



looking at looking at art

Isn't it interesting how the same artwork can yield a wide range of responses from different viewers? This guide will show you why that is and help stimulate thoughtful conversation about the works in the gallery.

Viewpoints is a theory of aesthetic development that defines five ways people view art. Someone who has attained the highest levels of art understanding can use all five Viewpoints. One without this background has a more limited palette of Viewpoints available to them.

Think of the Viewpoints as lenses that are used to view art through. These five lenses are:

Non-Reflective Viewpoint

Everyone has a first impression that attracts us to one artwork more than another. For example, we may respond to familiar subject matter or preferred medium, or we may be drawn to a favorite color.

Beauty, Realism, Or Skill Viewpoint

Many of us particularly admire artwork that we think is beautiful, realistic, or skillfully made.

Expression Of Feelings Viewpoint

Some of us see artworks as expressive and value artwork for its compelling emotion.

Modern-To-Contemporary Viewpoint

If we've studied 20th century or contemporary art in school or learned about recent art on our own, we begin to understand how critics, art historians, and other art experts value the art of today.

Plural Artworlds Viewpoint

If we learned about how and why art was valued in the past or how and why it is valued in other cultures, and if we appreciate that art was or is made and admired differently through time and across the globe, we are motivated to seek information and insights from experts.

VIEWPOINTS

How Do You Understand Art?

How to use this guide:

Look at an artwork, holding your gaze on it for as long as you wish. Ask yourself: What stands out to me as the most compelling feature about this piece? What do I find most or least valuable about this work?

Your answer will probably fit into one of the Viewpoints, listed below with bullet points.

Find out if the people with you are seeing the same work through a different lens. Have a conversation about each artwork you view together and share your thoughts. How do these thoughts about the work translate to one of the five Viewpoints?



Non-Reflective

Preference for or against:

- Subject matter
- Color
- Medium



Beauty, Realism, Or Skill

Judged by:

- Beauty
- Realism
- Technical virtuosity



Expression Of Feeling

Valued for:

- Feelings
- Emotions
- Sentiments



Modern-To-Contemporary Artworld

Based on art ideas and values after World War II:

- Originality
- Composition
- Contemporary ideas



Plural Artworlds

Informed by art ideas and values of the artist's culture:

- As they influence the artist
- As they influence viewers