

More About Art

Visual Arts 7-10

Lisa Malcolm ■ Sally Dewar



Björk

Scorpio-
Sagittarius cusp

S
Science Press

Front cover:
Tracey Moffatt, *Björk*, 2005
From *Under the Sign of Scorpio*
Archival pigment ink on acid-free rag paper, 43.2 × 58.4 cm
Edition of 21
Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

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About the authors

The authors are Visual Arts teachers in secondary schools in New South Wales in Australia. They both currently hold positions as the coordinator or head teacher of the Visual Arts department in their schools and have continuous teaching experience in a range of schools for a period of over 25 years. Both the authors hold Masters Degrees in Creative Arts Education from the University of New South Wales, Australia.

Their first book – *About Art* – was written to provide a suitable resource for junior art students which the authors felt was absent in the area of Visual Arts education in Australia. *More About Art* is a revised and greatly enlarged text which is designed as a resource for art students anywhere. Australian art, Modern and Contemporary art are the focus of studying artworks in this new book. *More About Art* broadens the range of artists and art forms discussed, including a wider exploration of indigenous Australian artists, women artists, and many more contemporary artists and artworks.

More About Art takes into account some of the changes in thinking about Visual Arts education, the additional experience of the authors and their further analysis of what is required as reference material. The authors strongly believe that this new book will become a valuable resource for both teachers and students in junior secondary education. The format emphasises throughout all parts of the book the integration of studying and making art and design works.

Introduction

More About Art is primarily written for junior secondary school students, however, more experienced students may find the book a useful source of ideas for making artworks. It provides a broad overview of international and Australian artists, themes commonly used in artmaking, and a variety of media and techniques in which artists express themselves. Teachers of students of all ages including upper primary school should find this book useful as a resource for programming art learning experiences in both studying and making artworks. Students' artworks from a range of ages, activities, themes and media are illustrated throughout the book. The aim is not only to provide examples of activities discussed but also to give students the confidence to value their own artwork and that of other students.

The book is divided into four parts. In each part artworks are illustrated and discussed, students are given activities to do of both a theoretical and practical nature (studying and making) and students' works are illustrated.

Part 1: Making and Studying Artworks explores the purposes and functions of art and briefly investigates different viewpoints used for making and studying art. The practices of artmaking, art criticism and art history are explained. A scaffold to assist students with critical and historical investigations is provided along with an example of critical writing. A definition of Modern and Contemporary art and other terminology assists student understanding in the study of artworks and aesthetic theories. The artmaking process and the function of the visual diary is explained to students.

Part 2: Elements and Principles of Art and Design focuses on the study of the elements and principles of art and design as the basis for formal analysis of artworks from aesthetic and expressive perspectives. In addition to critical study of artworks, this section provides some brief notes on artists from an historical perspective, in an attempt to give some insight into their attitude and approach to artmaking.

Part 3: Themes in Art and Design explores a range of themes and subject matter through which student artists can express their ideas, feelings and opinions of the world in which they live. Although the range of themes and subject matter that students could explore is vast, a small selection of some commonly chosen themes have been included.

Part 4: Art Forms, Media and Techniques outlines some of the major artmaking forms, media and techniques selected by artists to express themselves. The more traditional forms of artmaking, such as painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics and photography, constitute the main focus of the book. However, students now are increasingly provided with learning experiences in a wider range of media and techniques that reflect similar trends in contemporary artmaking practice. Art forms such as film, video, digital media, graphic design, textiles and fibre-based artmaking, and designed objects, environments, site-specific works, body art, performance and new media are now extending the boundaries of artmaking experiences in the field and in our schools.



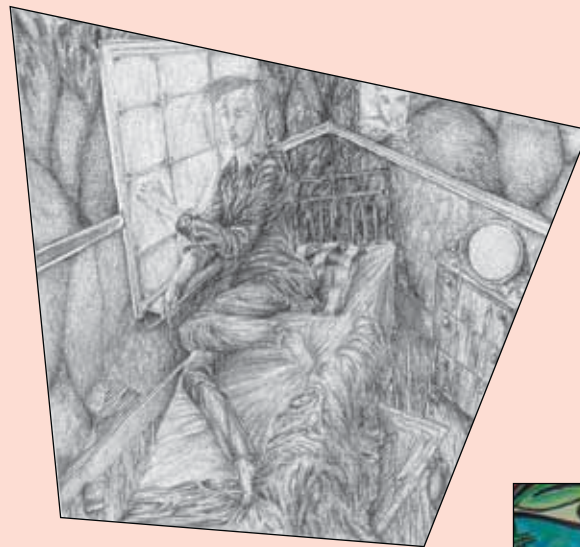
Matthew Drake, student, drawing with pen



Erin Smith, student, digital photography



Nicole Vircoe, student, drawing in charcoal



Steven Scott, student, pencil drawing



Vanessa Lawson, student, painting



Monique Legey, student, sculpture construction



Lauren Pascoe, student, painting



Hayley Conforti, student, photography



Stephanie Caltabiano, student, watercolour and ink



Jenna Donley, student, Cat, drawing in ink

Part 1

Making and Studying Artworks

What is Art?

When we talk about ‘the arts’ we are discussing more than just the Visual Arts. The arts are part of our everyday lives, when we watch TV and DVDs, go to the theatre, opera or ballet, read magazines, newspapers and novels and listen to music on the radio or CDs we are experiencing **the arts** in a direct or indirect way. Activities such as photography, painting, drawing, and craft activities are also part of the arts. People who work in the arts are writers, performers, dancers, singers, composers, and artists. The term ‘artist’ is often used when referring to singers or performers.

The visual and performing arts are called the creative arts. The performing arts include drama, music and dance. The visual arts are the focus of this book.

What is art? Finding a definition for art has been a challenge for scholars and philosophers as far back as ancient Greece. They tried to define the unique nature of art and understand its contribution to human life.

Artworks are a product of human sensitivity, creativity, imagination and skill. A great many objects can be included in the visual arts. These range from artworks created for their own sake to provide us with enjoyment and aesthetic pleasure to designed and functional images and objects.

We all experience and interpret art differently because as individuals we are a product of the time and place in which we live. Similarly, artworks are created by individuals, or groups, under the influence of **cultural** factors of the time. Art has been with us since the earliest cave dwellers painted animals on the walls of caves.

Today we are exposed to art from throughout history and from many different places, through exhibitions of artworks in galleries and through modern methods of communication such as books, journals, TV, DVDs, films and the Internet.

Through making and studying artworks we develop an understanding of the network of relationships between



Jeff Koons, *Puppy*, 1995, Stainless steel, soil, geotextile fabric, internal irrigation system and live flowering plants
12.3 x 12.3 x 6.5 m © Jeff Koons

the **artist**, the **artworks**, the **world** and the **audience**. Through an exploration of different types of artworks we also investigate the artmaking practice of artists and how they communicate different viewpoints about the world.

Art provides an outlet or vehicle for personal expression of feelings, ideas, opinions and beliefs. It can also provide for our social needs as a way of communicating moral, religious, political and cultural ideas and beliefs. Art can fulfil a practical function. Designers create structures and objects in our environment such as buildings, furniture, clothes and products.

In both studying and making artworks we need to consider both conceptual aspects and the material practice of the artist.

Conceptual aspects of an artwork include the subject matter, theme or concept of an artwork or body of work as well as how we interpret the meaning of the artwork.

Material practice refers to the materials or media and techniques employed by an artist in their artworks.

Perspectives – Viewpoints

When studying artworks we can investigate how images and objects are identified, created, categorised, interpreted, valued and made use of by individuals, societies and cultures.

Artists often create artworks which communicate a particular perspective or viewpoint of their world.

Members of the art world, including art critics, art historians and artists, promote and exchange alternative viewpoints. Different frames of reference provide alternative methods for identifying, investigating, explaining, understanding, expressing and judging relationships between artworks, artists, the world and audiences. Each frame of reference offers different kinds of information and understandings about the visual arts.

Critical study

Subjective

1. What is your initial and immediate personal response to *The Scream*?
2. What feelings and experiences are conveyed through this artwork?
3. Explain which aspects of this artwork evoke those feelings.
4. What emotional response is the artist trying to get from the audience?
5. Does the title of the work give deeper insight to the work?
6. How is the personality of the artist conveyed?
7. Using your imagination explore possible meanings or interpretations of this artwork.
8. Does this artwork remind you of anything from your remembered experiences?
9. Find other examples by Munch. How is Munch's individual style reflected in this artwork?

A discussion of material practice includes an exploration of the art form chosen by the artist, such as drawing, painting or sculpture, and an analysis of the formal qualities or the elements and principles of art and design. A discussion of the formal qualities includes an exploration of the compositional devices.

The subjective viewpoint

Some artists focus their work on the expression of personal feelings, experiences and sensory perceptions. Artists use a subjective approach to explore their own individual and others' deeply felt experiences and imagination. We can use a **subjective** approach to respond to artworks. Using the subjective viewpoint we can investigate the visual arts in an intuitive and personally felt way. Our initial reaction to an artwork is often a subjective one.



Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1893

Munch suffered from bouts of severe psychological disturbance. He painted *The Scream* as a reflection of his personal experience. He said of his own artwork, '... only someone insane could paint this!' This is an example of the subjective frame or perspective. The artist's intention was to investigate and express his own psychological condition and experiences.

The structural viewpoint

In using a **structural** perspective, artists use a visual language. This visual language employs a system of codes, symbols and signs to represent aspects of the world and communicate meaning. The formal organisation of elements and principles is a component of the structural perspective. Just like any written language, the visual arts employs a type of grammar or set of rules that help us to 'read', decode and understand the visual arts objects that we study. The methods used to create visual images and objects and the organisation of the image are generally accepted conventions governed by traditions and rules that are developed within the context of time and place. An artwork has meaning and value if it uses a system of signs and uses conventions that can be decoded and understood by the viewer. This is directly related to the viewer's level of understanding of the signs, symbols and codes used.

A structural analysis requires the viewer to decode or determine the set of laws, rules and conventions or traditions that underpin the visual language of the image or object and thereby construct the meaning. Understanding the artwork's significance and meaning can only be deduced through an analysis of how the signs operate and interact together within the overall structure of the artwork.

Historical and critical study

Structural

1. What rules of organisation are used to compose the Egyptian papyrus (below)?
2. Within the overall structure of the composition, can you notice any apparent conventions, traditions or rules?
3. What other rules about representation can you observe?
4. What are the visual and formal characteristics that constitute a system of signs?
5. What other signs and symbols are used in the image?
6. Do some historical research about Egyptian art. What spiritual values and religious beliefs are represented by the signs in the artwork?
7. Hieroglyphics are used in Egyptian art. Find out what they are. How do these symbols signify aspects of the world in Egypt?



Kasimir Malevich,
House Under Construction, 1915-16

Formal organisation of the elements and principles are the focus of this composition. Malevich's art used the language of pure geometric abstraction. This artwork exhibits a **structural** approach to making artworks (see page 51).



Egyptian painting, *Weighing of the Heart of Ani*
Section from a Book of the Dead found in the tomb of Ani, a scribe c. 1400 BCE
Tempera on papyrus (ancient Egyptian paper), total length of papyrus 23.16 m
British Museum, London © The Trustees of The British Museum

Egyptian artists adhered to a strict canon (rule) for depiction of the human form. When representing a person of high rank such as a pharaoh the formula was rigidly followed otherwise the image would have no religious power. One well-known Egyptian convention involves their depiction of the human figure. The heads, bodies and legs are shown in profile but with the shoulder facing forward. A hierarchical approach to size was employed to indicate the status of the figure. Important people were represented as the largest with children appearing as small doll-like versions of adults.

