

Understanding Visual Language

Visual Language is a crucial form of communication. Images are powerful tools for communicating messages. People need skills to interpret these messages and have thoughtful responses. The ability to decode the language of images helps us realise that a single image may have multiple meanings. Fluency in visual language enriches our understanding of Art and the world. It influences our creativity, empathy and critical thinking.

MEANING

Visual Artists apply this universal language to evoke and capture the essence of the message or meaning they want to convey.

BREAKING THE CODE

Unspoken codes and symbols are the 'vocabulary' of visual language, which is as complex as the spoken languages of the world. Here, we will look at FORMAL ELEMENTS as an entry point into reading visual language. Recognising formal elements helps us interpret imagery. Visual language is the application of formal elements via techniques and processes.

Formal Elements are often used together, and how they are organised in a piece of art determines what the finished piece will look like.

ELEMENTS: Line, shape, form, value/tone, texture, pattern, colour, scale, space and composition.

These elements depend on the artform and what went into the process or making of the artform. For example, in PHOTOGRAPHY, we might consider:

Light, P.O.V. (Point of view), Contrast, Composition, Depth of field etc.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES formalise or tie together the elements of art. Some of these are:

Contrast, Repetition, Pattern, Rhythm, Movement, Balance, Proportion, Emphasis, Unity

YOUR ARTWORK

Your understanding of visual language deepens the expression of your ideas. This takes practice!

- Take risks with media.
- Use REFLECTIVE THINKING to edit, refine and rearrange visual elements.
- Use CREATIVE THINKING to construct and manipulate visual elements to express yourself.
- Try removing one element. How does that change the meaning of your work?

IN YOUR SKETCHBOOK

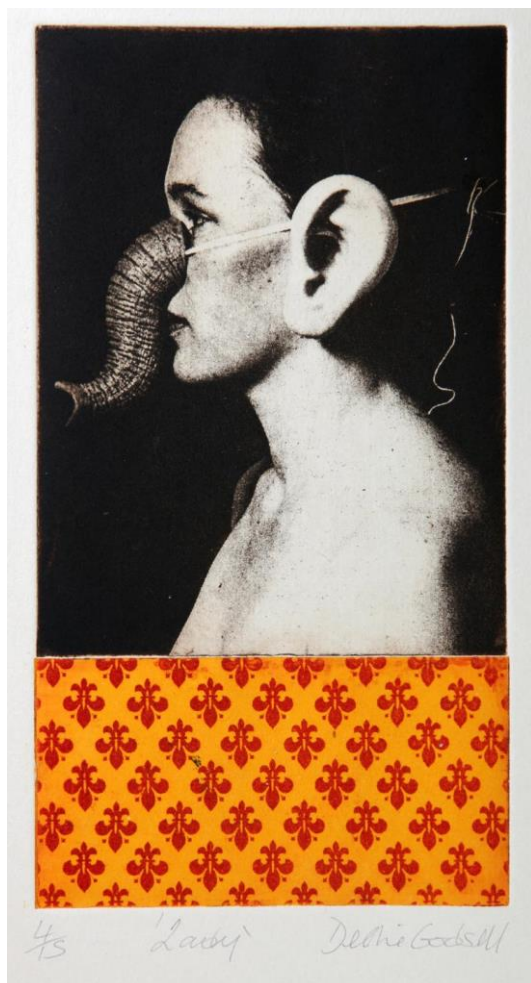
We learn by doing. Using our hands engages our minds. We can gain a deeper understanding of the formal elements an artist has chosen by reproducing extracts in our sketchbook. Sometimes, making studies can give you a deeper insight into an artwork.

TALKING AND WRITING ABOUT A 2D IMAGE

A method called **VISUAL THINKING STRATEGY** can really help simplify picture analysis. It relies on three basic questions:

1. What's going on in this picture?
2. What do I see that makes me say that?
3. What else can I find in this picture?

Try answering these questions by taking a look at each **ELEMENT** and **PRINCIPLE**. Practice with the images from the Crawford Art Gallery collection. Here is an artwork to get started:



CAG. 2067 Debbie Godsell, Lady, 2002

Photo intaglio on paper, Print.