guided by several essential questions is a part of each project. After an initial presentation/discussion on historical and contemporary examples related to the project's topic, students are given a written assignment that asks them to focus on the form, theme and context of the art in question. As a typical example I will use the written portions of the "Off the Wall" project from the grade 10 course (Figures 3–6). During the first two thirds of the year each category of form, theme and context in assignments is presented as a distinct entity with very specific teacher-generated questions. I have also added a "synthesis" element to Sandell's palette, where students are asked to explain how all three of these categories integrate to help form meaning. The corresponding assessment rubric, presented as the first page of all assignments, helps the student understand the criteria for the highest level of achievement for each question (Figure 7).

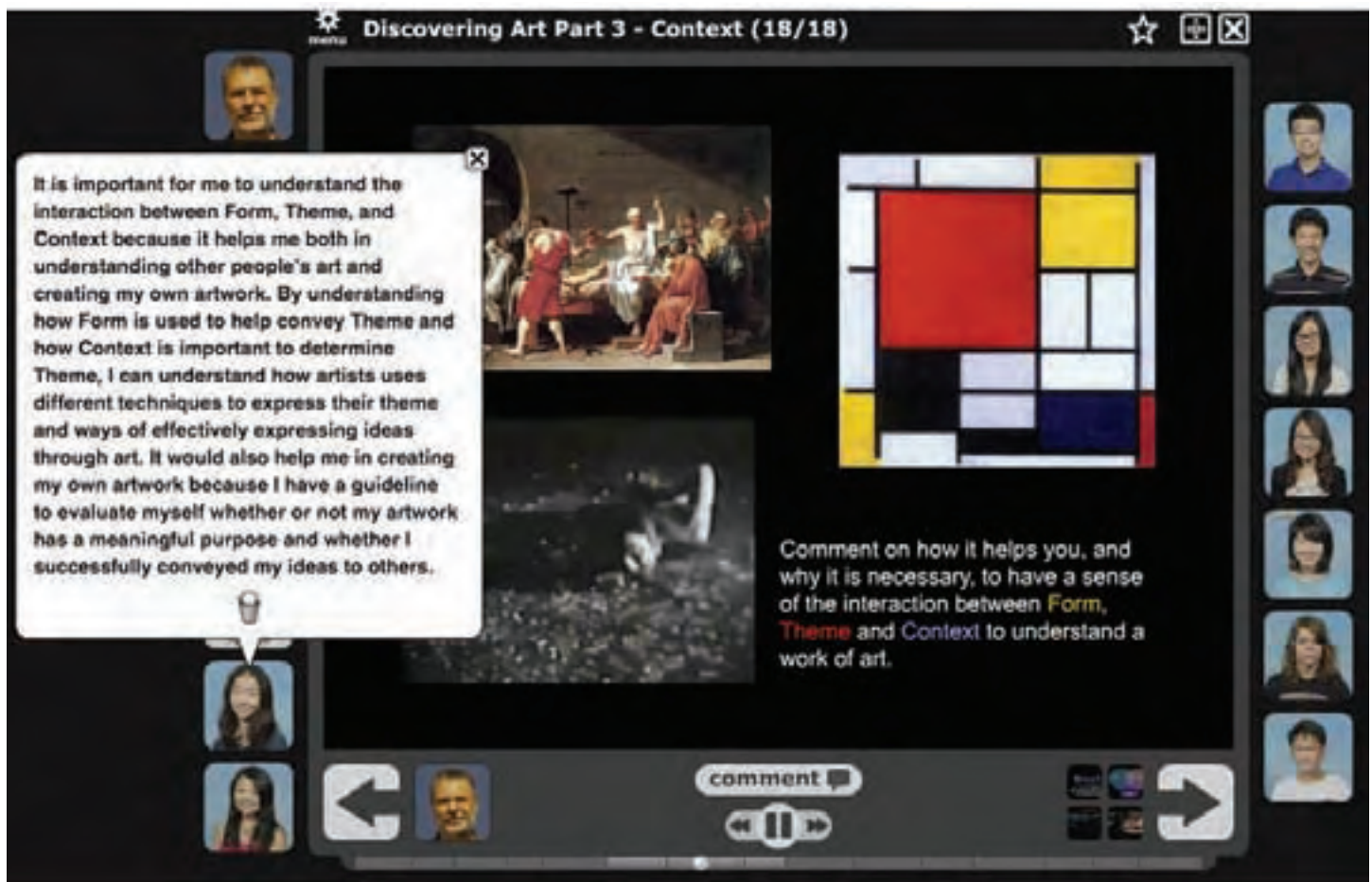


Figure 2: Screenshot of final page of the VoiceThread "Discovering Art Part 3—Context".



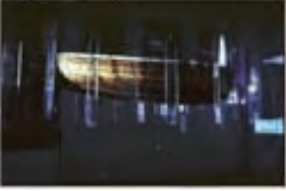













Here are the questions we are trying to answer. Of course you'll have more.

How has the form of some art changed in the post-modern era?

How can we judge works of art that use non-traditional modes of expression?

How do these non-traditional art forms express ideas or emotions?

You are going to do some original research. Below are some images of performance and installation art. When you click on the image it should take you to a website for that artist. You need to explore the website then respond to the questions below.

<p>Celeste Fichter</p> 	<p>Catherine Marcogliese</p> 	<p>David Connor</p> 	<p>Deborah Kennedy</p> 
<p>Eve Andree Laramee</p> 	<p>Georg Hartung</p> 	<p>Jenny Holzer</p> 	<p>Ken Rinaldo</p> 
<p>Laurent La Gamba</p> 	<p>Li Wei</p> 	<p>Megan and Murray McMillan</p> 	<p>Ned Kahn</p> 
<p>Nick Fortunato</p> 	<p>Pat Bandani</p> 	<p>Sally Mankus</p> 	<p>Tamar Frank</p> 

Hints:

Form - Usually on the website there is more than one image. See if you observe a pattern or common images. Look for similar technique, media, style. **Theme:** Usually there is an artist statement, or some reviews written by art critics, on the page. This will probably give you some idea of their "big ideas". **Context:** Here you may have to Google their name and see what's up. For example, Li Wei is an artist working in communist China. That will inform his work. Ken Rinaldo teaches technology and art at Ohio State University. Their worlds are quite different.

Figure 3: Page 1 of a written assignment for the "Off the Wall" project. Students are given a choice of which artist to research.

Form - Look carefully at the artwork by the artist (choose a group of representative works). Describe what you see based on the criteria in the table below.



2D and/or 3D elements (what types of things do you see – people, objects, nature, etc?)	Media/Materials (what physically makes up the work – video, wood, glass, photos, etc)
<p>In the works by artist Li Wei, I could tell that all of his work involved people as well as himself (in the image). Also, the setting of the images all took place in the suburban and tall buildings. It might not be too obvious, but the clothing of the people was quite simple and casual, which might hint a certain theme (simplicity or freedom?). Finally, Li Wei attempts to defy gravity in most of his works, including the ones posted above.</p>	<p>Li Wei mostly uses photography to present his work. It's predicted, though not certain, that he used some kind of photo editing software to edit and create these images of people floating in midair. Also, a material that is often seen in the works above is concrete and glass, which again might be symbols that he used to present the theme. Finally, people are one of the most important components of his work, because they are the ones that create the sense of action and movement in his photos.</p>
Size/Scale (is this a large work, small and intimate, do you walk through it, etc)	What aspects do you find visually striking or intriguing? (use your stylus to circle the areas)
<p>Li Wei's photographs are printed to a relatively large size, with most of them over 10,000 m² in area. Aside from the size of the photographs, the resolution is also very high, and it's mostly visual then kinesthetic.</p>	<p>First of all, it's visually attractive because the people in the photographs were either in mid-air or are in a situation that will rarely happen in real life. For example, in the middle picture above, it's very rare that you'll see a person being kicked off a tall building, and when one sees this in a picture, it'll automatically attract their attention because they're curious of the composition of the picture. Similar to middle picture, the third picture on the right is equivalently attractive because Li Wei was in a position of being thrown off a building, and the thrilling scene created an intense atmosphere around the photo.</p>

Figure 4: Page 2 of the "Off the Wall" assignment, where students respond to the visual form in the work of Li Wei.

Theme - Use the table below to briefly sum up the "big ideas" of the work(s) you have chosen.

What is the subject matter? (destruction of nature, technology and human interaction, memory, government oppression, etc)
I think one of the subject matter that is presented through his works is freedom, simplicity and making the impossible possible. The reason for that is because many of the positions of the people in his photos were breaking the laws of physics: for example, in Photo 1, there were people bunched up together and floating in mid-air; the casual dressing of the people may also represent simplicity. The floating not only creates an illusion of danger, but it also creates a sense of freedom because it shows that anyone, from any background (this is shown through the clothing of the people) could enjoy life and do whatever they want in mid-air.
What is the artist's point-of-view? (what is their position, how do they approach the issue, are they positive or negative, etc)
I think that Li Wei's photography were mostly positive, because the impossibility in the pictures create humor for the audience, which is also one reason why his works were attractive.
How does the work CONNECT with the world out there? (do you find any connections to other art, music, politics, news and current events, etc)
The theme of freedom and simplicity that could be found in Li Wei's art connects to the current issues that we have in China. For example, freedom is an issue in China, because different ethnic groups in China were discriminated by the government, and the people do not have free speech in the country because the government doesn't want much people to participate in politics. The theme of simplicity might represent the majority of people in China who earns only enough money each month to support them or stuck in poverty. Also, his illusions in the photographs also connect with science, because it challenges the laws of physics, and it could create new ideas for future inventions (such as levitation).

Context - Use the table below to look at the context of the work.

Who made the work? (not just the name, but who is this artist???)
Li Wei, who is a Chinese artist that is born in Hubei Province in 1970. His artwork was known for defying gravity, and his style is a mixture of performance art and photography because his performances, such as jumping off a building or free falling, were recorded using a camera, and he later edits the image to further enhance the quality of the photo.
Where was it made? (not just the location but the circumstances of the place)
The three photos above were all taken in suburban areas because of the abundance of high rises in the background.
When was it made? (not just the date but the <i>zeitgeist</i> (spirit of the times))
The three images were made in 2003, 2004 and 2008 during summer and fall. The season that these photos were taken might also suggest that he wants to present a warm mood in his pictures.
Why was it made? (was it to raise awareness of an issue, evoke a memory or feeling, challenge our beliefs, etc)
Though it was not explained by the artist, from my interpretation, it seems as if he was trying to challenge our beliefs with the gravity illusion. Also, through flying, he is spreading awareness of freedom to his audience, because flight is a symbol for that theme.

Figure 5: Page 3 of the "Off the Wall" assignment. Here the student addresses the *theme* and *context* of Li Wei's work.

Synthesis – Using the information you’ve gathered above respond to the questions below.

How does the artist’s use of the form of the work effectively get his or her theme across? (make reference to the visual evidence to support your position)

First of all, it is said that a picture is “worth a thousand words”. Li Wei’s photographs are effective in presenting the themes because the exaggeration of the poses in the image made the overall photograph more visually exciting and interesting, which will attract the audience to think about the hidden meanings behind the work.

Also, referring to Photo 1, there were lots of people floating in mid-air. The large amount of people helps emphasize some of the themes that Li Wei wanted to present to the audience, themes such as freedom and Happiness. The reason why quantity helps emphasize his points is because when the audience looks at the people floating in mid-air, there will constantly be thoughts running in their minds as the audience’s eyes move from one face to another, studying the facial expressions and their position in the air.

Finally, the use of lighting and color in the image also further presents the themes. For example, the drab color scheme in Photo 2 creates a hopeless mood as Li Wei was being kicked off the building in the image. The mood that was created from the colors assists the audience to interpret the true meaning behind these photos.

In all the responses above you make a good case for Wei’s work relating to his situation in modern China. I think your interpretations are thoughtful and show a good understanding of this art.

Figure 6: Page 4 of the “Off the Wall” assignment. Students must synthesize the concepts of *form*, *theme*, and *context* to describe how the artist creates meaning.

After the studio portion of the project is completed students are given another written assignment where they are asked to reflect on their own work in terms of form, theme and context (Figures 8–10). Part of this assignment asks them to compare their own work to a model artwork that is related to the project’s theme. By using the

same critical methodology on their own work that the students used on the historical models, the relevance of the FTC criteria hopefully becomes more apparent and integrated into the student’s developing understanding of art.

Design Studio - Off The Wall - K&U

Here is the assessment rubric for this part of the project

		Response goes well beyond expectations in conveying understanding	Response shows an complete understanding of the concepts	Response shows a nearly complete understanding of the concepts	Response shows an emerging understanding of the concepts	Response shows very little understanding of the concepts	Response not present or completely misses the mark
Observe	Form – your analysis of the form shows an understanding of the important expressive aspects of the visual language	20	19	17	15	13	11
Understand Art World	Theme – Your analysis of the theme shows insight into the meaning of the art	20	19	17	15	13	11
	Context – your answer shows an insightful analysis of the context in which the art was made	20	19	17	15	13	11
	Synthesis – your writing clearly shows active thinking on how Form, Theme and Context help decode the meaning of the art	20	19	17	15	13	11

If you give yourself a 20 for any question explain why your response **goes well beyond expectations**.

Remember I expect you to answer the questions effectively – so don't just tell me that you did what I expect!!

Theme question	
Form question	
Context question	
Synthesis question	

Figure 7: This self-assessment rubric is for the "Off the Wall" project and is on the first page of the assignment. The scoring scale is based on the IB rubrics.

Form – Paste a picture(s) of your artwork in the box below and then respond to the question in the next box.



Explain how the visual (or other) elements in your artwork helped to express your "big ideas." Make sure you specifically reference the visual evidence in your pic.

For our studio piece, we decided to wrap a printer with two-sided scratch paper from the waste paper bins (found next to the printers). We wanted to convey that the amount of paper wasted from printing uses could be reduced greatly and people can be more conservative. To do this, we tried to show people exactly how much paper is wasted by visually displaying the paper wrapped around the printer. We originally wanted to wrap the paper completely so as to suggest people should print less and be more aware of their paper usage, however, because the demand for printer was too great, we were only given permission to wrap the printer. However, we decided to paint the scratch paper different colours first to make our project more distinct and unique. This way, the piece would catch the viewer's attention and also be more visually interesting while also forming a stark contrast to what it previously was. In a way, this helps raise awareness to conserve paper, and contributes to our big idea. Moreover, to more directly convey our big idea, we wrote, "be conservative" on the wrapping so that the audience will understand our purpose more easily. The words are in bold, black font to be more noticeable. We wrapped a printer that was statistically known to be the place of highest demand for printing. This location ensured that more people would be able to view our project and gain awareness. *Very clear.*

Figure 8: Page 1 of a student reflection assignment for the "Off the Wall" project. Students write about their own studio work in terms of how the *form* of the work supports their theme.

Theme - The chart below shows some of the characteristics of modern and postmodern art. Using the chart explain how your "big ideas" might be classified as modern or postmodern.

Modernism	Postmodernism
Formal - art for art's sake	Art must relate to social conditions
Images are unique productions of individual artists	Art is a reworking, recycling and transforming of ideas from many sources
Art is apolitical and reflects a "universal truth"	Art is contextual and reflects the cultural norms of the maker
High art shows that culture is progressing forward	Acceptance of cultural conflict – Good/bad dichotomy reflect bias from the group in control
The meaning of the art is absolute	Many meanings possible

Our big ideas are mostly postmodern. Our idea of raising awareness for paper conservation relates to the social condition where environmental concerns are rising. Since the concept of eco-living has been developing, our ideas could be thought of as "recycling" and "reworking" other ideas from many different sources of influence. Also, our piece and the idea behind it reflect our opinions and beliefs as the artists. However, our ideas could be classified as modern in one respect in that the meaning of our art is more absolute and was meant to convey the idea of being more conservative. There is not much room left for the audience to reinterpret the art piece in their own way. This response shows you have a good sense of these concepts.

Context – Explain what aspects from your environment influenced your artwork. (ex. School culture, world events, personal experience, etc.)

Our artwork and big ideas were greatly influenced by the rising era of green living and environmentalism. The issue is rising that natural resources are disappearing and the natural world is being greatly damaged. An example of this would be the rapid deforestation and statistics would show that forests have been diminishing faster and faster. This is reflected in the use of paper all around the world and the daily bucket-fulls of waste paper, both one-sided and double-sided next to the many printers at our school. Often pieces of paper with only a few lines or a tiny picture are thrown in the waste bucket. Other times, the same document is printed multiple times for no apparent reason, wasting not only paper but also ink. We felt the lack of awareness of paper wastage was an issue and we wished to create an artwork that reflects our concern for the matter. Clear connection with your environment

Figure 9: Page 2 of the reflection assignment for the "Off the Wall" project. Students continue to explain about the theme and context of their studio work.

Synthesis – Choose an image from an artist that you looked at during this project (it could be from my powerpoint or your K&U. Paste the image next to yours below. Then compare the similarities and/or differences between the two artworks.



Form	In both our artworks, an object is physically wrapped and enveloped by something else. While we made an effort to make our piece colourful to catch attention, Kahn's piece is only grey, the original colour of the material he used. However, Kahn's piece is very large and has motion, which will naturally attract the interest of viewers.
Theme	The themes behind both of these pieces are related to nature. However, whereas our theme relates to the conservation of nature, Kahn's theme relates to the appreciation and understanding of nature. Also, our piece is more direct and absolute in conveying our message, however Kahn's piece leaves room for interpretation.
Context	Kahn worked in a very different period from us so our artworks have many differences in their approach of the same thing: nature. The 1960s when Kahn worked was an age where nature was more mysterious and not understood. In the modern day, however, conservation of nature is more of a heated topic. In effect, our artwork targets conservation while Kahn's targets the discovery of the natural world.

Good comparison – clearly stated

Figure 10: On the last page of the reflection assignment students compare their work to that of a professional artist.

For the final two projects of the year preceding the IB course students are transitioned from separate assignments for art history, studio development and reflections into an IWB format where these aspects of a project are more organically integrated. For the critical research part of these projects they are given a research guide adapted from Sandell's FTC palette (Figure 11). Now, however, students are asked to write in a manner blending their analysis of an artwork or artworks'

form, theme and context into a more expository format, anticipating the IB course's IWB (Figures 12–13). A corresponding rubric that starts to employ the IWB markband descriptor language helps with the transition to the IB IWB criteria (Figure 14). As students move into the DP they can use the same research guide to fine tune their writing as they deal with more challenging and sophisticated topics (Figures 15–16).

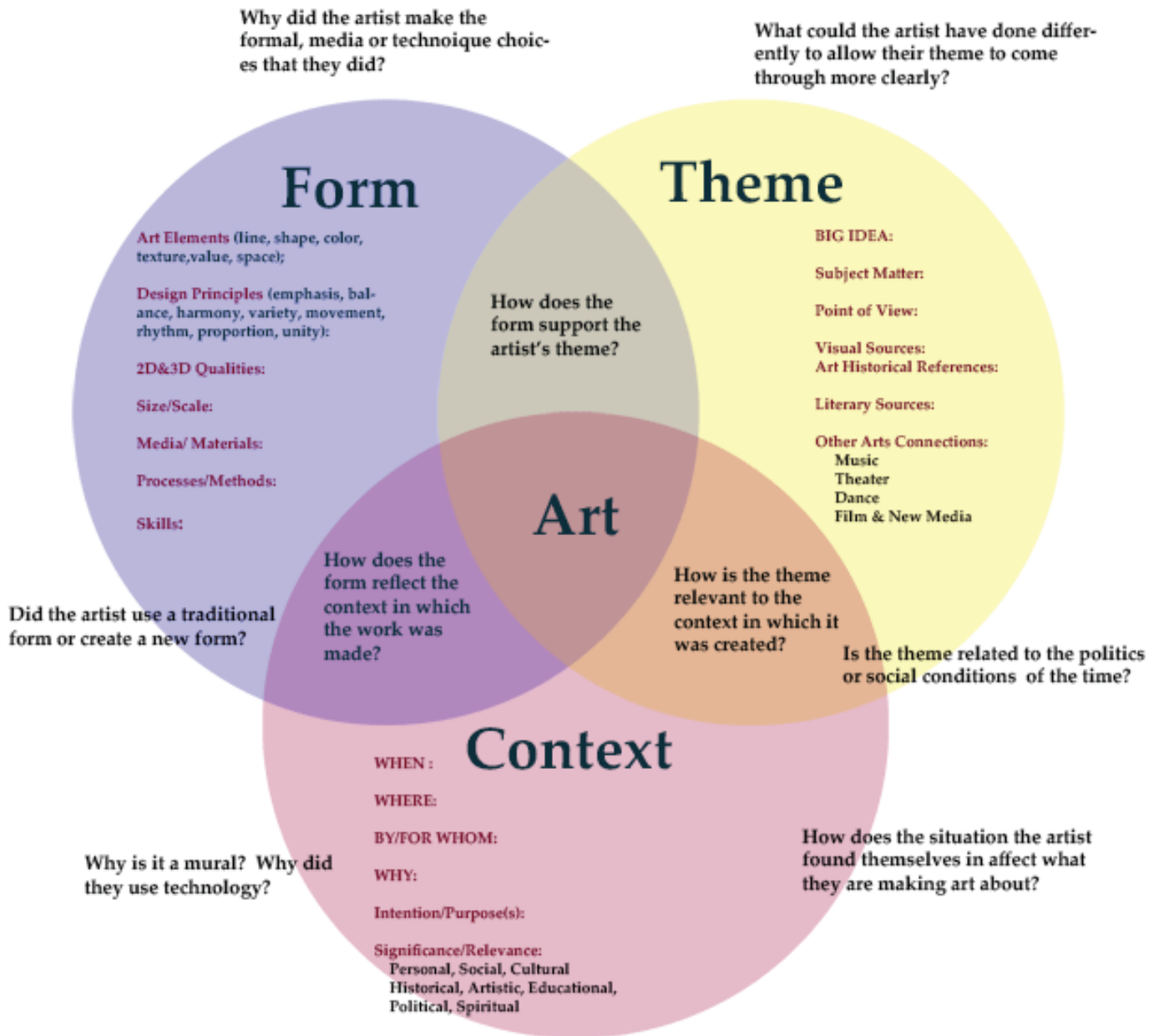


Figure 11: Research guide for grade 10 transition to IB projects. IB students use this as well.

BARBARA KRUGER



THE BIOGRAPHY

Barbara Kruger is an American conceptual artist born in Newark, New Jersey. She is an influential feminist artist. Much of her work consists of black-and white photographs overlaid with declarative captions. The phrases in her works often include use of pronouns such as 'you', 'I', 'we', and 'they'.

THE FORM

2D/3D Qualities
 The major elements of work are the print phrases and monochromatic photograph. The phrases are usually present in red with white background. This color choice creates essential contrast on the artwork. As well as so, the closeups and adjustments made on the photographs focuses the audience's attention in order to evoke thoughts and reflection.

Media/Materials
 Kruger largely incorporates photographic elements. And through the use of technology, she adds on black letters on top of the photographs. With the use of new media, Kruger indirectly informs the audience of the distorted values of modern society and its impact on the people.

Size/Scale
 The sizes of these artworks are relatively small, mostly no bigger than 20x20cm in scale. Yet these small scale works does not effect the delivering of Kruger's message towards the audience. These mini works seem to become more intimate and connected with the audience.




Figure 12: Sample workbook page from a grade 10 transition to the IB project. Students begin to write in a less teacher-directed format and a more expository style.

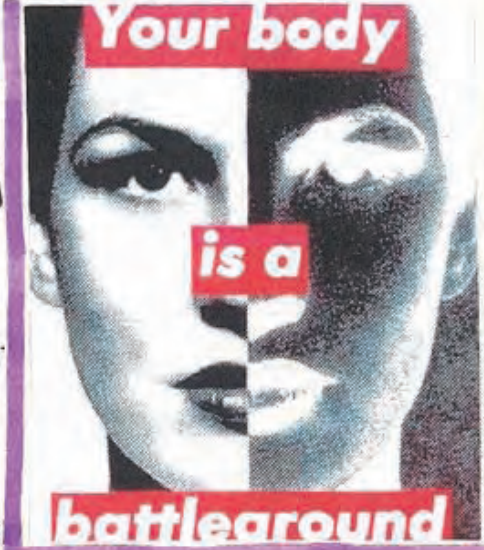
Process/Methods:
 The collage of the letters and photographs makes up most of the process of Kruger's composition. The way that the block letters are arranged are also paid with special attention. The different locations and arrangements of the words in relation to the photos constructs the mood successfully.

Skills:
 Kruger's main technique is her unique use of pronouns in her declarative phrases. This skill that is incorporated alongside the new media technique successfully address the audience in an intimate and direct manner. This intentional use of word choice effectively expresses Kruger's message and fully engages the audience with her artworks and her thinking.

THE THEME
Subject Matter:
 Barbara Kruger as being a significant feminist artist incorporates many perfect images of female characters. With the adjustments done in contrast, Kruger presents many political issues. And with the aid of the block phrases, Kruger successfully challenges many social stereotypes and one-sided values.

Point of View:
 Kruger takes on a very negative approach to the stereotypical values of the modern society. She expresses her attitude through the contrasting images with phrases and some of the bold yet ironic statements in order to raise awareness amongst the public.

Other connections:
 The political and social issues that Kruger addresses is also relevant to people's concerns nowadays. The way that media portrays the means of consumption and images of women are reflected in Kruger's artwork. She evidently responds to many of the media messages that have misled the values and perspective that people own of beauty.



THE CONTEXT
When: These collages were mostly made in the last years of the 20th century, therefore many modern values are reflected in Kruger's work.

Where: Kruger works mostly in her home country America. The great modernization or 'Americanization' that was happening in the US are clearly portrayed.

Why: These iconic projections full of juxtaposition and irony are to express Kruger's attitude towards the modern values and beliefs.

Relevance/Intention: Through these artworks, Kruger merely intends to reveal the hidden barbaric ideas and values that have manipulated the minds of the modern world. The stereotypes that are embodied are what Kruger intends to change.




Figure 13: Page 2 of student transitional workbook assignment.

Workbook assessment rubric for:

This is your assessment rubric for your workbook for this project. Use this to guide you and as a checklist to make sure you include all the necessary elements.

			Entries go well beyond expectations in conveying understanding	Entries show a complete understanding of the concepts	Entries show a nearly complete understanding of the concepts	Entries show a satisfactory understanding of the concepts	Entries shows very little understanding of the concepts	Entries not present or completely misses the mark
Stretch and Explore	Project Development	Brainstorming of ideas, multiple (5) solutions evident and 1 final idea worked out in detail	20	19	17	15	13	11
	Media pages	Media studies and notes show a thoughtful approach to understanding new media	20	19	17	15	13	11
	Process pages	Pictures and notes indicate important learning along the way	20	19	17	15	13	11
Understand Art World	Research on Artist models (formerly K&U)	Research addresses how form, theme and context interact in the artwork(s) in question	20	19	17	15	13	11
		Sources are cited correctly	20	19	17	15	13	11
Reflect	Reflections	Reflections explain important aspects of how form, theme and context interact in your art work.	20	19	17	15	13	11
Envision	Layout	Pages are designed creatively - information is presented clearly	20	19	17	15	13	11

Figure 14: Assessment rubric for a grade 10 transition to IB project.

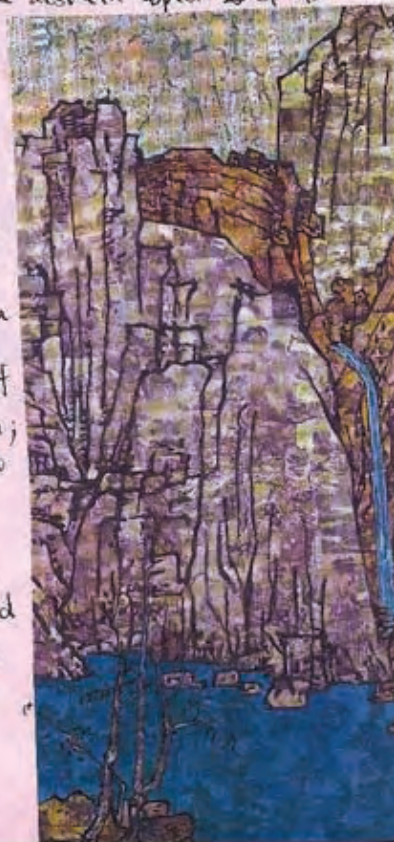
XUE · SONG

Unlike many other artists, Xue Song creates art that ~~is best~~ can only be fully understood if the viewer has a general ~~idea~~ knowledge of his ~~the~~ background and life story.

Xue Song's works 'originated from fire' — literally. A fire that occurred in 1970 left all his works in charred fragments and piles of ashes. To cope with the pain of his loss, Xue Song retrieved the remains & pasted them onto canvases. 'Ash is a symbol of rebirth and a reminder of fate.'

The subjects of Xue Song's paintings are usually among a mixture of burnt wood ash and layers of half-visible ~~the~~ calligraphy and other images and newspapers. Although Xue Song focuses mainly on culture, politics and society, I think the aesthetic aspect ~~is~~ of his works can be related to my art style. The recomposed images are ambiguous in meaning, and the viewer is often ~~just~~ content in admiring the physical aspect of the pieces.

In many of his pieces, Xue Song combines elements of traditional Chinese culture with those of modern day society, for example a cake bottle composed of Chinese mountains and surrounded by Chinese calligraphy. Most of his 'paintings' have a mystical element to them; his use of color and layering gives depth to the works. Although his subjects (in the paintings) are clearly outlined or otherwise strongly contrasted with the background, all of Xue Song's pieces seem free-flowing and not restricted at all. This is probably due to the softer colors the dominate and the



"The Story of Xue Song | ArtZineChina.com | "The Story of Xue Song. Web. 09 Apr. 2012. <http://www.artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid267_en.html>."

"Xue Song And The Ashes Of Time." Dantilyunfx.wordpress.com. Web. 10 Apr. 2012.

Figure 15: IWB page (1) from a Year 1 HL IB student. Writing structure is now determined by the student but is based on the principles of FTC.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

freely-drawn characters that compose most of the background. This aspect is strongly connected to how I plan to finish my project; there is both a sense of restriction and freedom in the piece. The characters on the vertical pieces of paper are neat, but the larger characters in the background are freely painted.

As a political/cultural artist with no particular cause, Xue Song gets his message across and manages to ~~main~~ keep his paintings aesthetically interesting. The subtle bits of Chinese media in the background and sometimes the subjects of strong media attention does just enough to remind the viewer to keep "larger things" in mind, since the paintings are essentially very open to interpretation.



Of Xue Song's many pieces, ~~the~~ "Conversation with Hong Ren (I)" attracted my attention the most. The scenery is very appealing, and I think the use of dull, tranquil colors works very well. My favorite part of this piece ~~is~~ ^{are} the images one can see "behind" the mountains. It's almost like a hidden image; it goes off almost a de-javu feeling, because it's essentially images of mountains that make up a larger image of a similar mountain. The similarly-colored sky is ~~also~~ composed of cut-outs from Chinese newspapers or bits of calligraphy. These bits are burnt at the edges then compiled to give a layered effect.

I think what Xue Song does really well (in comparison to many other artists) is keeping the viewer intrigued beyond first glance @ the piece by putting "treasures" in the piece, mainly the subtle images in the background of the background.

"I don't care much about how many elements of painting there are on my paintings. My works reach to the terminal of seeing directly: the meaning of the image." 3/28/12

Figure 16: IWB page (2) from Year 1 HL IB student.

RESULTS

Across the admittedly small sample of my own students who have followed this process I have been impressed by the level of critical, IWB-ready thinking that has emerged from these transitional projects completed by students preparing for the rigorous DP Visual Arts course. Although synthesizing the three categories remains the most challenging area of writing for my students, I am seeing more in-depth analysis and increasingly sophisticated connections among various art forms. The FTC approach gives students a specific framework with which to approach their research and supports the criteria of the IWB in terms of comparison and analysis. Applying these FTC principles to “past, present and emerging art” has been an effective way to help my students go beyond the visual form and construct an understanding of the “function and meaning” of the art from a thematic and contextual perspective. Anecdotally, I have observed improved and consistently higher scores on the IWB portion of my students’ VA examinations since the implementation of the FTC approach.

The FTC approach has become the basic principle on which I design all aspects of all my courses. In the studio portion of each project students are encouraged to think about how their formal decisions support their chosen theme and the significance of their theme to

.....
“The FTC approach gives students a specific framework with which to approach their research and supports the criteria of the IWB in terms of comparison and analysis.”

the context of their lives and the world. While I feel that there has been good progress towards more effective analytical writing across the grade levels that I teach, there is still only an emerging integration of these ideas in the way students approach art making. I am often amazed at the sophistication of the ideas my high school students generate for their studio projects. Conversely, I am sometimes confounded by the disconnect between the high quality of thinking towards the complex and challenging ideas put forth by the art they are looking at and writing about and the immature ideas that inform their own projects. Using the FTC approach to move students towards a more consistently sophisticated development of their studio work is an area of ongoing investigation.

FURTHER APPLICATIONS

Of course, analytical writing skills are not the exclusive domain of DP Visual Arts courses. For the development of visual thinking in other disciplines, teachers might explore strategies similar to the FTC approach. Tools such as VoiceThread may have useful applications across the IB Continuum, especially for collaborative explorations in coursework and programme components like the PYP Exhibition. Working across age groups, a systematic and vertically articulated strategy for teaching key approaches to learning can be a powerful way to increase student understanding. Finally, this kind of structured teaching and learning of communication skills—whether in visual arts or any other subject—can increase the depth and sophistication of students’ writing in ways that build personal confidence and academic success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Reverman currently teaches high school art at the International School of Beijing. He has taught Visual Arts in the Diploma Programme for eight years. He has an MFA from Ohio State University.

REFERENCES

Barrett, T. (1989). A Consideration of Criticism. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 23 (4), 23–25.

Barrett, T. (1994). *Criticizing art: Understanding the contemporary*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

Duncum, P. (2010). Seven Principles for Visual Culture Education. *Art Education*, 63 (1), 6–10.

Friedman, K. J. (2003). *Teaching visual culture: Curriculum, aesthetics, and the social life of art*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gude, O. (2000). Investigating the Culture of Curriculum. Retrieved from http://www.uic.edu/classes/ad/ad382/sites/AEA/AEA_01/AEA01a.html

Hamblen, K. A. & Galanes, C. (1977). Instructional Options for Aesthetics: Exploring the Possibilities. *Art Education*, 50 (1), 75–83.

International Baccalaureate. (2007). *Diploma Programme Visual arts guide*. Cardiff, UK: IB Publishing.

Sandell, R. (2006). Form + Theme + Context—Balancing Considerations for Meaningful Art Learning. *Art Education*, 59 (1), 33–37. Retrieved from <http://arteducation.gme/downloads/From+Theme+Context.pdf>

Sandell, R. (2009). Using Form, Theme and Context (FTC) for Re-balancing 21st Century Art Education. *Studies in Art Education*, 50 (3), 287–299.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Reverman, B. (n.d.). On occasion you can see the mountains clearly. Retrieved from <http://mountains.brianreverman.com/>

zantine. (n.d.). Smarthistory: A multimedia web-book about art and art history. Retrieved from <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/>

ILLUSTRATIONS

All images and text of student work is from the International School of Beijing and is used with student permission.